# HUMANAMENTE

# Weltbilder and Philosophy

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Introduction

# Framing Our World, or:
# Reconsidering the Idea of *Weltbild*

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## 1. *Weltbild*: Why Should We Take an Interest?

On approaching this issue of *Humana.Mente*, readers could maybe wonder why a theme such as that of *Weltbild* could be considered relevant for philosophy today. Of course, the debate on *Weltbild*, a term that can be translated in English as "world image" or "world picture", represented an important moment of the late-modern German-speaking philosophical debate, at least from the second half of the nineteenth century until the 1930s, before slowly fading out in the 1970s. From Wilhelm Dilthey to Edmund Husserl, from Max Weber to Martin Heidegger, passing through thinkers such as Franz Borkenau, Karl Jaspers, Ernst Cassirer and Ludwig Wittgenstein, until the works of Günther Anders and Hans Blumenberg, the idea of *Weltbild* and of what we can call the "family of concepts" related to it (such as *Weltanschauung*, *Weltauffassung*, *Weltansicht*, *Lebensanschauung*, etc.) seems to represent a characteristic element of the particular "philosophical *Stimmung*" of that specific epoch. At times the object of direct thematisation, at times an idea implicitly present in the core-questions of an intellectual path, there is no doubt that the topic of world image has absorbed some of the most appealing thinkers of the so-called continental philosophical tradition.

One can also wonder whether it is possible to think of the theme of *Weltbilder* as a karst phenomenon. Progressively eclipsed during the second half of the twentieth-century, when the term "ideology" seemed to be exhaustive

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enough to explain every "theoretical" or "ideal" process,[1] the topic of an "image of the world" now looks about to resurface in the renewed attention for the aesthetical and ontological statute of "images", without considering the reflection on the "virtual age" produced by philosophy as well as other disciplinary approaches. Remaining in the philosophical field, it is mainly the French context which has developed specific attention for the topic of imagination, starting from a discussion on the notion of *imaginaire* ("imagining" or "imaginary").[2] While the discussion on imagination may have accompanied philosophy since its beginning (we can think of Plato), it is primarily around the concepts of "imaginary" and "imaginalis" (or *mundus imaginalis*, a concept coined by the pioneering work of Henry Corbin) that the French debate has produced original results,[3] which also seem – sometimes at least– to cross some of the philosophical questions transmitted by the idea of a world image. Moreover, since the beginning of the new millennium the term "worldview" has started to appear in a growing number of titles in English-speaking literature too. A part from some works on the philosophy of science (see in particular DeWitt, 2004), the term usually identifies research dedicated to intercultural studies (Note et al., 2009), or to the phenomenon of religious faith (Nash, 1992; Bertrand, 2007; Hiebert, 2008), but it also denotes works concerning the meaning and relevance of the concept of worldview itself (Smart, 2000; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2004). We remember, in particular, David Naugle's research, who attempted to write an overall conceptual history of this term within the Christian religious traditions, modern philosophy, natural and social sciences, and offered a precious point of reference for every scholar interested in this topic.

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[1] Here we cannot extensively deal with the theme of ideology and all its diverse meanings. We would just like to note that, even if *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung* are sometimes translated as "ideology", actually world images imply a "neutralization" of the truth. Indeed, the concept of ideology – conceived in its most diffused meaning of "false conscience" – presupposes always the existence of a truth, and the possibility to distinguishes it from ideology, intended as a "masking of reality". On the other hand, as we shall see the idea of a world image does not refer to the dimension of demonstrability, and hence it completely overcomes the distinction true-false. World images do not "claim" to grasp the truth; conversely, it would be misplaced to affirm that they are actually "hiding" something.

[2] As Corin Braga (2007, pp. 59–60) suggested, the French term *imaginaire* has no convenient translations or linguistic equivalents in English. Possible translations could be "imagining" (suggesting that imagination is a dynamic process, as in Kearney, 1998) and the "imaginary" (trying to transform an adjective into a noun, as in Iser, 1993), but neither is sufficiently precise or specific.

[3] See for example the research by Castoriadis (1975); Corbin (1958); Durand (1969); Fleury (2006) and Wunenburger (1997, 2002, 2003).

Anyway, it is precisely the richness of his book that permits the following consideration to emerge: one can wonder if this history of the idea of worldview (a term very often used to translate both *Weltanschauung* and *Weltbild* in English) actually tells a story of the *interconnections* between the members of the "family of concepts" quoted above, which, although they belong to the same family, cannot be nevertheless superimposed one on the other and need to be reconstructed in their singularity as well as in their reciprocal connections.[4]

This is not a mere "scholastic" philological question. What is at stake here is the possibility to understand the philosophical problem – in all its nuances and inner perspectives – that lies behind the same ideas of an "image" of the world or of a "view" on the world. Indeed, by quoting the title of a fundamental work by Max Scheler, we can say that the question that world images try to answer concerns *Die Stellung der Menschen im Kosmos*, the place or positioning of human beings in the world.[5] Looking at it from this viewpoint, one can even venture to say that the idea of *Weltbild* and that of its correlated concepts are nothing less than the vehicle of *the* philosophical problem *par excellence* – a problem lying at the intersection between the highest level of terminological analysis and conceptual abstraction, on the one hand, and of the *Unbegrifflichkeit*, the pre-theoretical and non-conceptual "blocks" of figures, images and myths that inform and orientate our thought, language and action, on the other.

Anyway, this is not just a philosophical question, or better: a question for philosophers, only relevant for scholars devoted to this discipline. Maybe more importantly, the relevance of this topic lies in the fact that every person is born *in* a world image and *has* an image of the world, which constitutes the system that orients him/her in life. Indeed, one of the core theses that has driven us as

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[4] Consider for example the definition of *Weltanschauung*-worldview proposed by Naugle: «I will also propose that a worldview as a semiotic structure consists primarily of a network of *narrative signs* that offers an interpretation of reality and establishes an overarching framework for life» (2002, p. 291). As we shall see, the same function can be attributed to a *Weltbild*, so one can question what the difference between the two concepts actually is.

[5] Regardless of whether the term *Weltbild* occurs in their reflections or not, all the exponents of the so-called modern Philosophical Anthropology, such as Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner, have of course made a great contribution to the topic of the positioning of individuals in the world. In any case, we have decided not to insert them here, partly because they would require a separate issue of their own, and partly because their contributions to the theme of "man and images of the world" have been explored widely, at least in the Italian literature. For an introduction to this theme, see Accarino (1991).

editors of this project is that individuals – as such – need, imagine, conjecture, and more or less consciously adopt a specific world image. This is their gateway to the world, the overall *framing horizon* that offers them a chance to orient themselves in the world, to select what we call "reality" and its characteristic form, and decide about the friendly or hostile nature of what we consider "our" world. A *Weltbild* is the image-guide that shapes our specific attitudes towards the world, selecting some behavioural strategies and radically excluding others from the horizon of what is "meaningful". Seen from this perspective, it seems to us that what is still interesting about *Weltbilder* today is the possibility to weigh up if, by mapping the ways in which current world images frame the constitutive forms of our world, the idea of world image could give us some guidelines for identifying the typologies of subjectivity who inhabit the contemporary world.

Naturally, this introduction does not aim – nor could it – to exhaust the subject of world images; neither do we claim here to offer a reconstruction of the different positions asserted on this theme by the selection – in itself not exhaustive – of authors, to whom the papers that compose this issue of *Humana.Mente* are dedicated. Rather, we would like to use this space to explain the reasons for our interest in this research theme, and to argue a possible proposal on the hermeneutic function that the concept of world image can play with regard to the comprehension of the statute of politics in our contemporary Western society.

Indeed, our interest in research on the idea of world image mostly comes from within the attempt to identify useful conceptual tools in order to articulate a *Zeitdiagnose*, a diagnosis of the present that could reconstruct the transformations of late-modern subjectivity and explain their relevance for a theory of political action in the era of globalisation. In particular, it seems to us that the notion of world image can be particularly useful when it comes to frame the reasons for the weakening of moral capacity – a phenomenon which seems to characterise the shape of subjectivity peculiar to Western societies of late modernity. From Sennett to Bauman, from Fukuyama to Lipovetsky,[6] in recent decades the philosophical debate on the crisis of the *homo democraticus* has indeed highlighted the – increasing – discrepancy between the absolute con-

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[6] See Sennett (1977); Bauman (1993, 1999, 2000); Fukuyama (1992) and Lipovetsky (1983, 1992, 2006).

sensus reached in the West about the foundations of politics on the one hand, and the misery of contemporary democratic life on the other. Apart from a widespread disaffection towards politics, phenomena such as "post-modern indifference" and the advent of a "painless morality" (the ability to act morally if and only if it involves zero ethical costs) seem to point to a transformation of the overall *attitude* that individuals adopt towards their social reality, and towards politics itself. In our opinion, this transformation lies fully outside the overall *consensus* on reference values or the fundamentals of politics. Rather, it can be reconstructed by moving from an analysis of the dominant world images in the current social context and the answers they offer to the question about the positioning [*Stellung*] of "man" in the "world". Thus, the hypothesis we would like to question in this contribution is the hermeneutic function of the idea of *Weltbild* with regard to the comprehension of practical conduct in general, and the physiognomy of contemporary politics in particular.

## 2. *Weltbilder*, or Beyond Economicism and Hyper-Culturalism

The research path we would like to sketch in the following sections relies on an acceptation of "world image" that finds its main sources in the use of the concept suggested by Max Weber and Hans Blumenberg.

Even though the issue of *Weltbilder* is not thematically analyzed by Weber, we can nevertheless note that this concept underlies the methodological architecture of his *Sociology of Religions*.[7] Indeed, the issue of images of the world clearly emerges where the author examines the consequences of the world religions on practical conduct, and in particular on the economic ethos. In this respect, a passage from the *Introduction* to the *Economic Ethics of World Religions* is particularly significant:

> The conception of the idea of redemption, as such, is very old, if one understands by it a liberation from distress, hunger, drought, sickness, and ultimately from suffering and death. Yet redemption attained a specific significance only where it expressed a systematic and rationalized "image of the world" and represented a stand in the face of the world. For the meaning as well as the intended and actual psychological quality of redemption has depended

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[7] For a recognition of the concept of *Weltbild* in Weber's thought see Kalberg (2004). We are particularly indebted to D'Andrea (2009), who attempted a reconstruction of a possible theory on *Weltbilder* starting from Weber's *Sociology of Religions*.

upon such a world image and such a stand. Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest. "From what" and "for what" one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, "could be" redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world.

There have been very different possibilities on this connection: One could wish to be saved from political and social servitude and lifted into a Messianic realm in the future of this world; or one could wish to be saved from being defiled by ritual impurity and hope for the pure beauty of psychic and bodily existence. [...] One could wish to be saved from the eternal and senseless play of human passions and desires and hope for the quietude of the pure beholding of the divine. One could wish to be saved from radical evil and the servitude of sin and hope for eternal and free benevolence in the lap of a fatherly god. [...] One could wish to be saved from the cycle of rebirths with their inexorable compensations for the deeds of the time past and hope for eternal rest. [...] Many more varieties of belief have, of course, existed. Behind them always lies a stand towards something in the actual world which is experienced as specifically "senseless". Thus, the demand has been implied: that the world order in its totality is, could, and should somehow be a meaningful "cosmos". (Weber, 1974b, pp. 280–281)

Although Weber is referring to a specific type of world image – the typical *Weltbild* of the religions of salvation – his analysis allows us to reconstruct the main characteristics of any kind of world image.

First of all, this passage allows to us identify the *raison d'être* of a *Weltbild* or, to put it differently, the *performance* [*Leistung*] played by a world image. Indeed, the origin of an image of the world is to be found in the *practical need* to take a position towards the world, that is: in the need to define a general attitude towards the world, as this is an indispensable element for any attempt to answer the question of "How should I act?". The basic and fundamental performance or function of a world image is therefore to constitute the last – unattainable, but unavoidable – horizon of all practical conduct. *Weltbilder* thus provide the general conceptual framework, the horizon of meaning within which and through which individuals understand and interpret themselves and their needs, define their aspirations and expectations, and orient their practical strategies. Despite some differences in their conceptual apparatus, the definition of *Weltbild* offered by Hans Blumenberg seems to capture the fundamental function of a world image already identified by Weber:

I call "world image" [*Weltbild*] that quintessence of reality [*Inbegriff der Wirklichkeit*] in which and through which man understands himself, orients his assessments and his practical objectives, seizes his possibilities and his necessities and projects himself in his essential needs. World image has a "practical force", as Kant would say. (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 69, own translation)[8]

This idea of world image, then, transmits a specific thesis concerning our relation with the world: the world *only* gives itself in images. This means that the "world" can only be conceived in the form of an overall representation. At the same time, this implies that: i) the world cannot give itself in a different form; and ii) we cannot disregard an idea such as that of the "world". It is true that the world, insofar as this idea indicates the totality of the existent, can never be fully experienced or conceptualised by individuals. To quote Blumenberg, we can agree that «What the world really is» is for sure the «least decidable of all questions». But, for this exact reason, such a question «is at the same time the never undecidable, and therefore always already decided, question» (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 15). In other words, for Weber speaking of world images first of all implies affirming the limits of every possible Enlightenment, or, as we shall see later on with regard to Blumenberg's thought, unmasking the inner limit of the Cartesian ideal of a complete conceptualisation of thought and of our attitude towards what we call "reality".

Coming back to Weber, we can observe, secondly, that the above quotation also offers some relevant clues with regard to the *contents* of the images of the world, that is, their concrete *physiognomy*. According to Weber, the way in which a world image – an overall framing horizon – acquires its concrete structure and defining elements depends on its interweaving with materiality. Weber's aim is thus to refuse an "abstract" materialism which denies the autonomous nature of "ideal" or theoretical structures, without reaffirming a similar "abstract" idealism incapable of understanding the key role played by interests in the field of human action. The passage above clearly indicates that Weber firmly asserts the autonomous character of world images, arguing that *Welt-*

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[8] The relevance of *Weltbilder* for practical conduct and their pragmatic function are underestimated by the semantic approach used by Naugle in his definition of worldview: «A worldview as a semiotic system of world-interpreting stories also provides a foundation or governing platform upon or by which people think, interpret, and know» (2002, p. 291). In our opinion, this definition should be integrated with a direct reference to action.

*bilder* cannot simply be considered as a mere "reflex" of *lato sensu* material processes, or, in particular, of economic processes. Indeed, if we retrospectively consider Weber's research as a whole, we can see that he always attempts to keep these two perspectives together. His analysis specifically aims to identify, on the one hand, how a particular image of the world has contributed to "channelling" certain concrete interests, to "activating" some passions instead of others, to "legitimising" a specific behaviour towards the world, while excluding other behaviours from the "horizon of the possible". On the other hand, he also aims to reconstruct the influences that the material conditions of a specific historical and social context exert in their turn on the development of the concrete physiognomy of an image of the world.

Moreover, also interests – be these material or ideal in their nature – acquire their concrete form starting from the dominant world image of a specific social context. Indeed, it is true that «men's conduct» is immediately dominated not by «ideas», but rather by «interests»; anyway, world images (which are strictly ideal phenomena) constitute a unique "catalyst" for interests, since *Weltbilder* have very often «determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest». A world image works thus as a «switchman», which sets the «tracks» – the overall conditions for the conceivability and the legitimising criteria of a specific conduct; and this allows the dynamic of some *specific* interests to fully develop, pushing along a *concrete* course of action.

In Weber, therefore, the concept of world image seems to be functional to a "neutralisation" of anthropology (D'Andrea, 2009). His intent is indeed to show that there is not a relevant configuration from an anthropological point of view when we want to understand the positioning of the individual in the world. What we can say in this regard is that the relationship between the individual and the world, in its extraordinary diversity (from adaptation to extraneousness [*Weltfremdheit*], from satiety to rejection), is always a relationship mediated by images, but the contents of these horizons are not determined by anthropological factors, but rather by more or less contingent elements. Hence, the neutralisation consists of this: Weber tries to demonstrate that what anthropology has called "anthropological constants" are indeed, in most cases, only "empty horizons", whose contents are determined by contingent elements, which could be characterised both by ideal and material processes.

In addition, an approach centered on the idea of *Weltbild*, such as that of Weber, presents some important methodological indications for an analysis of

our contemporary social and political scenario. It offers what we consider a necessary correction to both "economicism" and "hyper-culturalism".

On the one hand, world images reveal indeed the inner limits of the economicistic reading of the social world (and politics) that has implicitly asserted itself since the 1989. With the collapse of the great narrations typical of the twentieth-century world and the transformation in the realm of the Westphalian State, economics seemed to offer the only realistic look at social reality for anyone interested in understanding our contemporary global world and its inner trends. Of course, it is not our intention to deny that the great twentieth-century narrations have lost their "grip" on the world, or their efficacy to orient practical conduct and to offer motivations for some specific forms of behaviour towards the world. But the relevant question here is whether we have witnessed a crisis of a *specific* kind of *Weltbild* – namely, of world images centred on a "thick" philosophy of history – or if human beings have ceased, *once and for all*, to "get in touch" with their reality through a device such as the one identified by the Weberian idea of world image. According to us, this second question presents a negative answer. Moreover, economicism forgets that economics, and material interests in general, depends also on not-economical elements, such as the individuals' overall behaviour towards their social reality. These are all good reasons to reaffirm the autonomous character of our representations of the world with regard to material processes, since this constitutes the first and necessary step to beginning a recognition of individuals' concrete types of behaviour towards the world which have arisen since the "end of history".

On the other hand, by stressing the reciprocal influences between world images and the material processes characteristic of a specific epoch and society, the Weberian idea of *Weltbild* helps us to find an "antidote" to, or at least a corrective measure against, what could be called the "culturalist twist" that took place in social studies (but also in political discourse) with the appearance of the famous book by Samuel Huntington (1996). In underlining the hermeneutic function of the idea of *Weltbild*, the intent is not to claim that "cultural" or "imaginative" products are the *only* key element for understanding the contemporary world and the different styles of conduct towards it; nor to reinterpret the thesis of the "clash of civilizations" as a "clash of worldviews" (Naugle, 2002, p. xvii) or of "images of the world". Today, as in the past, materiality exerts its own role in shaping individual and group interests, hence playing a role in their way of *framing* the world. This is an element that every debate on

"cultural" phenomena should not forget, especially when one wants to rightly counterbalance the economicistic temptation described above.

### 3. A Systematised Collection of Stands

Proceeding in this brief sketch on the constitutive elements of a world image, we can note that thirdly Weber's quote also allows us to say something about the inner structure of *Weltbilder*. Indeed, as it has been noted (D'Andrea, 2011), in Weber every world image presents a hierarchically organised structure. It does not make a great difference if one conceives this hierarchy in terms of a relationship "top-down" or as a relationship between a "centre" and a "periphery", where it is possible to distinguish between an inner "nucleus" and a series of gradually more peripheral regions. What is relevant here is that the top or nucleus of a *Weltbild* is always defined and constituted by a "stand" [*Stellungnahme*], a position taken towards the problem or question which is perceived as the most fundamental question for our practical experience. Thus, taking a position means to imagine an "order of the world", and to decide what one should do – or not do – in front of this order.

Obviously, a world image can also "organise" itself around a *plurality* of fundamental questions and stands, and the latter can often turn out to be incompatible with each other, or even contradictory. In this condition, one can define the possibility and the limits of the inner "rationalisation" or rendering coherent of a *Weltbild*, that is: how much a world image can be elaborated into a coherent comprehensive representation. In this regard, it is important to note that Weber does not seem to consider inner coherence as a necessary element for *Weltbilder*, since coherence does not directly influence their performance, that is, the system of coordinates offered by world images to orientate practical conduct. Weber's analysis of theodicy can be a good exemplification of this statement. According to Weber, in the entire history of humanity only three religions have developed a *Weltbild* where the issue of evil in the world was solved with full coherency, in this way elaborating a "rational" theodicy.[9] Anyway, all other religions have existed for centuries and have effec-

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[9] «The metaphysical conception of God and of the world, which the ineradicable demand for a theodicy called forth, could produce only a few systems of ideas on the whole – as we shall see, only three. These three gave rationally satisfactory answers to the questioning for the basis of the incongruity between destiny and merit: the Indian doctrine of Kharma, Zoroastrian dualism, and the predestina-

tively orientated the conduct of their followers, hence demonstrating that the lack of coherence in a question, however fundamental for their *Weltbild*, did not constitute an element of weakness in its "grip on the world".

To summarise, a world image can be considered as a "systematised collection of decisions on ultimate assumptions", that is: of decisions concerning the issues that are perceived by a specific social group as the key issues of their experience of the world, such as decisions concerning the idea of God, history or time, nature, human nature, evil, good or love and redemption. Consequently, these decisions select some specific ideas of the above-mentioned issues, and these ideas are then "systematised", in a more or less coherent manner, in a world image or, to put it differently, in an overall representation of the existent.

## 4. Absolute Metaphors or *Weltmodelle*? *Weltbilder* and the Modern Age

In any case, religious world images only identify one kind of *Weltbild*, which stand apart owing to their capability to grasp the "meaning" of the world: the constitutive element of a religious image of the world lies in its demand to offer an overall representation of the world as a "cosmos" provided with an objective meaning.[10] However, secular world images have also been able to perform this function, acting as "surrogates" of religious *Weltbilder*. One can think of eighteenth-century philosophy of history, centred around the idea of "Progress", but also of socialism which, inasmuch as its adherents perceived it as a philosophy of history that claimed the certainty of the advent of a worldly justice, has been an effective world image. But what if a world image is no longer able to provide the world with an objective meaning? Can we still talk of a *Weltbild* in this case, or not?

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tion decree of the *deus absconditus*. These solutions are rationally closed; in pure form, they are found only as exception» (Weber, 1974b, p. 275).

[10] See the following passage from the famous *Zwischenbetrachtung*: «Religion claims to offer an ultimate stand [*eine letze Stellungnahme*] toward the world by virtue of a direct grasp of the world "meaning". [...] All religions have demanded as a specific presupposition that the course of the world be somehow meaningful, at least in so far as it touches upon the interests of men. As we have seen, this claim naturally emerged first as the customary problem of unjust suffering, and hence as the postulate of a just compensation for the unequal distribution of individual happiness in the world» (Weber, 1974a, pp. 352–353).

While there is a consistent assonance between Weber and Blumenberg as far as the general definition of *Weltbild* and its practical function is concerned, with regard to this last question their paths begin to diverge. Indeed, according to Weber an overall representation of the world does not necessarily need to provide the world with an objective meaning in order to be effective, that is: to offer an orientation device to practical conduct in the world. For Weber, the "disenchanted" representation of the world typical of European late modernity is to all intents and purposes a world image. Obviously, it determines different types of behaviour towards the world compared to religious images of the world – but this is another matter. In Blumenberg, instead, we find a different position, namely a different *history of Weltbilder*, at least as far as Western historical experience is concerned.

With regard to Blumenberg, the theme of *Weltbild* already appears in *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, a work that can be considered, both chronologically and thematically, as an introduction to the author's philosophical path, a sort of documentation on the «genesis of the Blumenbergian world» (Savage, 2010, p. 134). It is here, indeed, that Blumenberg presents an initial survey of a family of problems that can be classified under the general heading of *Unbegrifflichkeit* (nonconceptuality), a theme that will always constitute the centre of gravity of his specific approach to philosophy. At the same time, here readers encounter a series of metaphors, figures, myths and images – such as the "book of nature", the Copernican image of the world, the myth of the cave, the metaphor of the ship at high sea – that would later be developed by Blumenberg into distinct monographic works. Even though the theme of *Weltbild* is not directly thematised in the *Paradigms*, we can nevertheless note that the core questions related to the idea of a "world image" are clearly connected to the central subject of this book, namely «absolute metaphors».

What is an absolute metaphor indeed? As is well known, Blumenberg's starting point (and *challenge*) is the «methodological programme» set out for philosophy by Descartes, whose historical fulfilment should transform philosophical language into a «purely and strictly conceptual language» (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 1). In its terminal state, hence, the terminological perfection acquired by philosophical language should consequently prove that any forms of figurative or «"transferred" speech» ["*übertragene*" *Rede*], such as metaphors, can be only considered as «leftover elements» [*Restbestände*], mere «makeshifts destined to be superseded by logic» (Blumenberg, 2010, pp. 2–3). "Absolute" metaphors are exactly those metaphors that reveal the intrinsic

limits of Descartes' programme, since they identify a kind of linguistic figure that, to quote Blumberg, «prove resistant to terminological claims and cannot be dissolved into conceptuality» (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 5). Instead of being provisional *Restbestände*, some metaphors prove to be indispensable «foundational elements» [*Grundbestände*] of philosophical discourses as such, showing that philosophy does not (and cannot) follow a one-way path «from *mythos* to *logos*» (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 3). Rather, philosophy is more reminiscent of a bridge – an attempt to "bring to the language" a constellation of questions, problems and issues which, although they cannot be constitutively conceptualised, have not lost their relevance for human life.

Now, upon taking a closer look at absolute metaphors, one notes that their function – what makes them foundational elements of philosophy – consists precisely in their capability to offer an answer to the most «theoretically unanswerable question», namely the question concerning «man's place in the universe, and his relationship to everything else that exists» [*die Stellung der Menschen im Universus des Seienden*] (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 115). In other words, Blumenberg's absolute metaphors perform the same fundamental *practical* function as Weber's *Weltbilder*: they offer an overall representation of the world, even if the «totality of the real» is *per se* something «nonexperienceable and nonapprehensible». Theoretical discourse fails to answer the question concerning the «structure» of the world, and anyway this question contains an «implicit [human] need for knowledge» that demands an answer, since this is a necessary condition for living and acting in the world. By offering a point of orientation towards the world, an absolute metaphor shapes our «attitudes and expectations, actions and inactions, longings and disappointments, interests and indifferences», hence performing the practical function of determining a specific attitude or conduct (Blumenberg, 2010, pp. 14-15).

The theme of *Weltbild* is then resumed by Blumenberg one year after the publication of the *Paradigms*, in a conference held at the University of Giessen entitled *Weltbilder und Weltmodelle* (*World Images and World Models*). It is here that Blumenberg sketches a history of *Weltbilder*, focusing on the transformation of world images that took place with the advent of the modern age. The starting point for his analysis is once again Descartes, the «founder of the modern age and of its scientific spirit» (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 68). For Blumenberg, indeed, through Descartes' scientific method we experienced a separation between the image and the model of the world [*Weltmodell*] for the first time. The definition of *Weltbild* presented here by Blumenberg has already

been cited in § 2. By "world model", instead, Blumenberg means «the total representation of empiric reality, which depends on the state of the art achieved at that point by the natural sciences, and takes into account all of its assertions» (1961, p. 69).

In other words, a model of the world offers an objective report of the reality, that is: a framework that can be verified according to the scientific standards of a specific epoch. Contrary to a *Weltbild*, a model of the world is not a useful instrument for finding answers to the question concerning our positioning towards the world. The fact that the Earth lies at the centre of the universe or that, on the contrary, it is just one of the many planets and stars orbiting around the Sun does not say anything *per se* about our self-understanding or our interpretation of the totality of the existent. A totality that, as already said, cannot be fully reported, experienced or conceptualised, but only "represented". Moreover, modern scientific world models don't provide the world with an objective meaning as some kinds of *Weltbilder* do.

Actually, in Descartes Blumenberg still notes a happy "division of labour" between *Weltbild* and *Weltmodell*, or between philosophy, which Blumenberg considers the real producer of *Weltbilder*, and natural sciences, which elaborate world models. Indeed, Descartes' idea of science was still dependent on a specific world image: in his eyes, even if man was no more located at the «the centre of the universe», he was nevertheless still «postulated as the reference for the sense of the knowledge of nature» [als *Sinnbezug der Naturerkenntnis*] (1961, p. 69). Accordingly, his science still found its own sense in this "anthropocentric" *Weltbild*, being conceived as an instrument for man, whose function should be individuals' self-realisation and happiness in the world.[11] However, since then science has started to become progressively autonomous, producing «its necessities and the regularity of its progress» by itself (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 70). Namely, modern science no longer needs a *Sinngebung*, an attribution of meaning from some outer reality, such as an image of the world. The correlation between image and model of the world has come to an end, or rather: «The *Weltmodell* has actually taken the place of the *Weltbild*

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[11] «The world image contained the attribution of meaning [*Sinngebung*] and, so to speak, the "instructions for use" for every conceivable world model. But this meant at the same time that, inside of the world model, one could not obtain any sufficient explanation as to what man's cognitive activity implied for man himself. By itself, science, released from this context of foundation, could not know what it was doing» (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 70).

and is still close to consuming the residual substance of the world image's heritage. For us to have something like a faith in science depends on the fact that science is no longer conditioned by a belief in an image of the world» (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 71). As a result, Blumenberg speaks of a «weakening» of the world images as a characteristic element of modernity. This weakening mainly concerns the function of *Entlastung* performed by *Weltbilder*.

In the contemporary debate, this fundamental function of world images has been particularly underlined by Fritz Stolz (2001, Ch. 1) in his work on the history of religious world images. Stolz reformulates the key function of *Weltbilder* as their skill to set a distinction between habitable spaces that could be (at least in principle) comprehended and controlled by humans, and hostile or uninhabitable spaces, namely all those fields of experience that put humans in check, and are hence perceived as external to men's theoretical and practical dominion. According to Stolz, religious world images fulfilled this function by setting three main distinctions, represented by the following three conceptual pairings: this-worldliness/otherworldliness [*Diesseits/Jenseits*], culture/nature, controllable/uncontrollable. Exposed to a constitutive vulnerability and contingency when dealing with "reality", individuals first of all need to distinguish between what is (or at least can be) familiar, known and controllable, thus becoming their world, and what remains a hostile, unknown and uncontrollable surrounding environment [*Umwelt*]. In other words, *Weltbilder* are the specific correlates of that "openness to the world" [*Weltoffenheit*] which Arnold Gehlen (1986) already identifies as the main characteristic of human beings, together with their capacity of adaptation to the outer environment, and their artisanal capacity to transform this *Umwelt* into their *Welt* – the first symbolic and communicative product of their culture. Indeed, as our openness to the world gets wider, the degree of our freedom to decide which conduct to adopt towards the outer reality also increases; but this in turn increases the individual's insecurity, exasperating his perception of life's contingency and vulnerability. *Weltbilder* then perform a fundamental function of *Entlastung* or relief: by setting the above-mentioned main distinctions, they define our world and shape an overall representation of it. This allows individuals to "forget" about the basic questions they encounter when facing reality, exonerating them from the daily responsibility to reformulate a comprehensive answer, and leaving them free to focus only on everyday problems.

For Blumenberg too, a *Weltbild* is essentially a remedy against our "openness to the world", a device that allows man «not to constantly confront himself

openly with his position in the nature, eccentric and menaced in the sense» (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 72). Hence, the horizons created by *Weltbilder* work «as screens and protections of interiority» (1961, p. 72). But a world image can fulfil this function only if two conditions are met. First, a world image should be «monistic» (1961, p. 73). The meaning of this condition can be better understood by looking at the second condition: in order to be effective, a *Weltbild* should allow us to take possession of the world «in an unquestionable and natural manner» (1961, p. 73). In other words, a world image only works if it remains "opaque" to the eyes of its followers – only if those who embrace a specific world image do not become aware of the fact that it is *only* a representation of the world, without questioning whether this representation is actually telling us the *truth* about the world. As for every non-theoretical belief, a world image also requires a complete faith in its capacity to render a "state of things" which, actually, is *not* a "state of things" *at all*, since it cannot be judged in terms of truth. In this sense, there could be only *one* world image, so that one cannot believe in Christ and Mammon at the same time.

Blumenberg thus seems to suggest that it is this opacity of *Weltbilder* that was lost during the *Neuzeit*. There are many reasons for this, and in actual fact not only science is responsible. Of course modern science, with its autonomy from a *Sinngebung*, is the first problem, as we have seen; but philosophy also played its part. Indeed, according to Blumenberg, philosophy progressively gave up producing *Weltbilder* on its own. Starting from the modern age, philosophers began to look for *Weltbilder* in the scientific models of the world offered to them by the natural sciences, such as in the case of the Copernican theory: for the first time, philosophers supposed they could find metaphysical guiding images [*Leitbilder*] in a scientific model that had nothing to say about the place of man in the world, but was interpreted as an image of the world, or – which is the same – as an absolute metaphor (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 71).[12] Finally, world images lost their grip on reality with the advent of a new cognitive approach to history, which would become characteristic of the so-called human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]. Indeed, the human sciences offer a new receptiveness to the fact that there is a plurality of world images. There has always been a plurality of *Weltbilder*, but this had not been problematic until

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[12] The "metaphorisation" of the model of world presented by the Copernican theory of the universe in an absolute metaphor or image of the world concerning man's self-interpretation is already analysed in Blumenberg, 2010 (Ch. 9, in particular pp. 101–102).

individuals took an "obvious", opaque approach towards their images. Things changed when the awareness of the fact that, "beyond the mountains", people live accordingly to a different image of the world began to "historicise" every world image. If every *Weltbild* can be linguistically and hermeneutically perfectly transmitted, if everyone has access to every world image thanks to its historical comprehension (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 73), then it gets harder and harder to believe in the "fiction" of your own *Weltbild*.

In other words, human sciences can give us only an «anonymous world», intended as a mere «formal horizon of every translatability» (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 73), depriving thus *Weltbilder* of their «basic validity» (1961, p. 72). Not only modern world images have ceased to provide the world with an objective meaning, but they have progressively lost their capacity to give us back a *framing horizon* to answer the question concerning our place in the world. Indeed, at the end of this essay Blumenberg speaks openly of a «lost of the world images», suggesting that philosophy cannot help us to recreate a relation with the world mediated by new *Weltbilder*. Thus, Blumenberg is more pessimistic then Weber!

According to us, however, his position is also less realistic than the Weberian one, since he claims that philosophy should now work to impede the resurgence of a human need for positioning that, according to Blumenberg himself, «cannot be eradicated» (Blumenberg, 1961, p. 75). One can wonder if this pessimism is mainly regret for a philosophy that has ceased to be the producer of *Weltbilder*.[13] But, independently from the specific "charismatic" sources or strata that produce *Weltbilder*, even a representation of the world as an anonymous globe is *still* a world image. Moreover, science and its models of the world cannot offer decisive arguments either in favour or against any kind of *Weltbild* – religious, secular, capable to provide the world with an objective meaning or not. Indeed, as Blumenberg himself argues, world images fall within the dimension of indemonstrability, because they don't work with the

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[13] In this context we cannot discuss the eventual "exceptionality" or not of this essay with regard to Blumenberg's overall idea of *Weltbild*. Here we would only like to remember that Blumenberg's position is also due to the "occasional" nature of this essay, presented for the reopening of the Philosophy Faculty at University of Giessen, and whose real focus is the contemporary relation between philosophy and science.

true-false criteria.[14] Maybe, the philosophical question that arises here is the one concerning the kind of behaviours and forms of subjectivity that contemporary *Weltbilder* are determining in our scenario.

## 5. Framing Politics

Having tried to present the main characteristics of world pictures, we would now like to sketch the hermeneutic function that the idea of *Weltbild* can perform with regard to the comprehension of practical conduct, by focusing on political conduct.[15]

From the point of view of politics, one of the most relevant aspects of world images is their capacity to delimit the horizon of the possible. In fact, once a specific world image has become affirmed within a certain social context, it also shapes the capacity to conceive *new* representations of the reality. Let us consider a Weberian example in this case too: the idea of redemption. The need for redemption from the injustice of "this" world and the possibility to imagine "another" world (a real alternative to the state of existing things, which can work as an indicative standard for praxis) is never an ultimate datum, a "natural" datum. On the contrary: the definition of the future scenarios (of "what is not yet, but could nevertheless be") proves to be a *variable* of the reference *Weltbild*. So, the extent of the horizon of the possible, and the very possibility itself of a "redemption" from the world as it is now, are also primarily determined by the world image, and then by the relationship that the world image has with the dimension of materiality. In short, once adopted, *Weltbilder* define the bounds of our representation of possible futures, precisely because they define the contours of the *horizon of the meaningful* that makes a specific moral conduct and a concrete positioning of individuals towards the world *plausible*. Independently from the specific mental faculty or faculties (imagination? reason? imagination and reason?) that control our capacity to conceive "the new" and "the possible", what is relevant here is that the extension and form of this capacity is shaped by the reference world image.

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[14] For example, science doesn't "demonstrate" atheism; it can only contribute to the spread of atheism if its report of the world is assumed by a world image among the core-ideas through which this *Weltbild* frames the horizon of the meaningful.

[15] We presented a previous version of this argument in Badii & Fabbri (2010), in which we showed the influence of world images on the concrete physiognomy assumed by politics with regard to a specific example of "absolute metaphor": the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor.

From the perspective of an analysis on the physiognomy of politics, there-fore, the notion of world image becomes essential when it comes to under-standing the *space* of politics and the *ethical inflection* that politics may *con-cretely* assume. For example, the capacity to criticise the injustices of the world – and to bear the costs, renunciations and sacrifices that every fight involves – can only materialise into a political praxis of rejection of the existing world when a certain kind of world image makes itself *available*. Namely, a *Weltbild* that, in representing the relationship between the individual and the world, contains a critical/transcendent element towards the world, without reducing the individuals' image of the world to the single level of a well-being meant only in the material terms of comfort and the private exercise of freedom. The space of politics as an instrument of justice only arises from this kind of world image. It is the reference to an "elsewhere" offering a criterion to evaluate the present that enables us to perceive the injustice of the world, by reading it as the prod-uct of human action or of unfair decisions, which can then be amended through our actions in the future. Without this kind of world image, material or sym-bolic deprivation alone does not trigger conflict, nor collective projects to transform reality: either because the world's ills are perceived as natural events which are beyond our capacity to intervene; or because there is no expectation of future transformations that can offer sufficient reasons to accept the risks and costs of collective action.

Hence, there is also a relationship between passions and world images, as «thymotic passions» (anger, revenge, resentment; Sloterdijk, 2006) may *only* be activated from a specific representation of the world. Namely, only if the world image provides a "first cause", responsible for the way in which things are going. If the evils that afflict our society and our time are represented as a "destiny", a natural phenomenon (such as an earthquake or flood), or a "physiological" pathology of society (a constitutive malaise of social reality), then it becomes impossible to steer anger, hatred or indignation towards someone. The sense of frustration with the present and the same desire for a "redemption" from the evils of the world, then, cannot turn into motives for action. Rather, those passions and desires become a deterrent to action. Namely, in a world where there is not a responsible for evil, inertia and apathy become the only meaningful behaviour.

In short, world images shape "legitimate" future expectations, by promot-ing a specific way of behaviour towards the world and a concrete ethical orien-tation, by defining the extent and type of sustainable ethical costs, and by ex-

cluding at the same time other types of behaviour towards the world from the
horizon of the possible. World images, thus, are not only the (systematised)
product of our capacity to create images and representations, but they in turn
shape this "imaginative" capacity in the realm of a community: they determine
the collective capacity to think of the new with regard to the existing state of
things, and select the possible forms of this *novum*. The political innovation is
never *indefinitely* open, but it can always think of a limited number of alterna-
tives of the "new", coherent with the *Weltbild* of reference for a certain his-
torical and social context. An overall transformation of the horizon of the pos-
sible can only arise from an overall transformation of the world image of refer-
ence, from a new decision on the ultimate assumptions with which we answer
the question of our positioning in the world.

Here we would like just to name a couple of examples to corroborate our
thesis. The first refers to the crisis of the most effective secular world image,
namely socialism. When socialism as world image felt into crisis, this overall
representation of the social world ceased to offer those reasons that have been
able to activate the thymotic passions for almost a century (Sloterdijk, 2006),
depriving of its plausibility a specific conduct towards the world like the revolu-
tionary one. Indeed, after the end of the twentieth-century great narrations the
idea itself of a "revolution" has completely vanished from the Western idea of
politics. This has implied the disappearance of the kind of political violence
socially diffused in our European societies during the 1970s and 1980s; but
the end of the great narrations has also contributed to weaken the "sense" of
political action. Namely, we have experienced a change from politics still con-
ceived as a dimension inherently connected with the "ultimate existential ques-
tions" to politics represented now as mere administration, as *governance*.

A second example can be racism. From a scientific point of view, today it is
ascertained that the idea of human races has no scientifically reasonableness;
moreover, after Auschwitz racism has progressively been conceived as the main
enemy of democratic society and its institutions, at least in the Western world.
In the post-1989 European scenario, however, a representation of human rela-
tionships and the social world based on racism has demonstrated to be fully
effective in orientating the conduct of individuals and groups, by offering plau-
sible motives for political action and its organization. One needs just to con-
sider the number of MPs belonging to xenophobic and extreme right parties
who are currently sitting in European national parliament as well as in the same

European parliament to conclude that racism is actually a core-idea of one of the most diffuse and effective world images of our time.

In summary, we believe that an approach to political conduct based on world images can allow us to identify the ethical contents that are really practicable for the individuals so as they are, and can help us to focus the conditions of the ethical inflection that politics can concretely assume in a specific historical context. Thus, the concept of *Weltbild* is fundamental when one wants to move from a "pure" normative ground, interested in the ethical foundations of politics, to a perspective that could be defined as "moral sociology": a perspective which does not focus on what we have to do, but on what has the *chance* of being perceived as a duty – on what is plausible/realistic to expect from individuals according to their representation of what it behoves them to do.[16] Indeed, an analysis focused on world images shows that, before the question of the foundations of a particular ethical inflection of politics, what matters is the question of the *plausibility* of a certain conduct. But the plausibility of a type of behaviour is decided precisely on the basis of the possibility to insert and justify this behaviour within a concrete framing horizon. Thus, this refers to the specific world images that can be deemed dominant in a certain social context and to the manner in which world images structure – within a more or less systematic narration – an answer to the sustainability of a specific ethical conduct, as well as to its chances of success.

## 6. On This Issue

The purpose of this issue is to offer a reconstruction of the various interpretations of the idea of *Weltbild* and of the "family of concepts" related to it ( *Weltanschauung*, *Weltauffassung*, *Weltansicht*, *Lebensanschauung*, etc.) that have characterised the philosophical scenario from the late nineteenth century until contemporary debate.

The aim of this reconstruction is not to outline a conceptual history of the term "world image", and we are fully aware that the selection of authors and

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[16] Bauman (1989, p. 169) has attempted to develop a «sociological theory of morality» to overcome the inability of contemporary sociology to provide answers to the «problem of the social nature of evil, or, more precisely, of the social production of immoral behaviour». From a philosophical perspective, the attempt to develop the perspective of a "moral sociology" in the realm of normative discourse can be found in D'Andrea (2009).

issues presented here cannot even attempt to offer an exhaustive and definitive mapping of the presence of the *Weltbild* concept in the realm of philosophy. Considered as a whole, the following contributions instead intend to highlight some of the most significant interpretations of the idea of world image, providing not only an analytical reconstruction of the occurrences of the term in the works of the selected authors, but also reflecting on its heuristic function, and the reasons that justify the use of this concept according to a specific author.

Each of the twelve papers included here – some commissioned upon invitation, others selected through a call for papers – thus present a monographic approach to the theme of world images: they all focus on a specific author, highlighting his conception of the idea of *Weltbild* and explaining which heuristic function has been attributed to each view. As readers will see, the papers concentrate on the authors who have been considered "classics" for the topic of *Weltbild*, following a chronological order: Dilthey (Eric S. Nelson), Husserl (Kenneth Knies), Weber (Dimitri D'Andrea), Heidegger (Michael J. Inwood), Borkenau (Arpad Szakolczai), Jaspers (Elena Alessiato), Cassirer (Barbara Henry), Wittgenstein (Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen), Anders (Stefano Velotti) and Blumenberg (Martino Doni). But our selection also includes Søren Kierkegaard (Hjördis Becker) and Peter Sloterdijk (Marc Jongen), two authors whose names are not immediately connected with this topic. Regarding Kierkegaard, we welcome the contribution – proposed following the call for papers – with interest because it highlights the relation between world images, *Livs-Anskuelse* (life view) and social context with regard to the father of existentialism. Instead, we commissioned a contribution on Sloterdijk because we believe that, even if not directly thematised by the author, the theme of world images crosses his thought and his "sphereology" all the same.

With regard to the Commentary Section, the selection of texts was driven by the desire to show the relevance of the concept of world image with regard to other disciplinary fields too, in the attempt to integrate the philosophical perspective on the idea of *Weltbild* with other points of view – such as theology (Ulrich Beuttler's commentary on Karl Heim), sociology (Mirko Alagna on Karl Mannheim) and photography (Domenico Spinosa on Susan Sonntag).

As readers shall see, in many aspects and at many times this issue refers to a so-to-speak *stone guest*, namely Martin Heidegger. He is not only the object of two specific papers, but he is also invoked – directly or indirectly – in almost all of the contributions. Of course Heidegger's essay *The Age of World Pictures* [*Die Zeit des Weltbildes*] contributed greatly to the diffusion of the term

*Weltbild*, especially outside the German-speaking debate. In any case, we are not going to hide from readers that — as far as our specific interpretation of world image and of its hermeneutic function is concerned — Heidegger represents the greatest *adversary*, his interpretation of *Weltbild* as a unique product of "modern metaphysics" and its correlative "promethean human type" leading to a complete misunderstanding of the idea of *Weltbild* itself. This is the reason why we prefer to differentiate ourselves from his position in linguistic terms too, and speak of "world image" instead of "world picture". However, this is only the editors' point of view, and it is not our intention to ascribe this to the other authors of this issue too. Moreover, there is no doubt that Heidegger represents a (or perhaps *the*) fundamental reference for twentieth-century reflections on *Weltbild*.

In fact, the centrality of Heidegger's stand towards the idea of *Weltbild* has indeed guided us in the selection of the material chosen for the Report Section. We have the great honour of publishing the first English translation of Jacob Taubes's essay *Die Welt als Fiktion und Vorstellung* (*The World as Fiction and Representation*, 1983), in which, upon reflecting on the relation between "realism" and "idealism" with regard to science and art, he openly disputes Heidegger's position on world image.

Finally, Heidegger is also present in the interview with Alain de Benoist, in which he dwells on his debts to Heideggerian thought. Alain de Benoist also offers his perspective on the French debate on the imaginary, which we mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, together with valued suggestions on the concept of ideology, improperly attached to the concept of world image for much of the twentieth-century.

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# From *Weltanschauung* to *Livs-Anskuelse*:
# Kierkegaard's Existential Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by Schleiermacher's *Weltanschauung*, Kierkegaard develops a concept of *life view* that lays the theoretical foundation of his works: In his *existential philosophy*, life view describes different modes to relate to oneself and to reality. In his ideas on *aesthetics*, a life view is the necessary condition for the unity of a novel. Even stronger, the author has the *ethical responsibility* to confront the reader with the existential task of developing a life view individually. Finally, the paper discusses ways of integrating Kierkegaard's concept of life view into a *socio-cultural perspective*: A life view can link people as individuals and create social forms and movements that build upon individual responsibility.

## Introduction

In the 18th century Kant defined *Weltanschauung* as the transcendental subject's capability to construct a perceptive totality (Kant, 1968, pp. 254–255 [KU B92-93]; Thomé, 2004, p. 453). *Weltanschauung* describes a universal cognitive ability that makes sure that we are talking about the same "world".

Thus, in the beginning, *Weltanschauung* is merely an epistemological term, and it is regarded as a *universal capability* and not as an *individual perspective*. These semantics are slightly modified by Hegel, who adds a historical component: For him, *Weltanschauung* is the total perception of nature, society and deity that changes according to the evolution of spirit. Thus, *Weltanschauung* is historically relative, but it nevertheless has "objectivity" for every epoch, nation and *Volksgeist* (Hegel, 1970, p. 330). Schleiermacher makes

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another crucial modification. He stresses that *Weltanschauung* is not the automatic consequence of being born in a specific historic epoch, as Hegel indicates. Rather, it demands a life-long *effort* everyone has to make individually.

The most famous successor of these thoughts is Wilhelm Dilthey. Despite references to individual spontaneity in his work, he concentrates mainly on general aspects by developing a *typology* of *Weltanschauungen* (Dilthey, 1968). The subject's activity and the individual feature of a *Weltanschauung* are not in the focus anymore.

Another Schleiermacher-inspired author of the 19h century makes *Weltanschauung* a crucial component of his philosophy: Søren Kierkegaard. He stresses the individuality of a *Weltanschauung* and the effort it takes to get the *right one*: Developing an adequate *Weltanschauung* becomes an existential task.

Kierkegaard uses world view (*Verdens-Anskuelse*) and life view (*Livs-Anskuelse*) synonymously,[1] but life view prevails in his works. This paper argues that Kierkegaard's emphasis on life view instead of world view is not coincidental. It shows how Kierkegaard translates the *epistemological* concept of German Idealism into an *existential* concept with *ethical* dimensions. Mainly focusing on Kierkegaard's signed works *From the Papers of One Still Living*, *A Literary Review*, and *Book on Adler*, this paper investigates the implication of Kierkegaard's reinterpretation of world view as life view. First, it discusses the theoretical context, especially the influence Kierkegaard's Schleiermacher-reception has on his definition of life view (1.). Then, it analyses the function of life view in Kierkegaard's work (2.): In his existential philosophy, it describes different ways to relate to oneself and to reality (2.1). In Kierkegaard's aesthetics, it is the *conditio sine qua non* for the unity of a novel (2.2). Linking Kierkegaard's aesthetics and his existential philosophy, the paper shows that according to Kierkegaard, an author also needs to live up to an *ethical* responsibility. However, only by succeeding in «individual ethics», that is, by developing a personal life view in opposition to the «demands of the age», the author can be a role model for the reader (2.3). The last section focuses on the rela-

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[1] See for instance Kierkegaard's *Book on Adler* (Kierkegaard, 1968, p. 6; Pap. VII 2 B235). I refer to Kierkegaard's works in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS), edited by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center. When quoting from his journals, I refer to: N. Thulstrup (Ed.), *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* (Pap.). Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1968–1978.

tion of a life view to its socio-historical environment, which according to Kierkegaard can negatively influence the individual's effort to develop a life view (3.1). Finally, the paper discusses an additional way of integrating the individual life view into the *socio-cultural perspective* presented in Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review* (3.2).

## 1. The Theoretical Context

### 1.1. Denmark

When Kierkegaard starts his authorship in the 1830s, *Weltanschauung* is already a dominant concept in the academic world, especially in aesthetics. In Denmark, *Anskuelse* is applied in the evaluation of art production. Johan Ludvig Heiberg for instance, the most influential critic and *homme de théâtre* of Golden Age Denmark, stresses in a discussion with the German writer Christian Friedrich Hebbel that art needs to demonstrate the world view that is adequate according to a (pseudo-)Hegelian scheme of a developing world spirit.[2] Heiberg can be regarded as a model critique for Kierkegaard (Pattison, 2009). Still, their opinions about philosophy and literature are strongly differing, especially with regard to Danish Hegelianism. So when it comes to finding the Danish source of inspiration for Kierkegaard's application of world view, Poul Martin Møller, professor of philosophy, is the more adequate candidate. Kierkegaard's friend and mentor is the first to openly oppose Hegelianism in Denmark. Furthermore, Møller criticizes his epoch for not having a *Verldensanskuelse* (world view). He especially finds fault with the then contemporary arts for expressing only negativism and not an adequate world view (Møller 1856, pp. 90–92; see de Mylius, 2006, pp. 35–37; Jones, 1965, p. 81; Pattison, 1999, p. 126; Walsh, 1994, p. 30). As shown later, this is exactly the criterion that Kierkegaard applies in his reviews and his own works, too.

### 1.2. Schleiermacher

Although Møller has been very influential on Kierkegaard, there is strong evidence that Kierkegaard develops his concept of life view by reading Friedrich

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[2] This long and detailed discussion has been published in *Fædrelandet* and *Morgenblatt* in 1843 (see Heiberg, 1861; Hebbel, 1913).

Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's influence on the Dane has been controversially discussed (for an overview, see Anz, 1985, and Crouter, 1994). As Crouter points out, Kierkegaard himself does not direct the attention to Schleiermacher's influence on him, so «only when we are aware of the issues running through the mind of Kierkegaard at distinct times of his life are we able to [...] assess how he views Schleiermacher's teaching» (Crouter, 2007, p. 203). One of these issues is *Weltanschauung*. It shows that for Kierkegaard Schleiermacher's work is an unobtrusive, but deep source of inspiration.[3]

A direct reference can be found in Kierkegaard's journal from October 1835, when he comments on Schleiermacher's *Confidential Letters Concerning Schlegel's Lucinde*, which has been reissued the same year by Karl Gutzkow. This edition of fictional letters provides an intense critique of Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* (1799), which caused a scandal due to its permissive treatment of erotic love.[4] Schleiermacher praises Schlegel's *Lucinde* for communicating a world view, and he stresses that people need to deal with the issues of modern life not by an intellectual approach, but rather by *Anschauung*: Therefore, the task of a work of art is to express a world view: «Who takes theory seriously today, and seeks the link to life in theory? [...] A work of art holds a view [*Anschauung*], this is the ground for everything» (Schleiermacher, 1907, p. 98).

In his note, Kierkegaard calls Schleiermacher's *Letters* a «true work of art» itself, and a «model review» which is

> an example for how a review can become extremely productive, because he [Schleiermacher] constructs many personalities out of books. By shedding light on the work, he at the same time sheds light on the individualities. As a consequence, we are not placed into different points of view, but rather, we get to know many personalities who represent these different points of view. These personalities are complete beings, so we are allowed to look right into each

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[3] Except for Schleiermacher's *Lectures on Education*, Kierkegaard owned all the works in which Schleiermacher develops his concept of *Weltanschauung*: The *Lectures on Dialectics* and *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Although he does not himself own every work, we can assume that Kierkegaard thoroughly gets to know Schleiermacher's philosophy (Crouter, 2007, pp. 198–201).

[4] For a comparative approach to Schleiermacher's and Kierkegaard's reception of Schlegel's *Lucinde* see Dierkes, 1983. Dierkes does not consider Kierkegaard's comment on Schleiermacher's review and its influence on Kierkegaard's *Livs-Anskuelse*.

> one's individuality, and, through many, although only relatively true judgments, create our own ultimatum. (SKS 19, p. 99)

Kierkegaard's early reference to Schleiermacher's *Letters* gives strong reason to regard Schleiermacher's *Weltanschauung* as the core of Kierkegaard's conception of *Livs-Anskuelse*. As we will see below, Kierkegaard's tribute to Schleiermacher is interesting from several perspectives: It shows Kierkegaard's preference for vivid personalities over theory and advocates a more literary approach towards existential issues instead of a Hegelian systematic approach. Additionally, the goal is to activate the reader.

## 2. Kierkegaard's *Livs-Anskuelse*

### 2.1. Life view and existential philosophy

Kierkegaard claims that individual existence cannot be the subject of abstract theory, as it can only be *shown* – and this is what the pseudonyms in Kierkegaard's works do. As fictive authors and publishers they express different life views. Kierkegaard stresses in «A first and last declaration» supplementing the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, that «what I have written is mine, but only as far as I put a life view [...] into the mouth of the producing poetical-real individuality» (SKS 7, p. 569).

  For instance, in *Either/Or*, Judge William describes himself as having a life view (*Livs-Anskuelse*, which is based on the «destiny to choose»), albeit no system (SKS 3, p. 203), and he comments on his opponent, the aesthete A: «Besides, you do not have a life view [*Anskuelse af Livet*]. You do have something, that resembles a life view and gives your life a kind of calmness, which should not, however, be taken for the secure and refreshing confidence in life» (SKS 3, p. 195). Getting a true life view is difficult, since it does not automatically come by abandoning the false, aesthetic attitude towards life. It demands an effort that includes the acceptance of one's actual and concrete life after having seen its relation to the eternal. This is an effort not everyone has the strength to take, as the young man in *Guilty? – Not guilty?* experiences. His aesthetic view collapses under a crises caused by an impossible love. He describes himself as «stranded» due to his «individuality's maladjustment»: «My life view consisted in hiding my melancholy in my inwardness» (SKS 6, p. 365).

Life view can be understood as orienting people on their different existential stages. One needs to leave behind the preliminary life views (the aesthetical and the ethical life view), since these views are only *illusionary* life views: the only one that can truly be called a life view is the Christian life view (McCarthy, 1978, p. 135). Thus, life view «goes to the heart of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy», since it «emphasizes the duty and importance of the individual to understand himself, [...] his conditionality and his freedom» (McCarthy, 1978, p. 135).

There are many ways to fail in developing a life view. According to Kierkegaard, most people evade this existential demand at all. It is the task of the modern author to make his audience pay attention to themselves – by confronting them with the author's own life view (be it preliminary itself, and be it the life view of a pseudonym or of a real author). In this dimension, many authors fail. Therefore, "life view" is the main criterion in Kierkegaard's aesthetics to categorize and judge a work of art.

## 2.2. Kierkegaard's Aesthetics

For Kierkegaard, three aspects are key when evaluating a work of art.[5] First, *is it supposed* to have a life view – defined as «transsubstantion of experience» (SKS 1a, p. 32)? Second, does it *actually* have a life view? Third, is this life view *adequate*? Kierkegaard develops this scheme already in September 1838, in *From the Papers of One Still Living*, an extensive review of Hans Christian Andersen's *Only a Fiddler* (*Kun en Spillemand*). Originally supposed to be published in Heiberg's journal *Perseus*, but probably published separately due to Heiberg's disapproval of its style (Garff, 2006, p. 84), the *Papers* accuse Hans Christian Andersen for having failed as author. Admittedly the booklet might be motivated by strategic interests like the wish to be accepted in the Heiberg circle (Koldtoft, 2009, p. 1), and its personal critique might be unjustified (Westfall, 2006). Still, it profoundly lays the foundations for Kierkegaard's aesthetics. Moreover, the view of authorship that is developed in his debut book stays dominant throughout his whole work and can also be found in later reviews like *A Literary Review* and *Book on Adler* (Verstrynge, 2006).

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[5] It is mostly literature and drama that Kierkegaard is occupied with.

Influenced by Heiberg's genre theory (Connell, 1985, p. 26; Pattison, 2009, p. 177), Kierkegaard distinguishes between «immediate art» (lyric productions) and «reflective art» (novels). For both, *unity* is essential, but in each genre, it is achieved differently. For novels, a life view is a necessary condition:

> A life view plays the part of providence in the novel; it is the novel's deeper unity which provides it with an interior centre of gravity; it prevents the novel from becoming arbitrary and pointless, because the purpose is immanently present everywhere in the work of art. (SKS 1a, p. 36)

Kierkegaard refers to the *Everyday Stories* of Thomasine Gyllembourg (a contemporary author who publishes anonymously) as ideal novels. Each of them achieves unity by representing her life view. In contrast, a poem achieves its unity by a singular mood, as Kierkegaard shows at the example of Blicher's work: «there stands forth here [...] a deep poetical mood wrapt in the veil of immediacy» (SKS 1a, p. 25). This mood is echoing an archaic, super-individual spirit instead of an individual life view, thus, Blicher is «the profound voice of a collective consciousness» (*ibidem*).

By characterizing the work of Gyllembourg and Blicher, Kierkegaard «establishes the characteristics of aesthetically valid immediate and reflective art, thus setting the boundaries of aesthetically illegitimate no-man's land within which he intends to place Andersen» (Connell, 1985, p. 26). The harsh critique of Andersen is based on the main argument that there is no life view in his novels, thus, they fail aesthetically because they lack unity. Kierkegaard relates the external unity of a work to the internal unity of a person, so he proclaims that Andersen *cannot* write aesthetically valid novels because his personality is split: he does not have a life view himself (SKS 1a, p. 32). According to Kierkegaard, Andersen is not a personality, but rather the *possibility* of a personality (SKS 1a, p. 26). His comprehension of life is not structured by a consistent life view; rather, it is dominated by his changing moods. This has consequences for his works: his novels lack the unifying life view, while his lyric productions lack a single, unifying mood: Andersen's lyric is the same «weave of accidental moods» in which Andersen finds himself as person (SKS 1a, pp. 25–26).

We can emphasize two aspects of life view in this context: First, the relation of a novelist to his work needs to be authentic; his novels can only depict the life view he holds himself. Referring to Gyllembourg as author of the *Everyday Stories* (and respecting her anonymity by addressing her as a male author),

Kierkegaard describes the author's creative process as «with the fidelity of in-wardness reproducing his own original character». As a consequence, «the life view that can be found in the novel, is to be found in its production, too» (SKS 8, p. 17). Nevertheless, the relation between author and work is not immedi-ate, not a direct expression of the individual life view, but a reflected one. Thus, the novel's unity is only *corresponding* to the author's personal unity (SKS 1a, p. 21). The reflective approach towards the own life view prevents the author from two mistakes that destroy the aesthetic value of a work, a purely theoretical approach and a subjective approach where the author identifies too much himself with his protagonists: «If [...] such a life view is lacking, the novel seeks at the expense of poetry to insinuate some theory or another (dogmatic, doctrinaire novels) or else stands in a finite and accidental relation to the au-thor's flesh and blood» – which results in «subjective novels» (SKS 1a, pp. 36-37).

In Kierkegaard's view, Andersen's novels are the prototype of a subjective novel. Andersen expresses such a strong empathy with the novel's protago-nists, that Kierkegaard characterizes his novels as «an amputation of himself [Andersen] rather than a literary product» (SKS 1a, p. 39). Interestingly, to give an example for a «doctrinaire novel», Kierkegaard refers to Schlegel's *Lu-cinde* (SKS 1b, p. 324). Thus, although he praises Schleiermacher's *Letters* for being a model review, he does not agree with him on the reviewed work itself: Whereas Schleiermacher finds a view (*Anschauung*) about life in Schlegel's *Lucinde*, Kierkegaard criticizes it for promoting an aesthetical the-ory, i.e., an *inadequate* life view.

Second, due to the authentic, albeit reflected relation between author and work, the work can be judged according to the *author's relation to reality*. Ac-cording to Kierkegaard, a point of view that flees reality is an illusionary life view, thus no life view at all. Kierkegaard criticizes Andersen for escaping real-ity by indulging in his moods and self-pity. Andersen is driven by his negative attitude towards life, a deterministic belief that a genius cannot thrive under bad conditions. In *Only a Fiddler*, Andersen illustrates this belief: a talented violinist fails since he does not live in a supportive environment. Since the plot does neither teach how to change one's life nor to arrange oneself with it, Kierkegaard wants to «fight this negative point of view and its putative right to pass itself as a life view» (SKS 1a, p. 35).

Indulging in subjective moods, Andersen is an example how an author evades reality, fails in his existential task, and in his works even *teaches* this

escapism from existential responsibility. Thus, his failure is not only aesthetical, but also ethical.

Referring to Schlegel's *Lucinde*, Kierkegaard gives another example for the failure of an author.

Schlegel demonstrates a sophisticated way of missing one's existential task: instead of confronting oneself with the painful existential responsibility, he suggests to approach reality with more fantasy and rewrite it like a poem – an idea Kierkegaard strictly rejects:

> Who would be such a brute that he could not enjoy fantasy's light play, but out of this does not follow that life shall be resolved in the view of fantasy [*Phantasi-Anskuelse*]. If fantasy in such a way is empowered, it will weaken and stun the soul, bereave it of all moral strength and turn life into a dream. (SKS 1b, p. 326)

Both Andersen and Schlegel miss two ethical tasks: they fail to leave the false, aesthetic stage of life behind themselves, and they do not awake the reader. Not expressing an adequate life view in their works and not forcing the readers to create their own «ultimatum» (SKS 19, p. 99), they fail as *persons* and as *authors*.

In order to give a thoroughly positive example, Kierkegaard praises Gyllembourg.[6] She has a true life view that is grounded in the reflection of her life's experience, and has been proven by the strokes of fate (SKS 1a, p. 24). In *From the Papers of One still Living*, Kierkegaard refers to Gyllembourg occasionally, but concentrates on Andersen. Eight years later, in *A Literary Review*, he describes Gyllembourg's merits as an author more detailed. Still, life view is the core criterion of his judgment. Here it becomes clear that a "true" life view can be attributed not only to the last stage of life, the religious one, but to the ethical stage, too. According to Kierkegaard, Gyllembourg does not reach the religious existence, but stays at the ethical level. Although not totally fulfilling the existential task, she still succeeds with regard to her task as author. First, she expresses a life view that does not flee reality, but persuades the reader «to stay where he is» (SKS 8, p. 23). This does not help the reader making the leap into a religious existence, but it prevents her/him from drifting into the realms of an aesthetic existence. Furthermore, since the ethical existence is a first step towards becoming an individual in front of God, it can also be regarded as to

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[6] On Kierkegaard's general appreciation of Gyllembourg's work see Nun, 2009.

*prepare* the reader for the religious existence. Second, Gyllembourg demonstrates what it means to be an authentic personality. She has found herself and therefore, she can be a role model: «He can be a leader, because he is not a writer who seeks himself, but someone, who has found himself, before he became an author» (SKS 8, p. 19). The author of the *Everyday Stories* does not adjust herself to what Kierkegaard calls the «demands of the age» (*Tidens Fordring*, SKS 8, p. 13), but stays true to herself (SKS 8, p. 17).

## 2.3. The author and the demands of the age

The *demands of the age* repeatedly occur in Kierkegaard's works. They can be interpreted as the Hegelian *Zeitgeist* as much as shorter living fashions, or as the Heideggerian *Man*. Whatever interpretation one chooses, it always includes the same crucial component: the demands of the age make the individuals forget about their existential task of taking charge of themselves.

According to Kierkegaard, evading the existential task of developing a life view is characteristic for his epoch. He criticizes especially that the individual responsibility has been neglected: the existential demand has been degraded to a collective demand – to the demands of the age

A true life view is the antidote against these demands, and a novel that communicates such a life view has an awakening effect on its readers. Furthermore, the author can be a role model. In order to judge whether the author has a life view, it has to be evaluated, «whether the author stayed faithful to himself despite the demands of the age, or whether he deceived himself and the duties he gave himself» (SKS 8, p. 12).

The connection of "life view" with an author's authenticity that opposes the "demands of the age" returns in Kierkegaard's *Book on Adler*. In the introduction, Kierkegaard describes his age as fickle, «in which the individual in many different ways (in the judgment of the social environment, in the public opinion, in the city's gossip) tries to find what essentially can only be found in the individual itself» (Kierkegaard, 1968, p. 22; Pap. VII 2 B235). As in the *Literary Review*, Kierkegaard accuses his age as being hyper-reflective, and unable to act. People are struck in a web of reflection, they consider too much – in Kierkegaard's words: they only discuss premises – so they never reach a conclusion and make a decision leading to action. This «weakness of the age» is used by «individuals, who's life similarly only has premises, to become writers, and their works will be exactly what their time demands» (Kierkegaard,

1968, p. 7). Such a "premise-author" suggests a lot, refers to many projects and distracts instead of motivating the reader to come to a conclusion. As in Kierkegaard's earlier mentioned works, the failure of the author *as author* has its roots in the failure of the author *as person*.

> Instead of agreeing with oneself – everyone separately – about what one wants *in concreto*, before one starts to express oneself, they have a superstitious belief about the use of initiating a discussion. [...] They have a superstitious notion that, while the individuals, every one for itself, do not know, what they want, the *Zeitgeist* [*Tidsaand*] [...] is able to reveal, what one really wants. (Kierkegaard, 1968, p. 9)

Thus, the "premise-author" is "needy", he is dependent on the judgment of the reading public (Kierkegaard, 1968, pp. 12–13). He adjusts to the demands of the age, thereby enforces these demands and makes it even harder for his contemporaries to develop a life view. In this respect, he is responsible for his readers evading their existential task.

So far it has been shown that life view is an existential rather than an epistemological category in Kierkegaard's work. Having a true life view is a necessary condition for becoming a true, self-responsible individual. Since it is the author's task to demonstrate a life view not only due to aesthetical reasons, but also due to a responsibility towards the reader, the paper suggests that "life view" is neither solely an existential nor an aesthetical category. It is an ethical concept, too, addressing interpersonal relations like the author-reader-relation. However, can we even think of a wider ethical dimension, maybe with regard to a socio-political context? I would like to finish by suggesting a link between Kierkegaard's concept of "life view" and "idea": "idea" translates "life view" into a socio-political term.

## 3. Life View: a Social Context?

### 3.1. Individual responsibility and determinism

It seems that failure and success in developing an adequate life view is totally the individual's own responsibility. When explaining "life view", Kierkegaard concentrates on the individual:

> When we ask how such a life view develops, we answer that for him who does not allow his life to fizzle out, but as far as possible seeks to turn its individual expressions inward again, there must necessarily come a moment in which a

special illumination spreads over life; and one does not, even in the remotest manner, need to understand all possible particulars, for the subsequent understanding of which one now has the key; there must, I say, come that moment when, as Daub observes, life is understood backwards through the idea. (SKS 1a, p. 33)

In addition, Kierkegaard's rejection of Andersen's "negative view" about a genius' dependence on external circumstances underlines the individual's total responsibility. This attitude has been enforced by the classic concept of *Bildung* (cultivation). Joakim Garff shows that Kierkegaard's judgment of *Only a Fiddler* is based on the concept of *Bildungsroman*, which has been prominent in 19th century, also in Copenhagen's intellectual circles (Garff, 2006). In three stages (home – homeless – home), the *Bildungsroman* «sketches the process that takes place as an individual realizes his own rudimentary layout in a series of coordinated moves, and thus brings himself into a continually more proportioned relationship with the world that surrounds him: society, nature, cosmos, God» (Garff, 2006, p. 87). For the concept of *Bildung*, the interaction with the social environment is crucial. As Schleiermacher stresses, education helps to get a *Weltanschauung*, it is its task to «develop the receptive chaos into a world view» (Schleiermacher, 1849, p. 622). *Bildung* has passive as much as active elements: The individual finds its place in the world by *being educated*, but also by *actively reflecting* her/his experiences and integrating them to the unity of a personality. Thus, it is «apparent that even though the *Bildungsroman* neither disputes the reality of existential contingency, nor is regulated by a strict determinism, it nonetheless reveals a fundamental confidence that life unfolds according to laws and structures that are deeply embedded in the individual human person» (Garff, 2006, p. 87). Thus, for the *Bildungsroman* it is characteristic to end well and to restore harmony. This does not happen in Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*. Therefore, Kierkegaard condemns it with regard to aesthetics (for deconstructing the genre *Bildungsroman*), but also with regard to ethics: for propagating a negative attitude towards life. However, Kierkegaard is not as consequent as it seems. In the beginning of *From the Papers of One Still Living*, he makes several adjustments that weaken not only the strong supposition of the individual's total responsibility for fulfilling his existential task. Even the moderate thesis of the interaction of a reflecting individual with its environment cannot be found in the description. For a person like Andersen, the circumstances are simply not providing the necessary base for such interaction: «Such an aid of the epoch's cir-

cumstances was not Andersen's destiny; because his own life-development happened in the so-called political period» (SKS 1a, p. 27). Kierkegaard's negative statements about the «political period» should not only be understood as political concern and «crusade against liberalism» (de Mylius, 2006, p. 35). Kierkegaard does not have in mind the different interests of opposing parties and social classes, but the effect the «political period» has on the individual. To describe the characteristic features of that period, Kierkegaard uses psychological instead of social categories: His age is too reflective, it is «not a period of deeds» [*ingen Gjernings-periode*] (SKS 1a, p. 27) and thus, it prevents the individual from acting. Locked up in the "prison of reflection", the individual is unable to make existential decisions that concern exclusively his own life:

> Reflection's envy keeps will and power in prison. First, the individual has to break out of that prison, where his reflection keeps him, and then, when he succeeded, he is not yet standing free, but in the big prison-building that is constructed by the environment's reflection. (SKS 8, p. 78)

Considering Kierkegaard's view on his epoch, one can resume that his position is not so much different from Andersen's: Although Kierkegaard contrarily to Andersen finds the *genius* to thrive under each condition, he still admits that the *normal individual* depends on his environment to fulfil his existential task. Therefore, writers have a task. Especially in "political periods", "true authors" are needed to activate the readers as single individuals and to help them develop an adequate life view.

### 3.2. Life view and idea

This final section claims that Kierkegaard's concept of life view also includes sociality: By elaborating on the hidden link of "life view" and "idea", I show how individuals socially connect without mutually hampering each other's existential development.

In the *Papers of One Still Living*, Kierkegaard anticipates possible defences of Andersen. One could for instance state that an *idea* is the centre of Andersen's novel, and thus, one could conclude, he has a life view. Kierkegaard strictly rejects this argument:

> To this I have to answer that I never claimed that an idea as such (least of all an *idée fixe*) is to be regarded as life view, and further do I have to know a bit more about the idea's content. Now, if it is based on the assumption that life is no process of development, but a process of decline of everything great and

> special that wants to sprout, I rightful dare to protest against attributing "life view" to that idea. (SKS 1a, pp. 34–35)

Some scholars have interpreted this as evidence that an idea cannot substitute a life view (see for instance McCarthy, 1978, p. 142). However, I think that "idea" and "life view" do not necessarily exclude each other. As Kierkegaard emphasizes, the *kind* of idea is relevant. In Andersen's case, the idea contradicts life. It does not help to lead a life in reality. This is the only reason why Kierkegaard wants to «fight this negative point of view and its putative right to pass itself as a life view» (SKS 1a, p. 35). But other ideas can be thought of that fulfil exactly the function of a life view. In Summer 1835, only a few months before Kierkegaard praises Schleiermacher's *Letters*, he notes that he is looking for «an idea that I want to live and die for» (SKS 17, p. 24). In becoming an individual in a true sense [*den Enkelte*], Kierkegaard finds the idea that guides his life and also structures his work. Again, there are striking similarities to Schleiermacher, who defines his *Monologues* as demonstrating no «dead thoughts» [*todte Gedanken*], but «ideas that truly live in me and in which I live, too» (Schleiermacher, 1858, pp. 415–416; Czakó, 2006, p. 650).

Although having an idea about life is not automatically a life view, its relevance for life comes similar to it, if it expresses and initiates a right relation towards reality. Furthermore, as an idea, life view does not only link the individual with its concrete existence, i.e., with her/himself, but also with others. In *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard describes three relations of the individual to an idea and to others. He judges the relations differently; interestingly, what is best for the individual is best for society, too:

> If the individuals (everyone for himself) essentially relate to an idea in passion, and thereby essentially relate to the same idea in union: then it is the best and normal relation. The relation is individually separating (everyone possesses himself) and ideally uniting. In the essential inwardness there is decent shame among men that prevents rude obtrusiveness; in the harmonious relation to the idea rests a sublimity that forgets the individual's contingency above the whole. [...] In contrast, shall individuals simply relate *en masse* (that is, without the separation of inwardness) to an idea: so do we get violence, lack of steerability and lack of restraint; but if there is no idea for individuals *en masse*, and also no individually separating essential inwardness, so do we get brutality. The spherical harmony is the unity of the planets relating to themselves and to the whole. If we eliminate one of the relations, we will get chaos. (SKS 8, p. 61)

Passion, the necessary condition for relating to an idea individually and *en masse* at the same time, has been lost in Kierkegaard's epoch. Thus, the «best and normal relation» is difficult to achieve.

Since Kierkegaard concentrates on criticizing his age instead of developing future scenarios of a society, sketching a Kierkegaardian socio-political theory is extremely difficult and would be misplaced in this context. However, the quote allows us at least to highlight two elements. First, Kierkegaard admits that the social environment has an influence on the success and failure of developing a life view. Second, by stressing the identity of specific "ideas" and "life view", Kierkegaard suggests a social function of life view: as an idea to which people relate *as individuals*, but *together with others*, it helps to construct a society that prevents mass delusion and supports the individuals in their existential task of leading an authentic life. In other words, according to Kierkegaard life view is not only an individual, but also a social issue: it helps to construct a well-functioning society that is build upon individual responsibility and authenticity.

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# The World Picture and its Conflict in Dilthey and Heidegger

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I describe the hermeneutics of perceiving and picturing a world in Wilhelm Dilthey's works. I examine some of the issues facing Dilthey's approach to picturing a world [*Weltbild*] and the conflict [*Streit*] of world-pictures, contrasting Dilthey's interpretive strategies with those of the early Martin Heidegger who both borrows from and critiques Dilthey's conception of picturing the world.

## 1. Picturing a World

Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of "worldview" [*Weltanschauung*] aims at depicting the formation of life through its interpretive perception or picturing [*anschauen*] of a world [*Welt*]. A historically situated and self-reflexive life interpretively pictures and forms a world for itself and expresses and communicates this world in myriad ways throughout its life. This world-picturing [*Weltbild*] does not emerge through the self-intuition or self-assertion of a monadic subject, as the self, its subjectivity, and its world can only emerge in relation to the exteriority of things and others. As others make my self-interpretation and individuation possible through processes of learning and socialization, one's world is primarily a human world, even if it is never exclusively this. A person's world is still a human world even if one rejects the human for the inhuman, the impersonal divine or the natural, as supernaturalism and naturalism (whether scientific, poetic, or mystical) are also socially-culturally informed interpretations and world-views of life.

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A plurality of world-perspectives emerge since humans are constituted in social-historical worlds shaped by natural forces, biological drives, practical interests, sedimented customs and traditions, the reproduction of powerful structures and institutions, normative-spiritual strivings, and communicative and self-reflection. Given such conditions of diverse origins, the sciences of the human world also need to be multifaceted to address this complexity. Furthermore, unlike the natural sciences that can bracket their basis in human life, the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] cannot escape their own reflexivity and consequently the need for self-reflectively engaging the human world from which they emerge, since knowledge of the human world falls within that world itself.

As a worldly bodily being exposed in its exteriority and facticity, these processes of self-understanding and interpretation are not purely conceptual or self-contained (Dilthey, 1959[4], p. xvii/1989, p. 50). They involve all dimensions and "faculties" – "rational" and "irrational," cognitive and affective – of human existence. The human sciences can correct for but cannot eliminate the passions and interests of human life that enter into the study of that life. Dilthey's insight is more than pragmatic. Dilthey reformulates subjectivity as contextualized and embodied while maintaining its individuality and potential for personhood.

The immanent or internally given world of the self to itself implies the original givenness from the first-person perspective of co-agents or participants of meaningful social-cultural structures and processes. In this context, "inner" refers to the first-person life-context, which is inherently bodily, perceptual, and worldly as well as social-historical, in which objects are pre-conceptually and conceptually understood. The "internal" human world is constituted through social-historically formed practical goods, interests, norms, purposes, and values (Dilthey, 1959[4], p. 9/1989, p. 61). "Outer" or "external" refers to the abstraction of objects from their life-nexus in the third-person perspective of observation and explanation characteristic of the modern natural sciences and associated with metaphysical worldviews such as naturalism and materialism (Dilthey, 1959[4], pp. 9–10/1989, pp. 61–62, 67). Such worldviews give the impression of being modernistic in being associated with the development of the natural sciences. Yet they remain metaphysical in asserting that there is one definitive picture and truth about the world. Metaphysics represents the world through a unified point projected outside the world in

order to conceptualize the world as a transparent systematic totality (Dilthey, 1960[2], pp. 38, 96).

Metaphysical claims consequently presuppose a perspective external to any possible perspective and come into conflict with other characteristics of modernity: skepticism about cognizing the transcendent and noumenal and respect for the plurality, perspectivality, and individuality. Dilthey articulates this point not as a transcendent truth but as a conflict between the historical consciousness of the present and of difference with every form of metaphysics understood as science (Dilthey, 1960[2], p. 3). This antinomy between reason and history is due to reason extending beyond itself and claiming definiteness about the indefinite, cognitive clarity about what is in fact a product of an affective mood [*Stimmung*] and historical nexus [*Zusammenhang*] of conditions. This antinomy that places exaggerated rationalism into question is itself historical rather than transcendental. If it reoccurs in different contexts, each context has its dynamics and a comparative approach that preserves particularity is crucial.

The historical consciousness of differences, which cannot be mediated without problematic metaphysical appeals, raises questions of skepticism and relativism. After the end of metaphysics as unified science, which includes positivistic programs of the unity of science, is there and to what extent can there be value, validity, and truth in the multiplicity and relativity of human experiences? Without the metaphysical integration of the world, which has collapsed into paradox and aporia, we are faced with incommensurable data from myriad sources. As Heidegger later complains, being [*Sein*] is absent in beings [*Seiende*], the world is lost in the plurality of worlds, and the ontological difference disappears in endless ontic differences (Heidegger, 2001[2]). Likewise, the positivist Richard von Mises criticizes – from the perspective of the unity of science – the disunity and ambiguity produced by maintaining the empirical difference of the subject matter (von Mises, 1968, p. 209).

Because we are always confronted by the singular as well as the whole, the disrelational as well as the relational, ontic and empirical multiplicity cannot be conclusively combined into one fixed world-picture or sublimated and removed [*aufgehoben*] by an external category or third term (Dilthey, 1959[4], pp. 9–12/1989, pp. 61–64). Instead of asserting the unity of the world and the sciences, or of being and knowledge, as phenomenology and positivism desire, Dilthey unfolded a non-reductive or pluralistic empiricism in relation to

knowledge, and moderate skepticism in response to metaphysical and speculative theories.[1]

The truth of relativism and skepticism, which their critics miss, is the therapeutic correction of false universalism that takes the established present type of human being as the natural and universal standard (Dilthey, 1960[2], pp. 5, 75). To this extent, Dilthey articulated the "death of man" a century before postmodernism, as no one fixed determinate type called "man" is discoverable in history (1960[2], pp. 76-77). As the naturalistic world-picture indicates, humans are nature (1960[2], p. 100). Yet human biological, geographical, climatic, and historical nature is diverse. No essence or transcendental argument can exclude human diversity even though there are commonalities in all dimensions of human life.

Given the commonalities of human existence, understanding and interpretation are not random. Further, the individuality of things does not make any interpretation possible much less legitimate, as it calls the interpreter to be receptive and responsive to the other phenomenally and immanently from out of itself and in its own empirical situation. The subject matter itself in its difference becomes the basis for interpretation. Hermeneutics, at least in its non-ontological and non-universal variety, is inherently of the other. What is methodologically appropriate then, if we are concerned with universal validity and facticity, commonality and singularity, is a morphological-comparative strategy that elucidates individuality in relation to its context and its others. That is, a strategy that includes all ontic and empirical aspects of human existence, including what is dismissed as "irrational," and especially psychology and history (Dilthey, 1960[2], p. 9). These psychological and historical elements are not of course deduced from a priori ideas, transcendental categories, or universal hypothetical-deductive theories; the phenomena need to be elucidated from out of themselves. Thus, the a posteriori, contingent, and empirical as well as the descriptive and analytic are necessary for each science in its own way according to the immanent sense and direction of its objects.

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[1] On Dilthey's empiricism, see Nelson, 2007b.

## 2. Living in the Historical World

It is incorrect to claim, as one author does, that «[f]or Dilthey, the task of human understanding is to liberate the social from the empirical» and, as if world-picturing and the empirical were disconnected categories, it is «an image of the world, a *Weltbild*, determines the value of life...» (Horowitz, 1989, pp. 28–29). Value is not imposed on life from the outside, as life valuing itself forms a world-picture that in turn orients and disorients that life in the tension between value and facticity. Likewise, a *Weltbild* is a dynamic experientially-shaped understanding and picturing of a world rather than a static and immutable «cosmic picture» (Naugle, 2002, p. 87). Instead of being underway on a one-way street moving from a doctrinal principle, originary source, or self-evident intuition to the phenomena, experience and worldview interact and inform one another as part and whole, particular and general. Dilthey's accordingly prioritizes the empirical [*Empirie*], including the appearance of the unexpected that can reorient or traumatize a world, while resisting the exclusivity of reductive conceptions of empirical explanation.

Positivist tactics miss the dynamic structures and holistic living nexus of human phenomena in breaking them down into a collection of hypotheses and data (Dilthey, 1960², p. 15). Dilthey's holistic experientialism opens up and extends knowing to the unrestricted empiria [*unbefangene Empirie*], thus undermining doctrinal atomistic empiricism [*Empirie, nicht Empirismus*] (Dilthey, 1959⁴, p. 81; 1997², p. 17).² Dilthey's pluralistic non-dogmatic hermeneutical empiricism is especially appropriate for the demands of the human sciences. Dilthey's holism indicates a different logic that coordinates whole and part rather than subordinating the particular under a universal or integrating it into a totality (1960², p. 65). It is holistic, without eliminating the differences that make up a differentiated nexus. It is historical and "positive" as history is differentiation and the "positive" is the particular. That is, history is not only a way of seeing or a methodological science, it is at the same time the particular events, persons, structures, etc., which constitute it.

History presents an unending and dazzling richness and variety that appears to support historical relativity and incommensurability. But while Dilthey demands that we recognize the truth of historicism that each historical moment

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² Compare Nelson, 2007, pp. 108–128.

has its own unique value and validity, he also criticizes historicism for its one-sidedness in forgetting the more general and universal that allows the singular to be recognized. Consequently, Dilthey argues that further historicizing is the cure for historicism and historical relativity, as historical consciousness moves from the destruction of the ahistorical and timeless to its own historically informed forms of validity ($1960^2$, pp. 10, 78). On the one hand, history constitutes the very activity, self-understanding, and subjectivity of the subject (Landgrebe, 1968, p. 19). On the other hand, since such historicity entails the necessity of the self to understand and interpret itself in relation to others, things, and a world, the subject is not a brute historical given or monadic singularity.[3]

Heidegger ($2001^2$, pp. 346–347) suspects that subjectivity in Dilthey remains beholden to a modern conception of the epistemic and psychological subject that needs to be overcome.[4] This criticism ignores Dilthey's thinking of subjectivity as embodied living and worldly. Subjectivity always involves interpreting the self's contextual historicity, which permit and require developmental and comparative strategies of description and analysis. It is in this context that Dilthey introduces the notion of types that he employs in his morphology of world-pictures. Types have a preliminary heuristic character that allows them to open up and articulate the singular in relation to its contexts (Dilthey, $1960^2$, pp. 86, 99). Types are not irrevocable constructs or irreversible prejudices. Types are the researcher's hermeneutical anticipations that can be transformed through research just as the self's anticipations about the other should be revised in encountering the other ($1960^2$, pp. 99–100). This is not only a methodological issue, as a world-picture is rooted in and expresses a life ($1960^2$, p. 78). Dilthey's comparative morphology of life- and world-pictures leads to their living nexus and experiential context ($1960^2$, p. 8).

This comparative coordinating strategy also informs Dilthey's response to the question of relativism. The antinomies within a scientific world-picture and the contradictions between world-pictures are not resolvable by conceptual theorizing because they are expressions of life in its diversity and perspectivality ($1960^2$, p. 8). The self-interpretation of a world-picture leads Dilthey to

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[3] On the historically situated and interpretive and reflective formation of the self, see Nelson, 2011.
[4] I present a divergent interpretation of Dilthey's psychology and epistemology from Heidegger's in Nelson, 2010 and 2008.

consider metaphysical and other cognitive-theoretical systems to be an expression [*Ausdruck*] of life and lived-experience [*Erlebnis*]. Metaphysics, or any other "philosophy" including Dilthey's hermeneutical experientialism, cannot resolve the conflict, as life- and world stances and their conflict are constitutive of the dynamics and perspectives of life itself (1960$^2$, p. 98). To remove life from science and philosophy does not resolve the question and save us from "irrationality," but leaves us with an impoverished thinking that is only calculation and an instrument of domination (1960$^2$, p. 20). The resolution of the antinomy in a projected systematic totality is to suppress the differences constitutive of life (1960$^2$, p. 24). Instead of a systematic totality that suppresses what is considered contingent and different, Dilthey appeals for an epistemic humility.[5] Dilthey identifies with the cultivation of a tragic sensibility that is an openness to the irresolvable differences and conflicts of life (1960$^2$, p. 71).

Although Dilthey wants to retain the insights of German idealism, he is not an advocate of idealism and the priority of consciousness over embodied worldly life. Such life not only projects and forms a world out of its own consciousness or self-existence, but its world is always already there [*da*] for it (1960$^2$, p. 16). The world is inevitably present and there as a whole for the self in one way or another (1960$^2$, p. 43). The self is not constituted in self-reflection alone but is consciousness and reflection is a response to its exteriority, facticity, and worldliness (1960$^2$, p. 39). Life becomes a world through the irremovable experience of resistance and alterity (1960$^2$, pp. 16–18).

According to Dilthey's student Georg Misch, Dilthey's «thereness» in the midst of life is not Heidegger's transcendental and impersonal «it worlds». It is not a «worlding of the world» that absorbs the individual, but the formation of an individual reality and individuation of a world for a relational self (Misch, 1931, p. 247).[6] This process of the formation of a world for a life centers on the feeling, thought, and will of the individual and the relation of the body to its world rooted in the senses and the bodily feeling of life (Dilthey, 1977, p. 175). Dilthey describes here the traumatic emergence of the self through its differentiation from the world in resistance and the exposure to facticity of its receptive spontaneity and vitality.[7]

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[5] Dilthey's "epistemic humility" is underexplored. This conception has been developed in regard to Kant by Langton, 2001.
[6] Compare Dilthey, 1960$^2$, p. 79.
[7] On the traumatic constitution of existence, see Nelson, 2009.

In place of a dichotomy between active spontaneity and passive receptivity, Dilthey argued for the crucial role of receptive spontaneity. Receptivity and spontaneity are a continuum, conditional, and presuppose each other (Dilthey 1957$^2$, p. 84; 1977, p. 156). As a consequence, life is first there in the tension of non-identity, in the reflexive awareness of the self in its feeling of something exterior and resistant to itself (1977, pp. 157–158). Self-feeling and self-consciousness arise and presuppose resistance and the externality of an environing world (1977, p. 166). The "internal" human world is thus not an ideational or spiritual construct. It is constituted through social-historically formed practical goods, interests, norms, purposes, and values (Dilthey, 1959$^4$, p. 9/1989, p. 61). A world is mediated through material, social, and symbolic relations. A world is felt and lived and never merely a conceptual, ideational, or representational object (Dilthey, 1960$^2$, p. 17). Life interestedly cares about and understands its own life from out of itself and in response to others.

History and biography are the most appropriate ways of expressing and provoking reflection on life. All sciences have an element of art in being practices, but some are more thoroughly artistic employing all of our spontaneity and responsiveness. Poetry and the other arts provide the most powerful and moving insights into life and the individual's formation of a world-picture. Art and literature are nearest and most expressive of the self-presentation of life in its fullness and complexity (1960$^2$, p. 26). Works of art do not only express life, they heighten and intensify it and disclose its further possibilities that often remain unseen and unheard in the course of daily life. Art is the clearest articulation of the imagination, and it is the imagination that approaches the singular without eliminating it and allows for a non-coercive juxtaposition of singulars (1960$^2$, pp. 26–27).[8]

Art, religion, and philosophy are extensions and intensifications of the feeling of life, or – in some cases – its condensation and impoverishment, in worldviews. The "internal" feeling of life is confronted by exteriorities that resist, threaten, and undermine it, including the irreducible exteriority and facticity of death (1960$^2$, pp. 45–46, 53, 79, 81). Even at its most abstract and conceptual height, endeavors to systematically comprehend and organize the whole leads to aporias and downfall. Dilthey accordingly arrives at the opposite conclusion from Hegel. Philosophy in the end can only be deeply per-

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[8] On the exemplary significance of the aesthetic in Dilthey, see Makkreel, 1986 and Nelson, 2007a.

sonal and individual even in expressing what is impersonal and universal ($1960^2$, p. 32). A philosophy is not merely a system of concepts; it is oriented in a fundamental mood [*Grundstimmung*] and disposition [*Gemütsverfassung*], which conceptualization and reflection in turn can influence ($1960^2$, p. 33). These moods orient the picturing the world as it is formed and individualized in its epochal and generational contexts ($1960^2$, pp. 35, 82).

### 3. The Conflict of World Pictures

Another facet of Dilthey's depiction of world-pictures is their conflict and contest [*Streit, Widerstreit*] arising from the divergent conditions and agonistic dynamic of life ($1960^2$, pp. 18, 98, 152). Individual and divergent world-perspectives and their tensions can be suppressed in totalizing theories and ideologies, but they are haunted and disturbed by the alterity and conflict they seek to master. These attempts at complete identity and unity result in irresolvable aporias and antinomies that are the overextension of a world-picture. In their internal aporias and external conflicts, conflict and incommensurability [*Widerstreit*] are revealed as constitutive of life. Conflict and resistance condition even the most immediate self-consciousness ($1960^2$, p. 43). Consciousness accordingly arrives at its own finitude and the need to cultivate humility in face of the ultimately ineffable character of life.

The basic *Widerstreit* prevents the closure of life in a metaphysical or conceptual system insofar as it inevitably is led to its limits. These limits are disclosed in the antinomies and aporias of conceptual thought. Dilthey articulated a "philosophy of world-pictures" in order to account for the genesis and conflict of systems of interpretation of meaning in relation to the feeling and nexus of life. World-pictures express a natural and legitimate tendency to unify and integrate experience even as the conflicts inherent in life prevent the questionable closure of life in a complete totality or system, as they inevitably face their limits in the self-generated antinomies and aporias of life.

The conflict of life, of its interpretations and worldviews, signifies the impossibility of an indifferent relativism in which everything is equal in its independence. The forces of life and human responsiveness make the disinterested equality of relativism impossible. Life as the differentiation of *Widerstreit* resists totalization, whether this occurs as metaphysics, science, or theology, a unified picture of the world (an ultimate worldview or metaphysical system), or a perspective detached from all contexts and perceiving life from outside of

itself without the aporias of immanence (the so-called view from no-where) ($1960^2$, p. 98). For any contextual form of thought, and all thinking presupposes a further context of conditions it cannot fully know or master, resistance and excess are irreducible, and remainder and rest remain incomprehensible to identity-thinking ($1960^2$, p. 152).

An epoch has its homogeneity but is also an agonistic and differentiated field of forces ($1960^2$, pp. 158–159). The recognition of the intrinsic conflict and difference constituting an epoch is visible in Dilthey's concept of generation (Dilthey, $1956^2$, pp. 177–178/2002, p. 159; Heidegger 1985, p. 385). Dilthey characterized a generation by its receptivity and dependency that forms a relative homogeneity distinct from other generations. This homogeneity does not consist in a fixed essence but in a generation forming and sharing in an intersection of possibilities unavailable to other generations (Dilthey, $1957^2$, p. 37). «Generation» is a determination of the social-historical self, through which the self is understood through the possibilities of its facticity and historicity.

Each generation encompasses a multiplicity without one exclusive unified worldview. An age is typified by an individual who reveals the age's contradictory and conflicting impulses. Unlike Hegel's one person who embodies an age, there is no one definitive identity in the determination of an epoch but a field of tensions and a *Widerstreit* of worldviews immanent to the movement and self-understanding of life itself. There is a dominant yet no single unified tendency of an age, as anarchic possibilities of the creative, new, and otherwise – which contest the hegemony of the dominant worldview – emerge and defy control (Dilthey, $1956^2$, p. 178).[9]

## 4. Resistance and World-Formation in Dilthey and Heidegger

In Dilthey's thought, the phenomenon of resistance is what enables the formation of a worldly self, a self that cannot simply be itself because it is always related to others, objects, and the world with which it is co-given or equiprimordial. It is difference that constitutes identity. Resistance is a key feature of Dilthey's thought for the early Heidegger. Its significance has been underestimated because of Heidegger's critique of it in *Being and Time*. There Heideg-

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[9] On generation and the new in Dilthey, see O'Byrne, 2010.

ger rejected resistance as proving the externality of the world, since resistance already presupposes world, but this does not negate the import of resistance as such. Heidegger would take up and transform resistance at various levels of his thought – from the resistance of things in the breakdowns of their purposiveness to the resistance of existence to human projects and understanding in the impossibility of mastering death.

Worldly resistance remains significant in Heidegger's early thought, as experience is still related to the «resistant» insofar as experience is both passive and active and implies a differentiating setting-apart-with [*Sich-Auseinander-Setzen-mit*] and the self-assertion of what is experienced (Heidegger, 1995, p. 9).[10] The origin and goal of philosophy is factical life understanding and articulating itself, as thinking springs from its facticity in order to return to it (Heidegger, 1992-93, p. 173; 1995, pp. 8, 15). Facticity does not only open access to the world through differentiation but resists and blocks access to itself through its everyday indifference (Heidegger, 1995, pp. 12, 15–16). Heidegger also reinterpreted Dilthey's resistance as the ruination, counter-movedness, and transversal of life (Heidegger, 1992b, p. 185). The "there" in and from which the "I" occurs is fundamentally resistant and ruinating (1992b, p. 185). Thus, despite Heidegger's rejection of resistance as an argument for the self-existence of the external world, Dilthey's notion of resistance is appropriated and transformed in Heidegger's thinking of life's phenomenality and facticity.

In contrast to this approach to resistance as (1) the key to individuation and (2) the counter-movement of life, which is immanent to life insofar as it is life itself that presents us with its ruination and questionability, we can compare (3) Heidegger's critical interpretation of Dilthey's account of resistance in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1985, pp. 209–211)[11]. As Magda King remarks, resistance «characterizes beings within the world, and by no means explains the phenomenon of the world» (King, 2001, p. 261). Resistance occurs from out of the world rather than being the how or way in which the world is grasped as world. It is significant though that Heidegger provides an ontological basis for resistance rather than rejecting it: Resistance «gives a factical existence to understand his exposedness to and dependence upon "a world of things"

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[10] On the import of *Auseinandersetzung* in the early Heidegger, see Nelson, 2000.
[11] Cf. also Heidegger, 1992b, pp. 1301–1331.

which, in spite of all technical progress, he can never master» (King, 2001, p. 261).

Heidegger recognized in his Kassel lectures that the epistemological and methodological aspects of Dilthey's thought need to be considered in the context of the centrality of the question and concept of life (Heidegger, 1992-93, pp. 153–154). Historical knowledge is reflexive of being a self (1992-93, p. 153). Life as knowing follows itself in its history in attempting to know itself (*ibid.*). According to the early Heidegger, the self is a world along with the environing world and the world of others. This «self-world in factical life is neither a thing nor an ego in the epistemological sense», but it has the character of «a definite significance, that of possibility». (Heidegger, 1992a, p. 232; 1992b, p. 94) The self-world is not a denial of others but indicates how the "I" is always referred to others and the world in the equiprimordiality of the self-world, with-world, and environing world (1992b, p. 95). These three overlapping co-constitutive worlds make up the "life-world" such that they cannot be isolated from each other or interpreted as self-sufficient (1992b, p. 96). Thus, despite the constitutive but cogiven significance of the self-world in these early lecture courses, Heidegger was already critical of the primacy of the subject and its separation from life. Life can neither be understood as an object nor a subject (1992a, p. 236).

Dilthey's central question is that of historical self-knowledge in which the being who questions is addressed by and included in the question (Heidegger, 1992-93, p. 153). Life confronts me as always mine, such that the "subject" is always already differentiated (Dilthey, 1997[2], pp. 346–347). Life is, however, not only the ground of knowledge but is unknowable. Life constantly understands itself while remaining non-transparent and ineffable to itself. This remainder is also a concern of Heidegger's early thought from the singular thisness [*haecceitas*] of his early work on Duns Scotus to the «it worlds» [*es weltet*] and «there is/it gives» [*es gibt*] already discussed by Heidegger in the late 1910's. This promoted Dilthey's importance in Heidegger's eyes, since Dilthey understood life as an exposure to facticity in its singularity and contingency (Dilthey, 1997[2], p. 348). The facticity of life is the last ground of knowledge, as knowledge cannot penetrate its own facticity (Dilthey, 1959[4], p. 322; 1970, p. 53).

Although hermeneutics, facticity, and life operate as basic words in Dilthey's writings, the question of the possibility of a «hermeneutics of factical life» is first explicitly posed by Heidegger in his early lecture courses. Heideg-

ger's question would then be of how Dilthey's used of these three concepts. The facticity of life shows itself in experiences of resistance, the inability of concepts to lead thought out of its own incommensurabilities and aporias, the discontinuities and interruptions, the limits and breaks which do not allow the immanence and givenness of human life to be transparent and which prevent their being grasped through mediation.[12] Heidegger argued that facticity is neither immediate to intuition nor can it be dialectically mediated and pushed aside in a discussion of resistance and questionability (Heidegger, 1992b, pp. 148–151). Instead facticity presents us with the immediacy of questionability and ruination that shakes up all immediateness (1992b, pp. 150–151). Facticity can only be articulated by strengthening and intensifying its factical character by lingering within its ambiguity and questionability (1992b, pp. 152–153). Facticity is formally indicative of a fullness and richness of a worldly context of determinations that we cannot fully comprehend nor escape.

## 5. A Conflict of Worlds?

> One objective, determinate, *integral system* of reality that excludes other possible ones is indemonstrable (Dilthey, 1959[4], p. 402/1989, p. 235).

Heidegger becomes increasing more critical of Dilthey during the 1920's. He unfolds his most sustained critique of Dilthey in his lecture course *Introduction to Philosophy*. Here he argues against understanding the world and world-picturing through the multiplicity of ontic differences for the sake of an originary ontological difference. Heidegger throws into question the ontic differences of the empirical articulated by Dilthey.[13] A worldview is not an observational interpretive response to multiplicity; it is primarily world-intuition [*weltanschauen*] and a factically gripped being-in-the-world for Heidegger:

Precisely the differentiating confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] renders being

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[12] The discontinuities of time and history do not emerge after Heidegger's "turn", they are at play in his early project of a hermeneutics of facticity. Note the opposing claim in Bernasconi, 1993, p. 180.

[13] The issue of Heidegger's apparent monism is not new. Ernst Cassirer argued in 1931 that the «reduction to temporal finitude» in Heidegger's explication of Kant is a monism that undermines the Kantian distinction between the knowable sensible and the unknowable supersensible. Compare Friedman, 2000, pp. 140–142.

in itself available and not mere observation. Observation is a supplementary form of the possible appropriation of truth, but it is not the essential one of making manifest. It is also fundamentally the authentic meaning that dwells inside the term "intuition". It is hardly self-evident that the Western concept of knowledge is oriented precisely to the idea of intuition and that Kant applied the idea of knowledge as *intuitus*. "Intuition" of something wants to express the immediate having of something in its entirety. Such having, as a sought after ideal, includes in itself the orientation toward not-having, not-possessing. (Heidegger, 2001[2], p. 344)

Observation and empirical inquiry already presupposes encountering and confronting the world, but – as Dilthey stresses – the encounter can repeat, miss, or be transformed in the encounter such that the empirical ontic dimension should not be dismissed. In traditional thought, this encountering prior to inquiry is understood as intuition and Heidegger returns to a phenomenological intuition independent of Dilthey's empirical interpretive strategies. Heidegger's intuition is not only an immediate grasping but is deferred through not grasping. According to Heidegger:

Worldview [*Weltanschauung*] is basically called having-world, to possess world: that is, holding itself out in being-in-the-world that uncovers the lack of bearing [*Haltlosigkeit*], in which worldview to be sure continues to provide the direction of bringing it into possession. In the expression "world-intuition" [*Welt-anschauung*], the appropriated belongingness [*zugeeignete Zugehörigkeit*] of being-in-the-world to being-there [*Dasein*] is held to be heard from there. World-intuition as world-having is at any time in one way or another factically gripped being-in-the-world. We may not then, taken strictly, say that being-there has a worldview, instead being-there is necessarily world-intuition. (Heidegger, 2001[2], p. 344).

Whereas Dilthey emphasized the interpretive character of worldviews, Heidegger highlights their intuition. Heidegger contends against Dilthey that a worldview is not formed out of multiple and heterogeneous aspects and elements. It is not of "diverse provenance" but rather an originary unified phenomenon in the transcendence of *Dasein* in its nothingness and ecstatic and eccentric lack of bearing (Heidegger, 2001[2], p. 354).[14] *Dasein* is in each case betrayed and endangered in its transcendence-in-the-world, or in «the each

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[14] I explore the role of nothingness and lack of bearing further in a comparative context in Nelson, 2010.

time of the facticity of transcendence» (2001$^2$, pp. 358, 367). *Dasein* does not first of all ontically observe and inquire, as is emphasized in Dilthey's empiricism, it rather primordially understands and «intuits the world» (2001$^2$, pp. 367–368, 382–390). Human existence, understood as being-there [*Da-sein*], is each time an intuiting of world. It is a having and not having of the world which it is. Worldview is often treated as something objectively present, as a fulfilled having of the world. Contrary to this tendency to reify world-pictures, which Dilthey also rejected, Heidegger shows how worldview expresses *Dasein*'s lack of bearing. To have a world is equally to be decentered into the world (2001$^2$, pp. 344–345).

Worldview is further misunderstood in the idea of a "natural worldview" for Heidegger:

> One means by this a holding-itself in being-in-the-world that is natural to every *Dasein* and equal for each. Yet if every *Dasein* as factically existent is necessarily individuated in a situation, then factically there can be no natural worldview. Every worldview like every being-in-the-world is in itself historical, whether it knows this or not.

There is no one so-called natural worldview upon which a historically formed worldview is then additionally grafted, as little as there can be a *Dasein* that would not be the *Dasein* of the self and thereby, Heidegger concludes, dispersed in relations of self and other [*Ich-Du*] (2001$^2$, pp. 344–345). Heidegger's denial of a natural worldview extends beyond Dilthey's analysis, as Dilthey interprets naturalistic world-picturing to be an expression of a mode of life that, as a life rather than a theory, has its own legitimacy and cannot be refuted. Dilthey argued that there can be no one unified natural worldview common to all humans, but concluded from this that naturalism is one expressive possibility of life among others rather than impossible. Naturalism is one expression and enactment of the truth for Dilthey and only untrue when it overextends itself and takes on a dogmatic totalizing metaphysical form. A worldview is essentially historical for both Dilthey and Heidegger, but for Dilthey this entails that it is irreducibly individual and worthy of recognition for itself.

The empirical ontic multiplicity of worldviews is not irrelevant to any given picturing of the world, which is confronted by and must recognize or repudiate other ways of picturing the world. Dilthey noticed that the historicity of worldviews entails that there is no master worldview from which to neutrally rank others, even one that appeals to an ontological principle of difference. Instead, individuals are confronted with the incommensurability, difference, and con-

flict of worldviews that make a unified thinking of being impossible and unde-
sirable, because they are inevitably participants in and party to agonistic life.
This is why, despite their affinity on numerous questions, Heidegger increas-
ingly sided with the hermeneutic conservatism of Graf Paul Yorck von Warten-
burg and his drive toward ontology against Dilthey's "liberal" and "tolerant"
hermeneutics with its ontic pluralism born of interpretive humility and char-
ity.[15]

## 6. Conclusion

Dilthey's philosophy has been appropriately interpreted as hermeneutical be-
cause of how he responded to the questions of the historicity of knowledge and
human nature. Knowledge results in epistemic humility when knowers realize
their limited access to the infinity of relations that determines its inescapable
contexts. The pursuit of knowledge is unable to provide irreversible answers to
the questions that are posed to it whether they concern the world of nature or
spirit. Dilthey's life-philosophy is not so much one of the «last offshoots and
consequences of Platonism», as Heidegger accuses (Heidegger, 1989, pp.
218, 337). Dilthey's project is more akin to the beginning of philosophy in the
Socratic sense of a love of wisdom that recognizes its own ignorance and fini-
tude.

In Dilthey's thinking, two varieties of the interpretive and indirect pictur-
ing of the world are the mathematically-oriented sciences of material nature
(the scientific world-picture) and the hermeneutic articulation and analysis of
historical life (historical consciousness). These are two facets of the modern
world that orient Dilthey's thinking, and Dilthey would not disagree with Car-
nap, Hahn, and Neurath's statement that: «Die Wissenschaftliche Weltauffas-
sung dient dem Leben, und das Leben nimmt sie auf» (Verein "Ernst Mach",
2006, p. 27). In response to Dilthey's apparent duality, Heidegger demands a
fundamental ontology of being that discloses a more basic dimension from
which the unity of both nature and history can be understood.

Even though Dilthey unfolded embodied historical worldly life as the point
of departure for the sciences, Dilthey's project of a «critique of historical rea-
son» remained inadequate for Heidegger as it did not reach the ontological

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[15] Compare Hans-Georg Gadamer contrast between Dilthey's "cultural liberalism" and Yorck and
Heidegger's conservatism in Gadamer, 1995, pp. 9, 186.

questions of the being of that historical life and of being as being. Heidegger asserts therefore that Dilthey missed the crucial difference and intertwining – the ontological difference – between the ontological and the ontic, and between being [*Sein*] and human existence as being-there [*Da-sein*]. It should be asked though, based on the account of Dilthey unfolded above, whether this is the weakness or strength of Dilthey's philosophy and whether it continues to modestly offer something that is underappreciated in twentieth-century hermeneutics and phenomenology.

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# Three Views of the One True World and What They Make of Mere Worldviews: a Husserlian Approach to *Weltanschauung*

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ABSTRACT

The problem of worldview is crucial to Husserl's conception of phenomenology as an *immanent* critique of modern scientific rationality. According to Husserl, our scientific traditions tend to frame the distinction between mere worldviews and the one true world in a way inimical to the aims of science itself. It is thus an important task for the phenomenological critique of reason to rehabilitate this distinction. This paper outlines three ways to do it. The first two define world-directed sciences in the customary sense (objective and critical-historical sciences, respectively); the third defines phenomenology and opens up the phenomenological view of the world.

## Introduction

The problem of worldview [*Weltanschauung*] is crucial to Husserl's conception of philosophy. Unlike his most influential successors, Husserl saw phenomenology as an *immanent* critique of modern scientific rationality that would clarify and progressively realize its guiding ideal of universal knowledge. In light of this ideal, *Weltanschauung* refers to a limited understanding of the world, relative to the particular traditions of experience and praxis in which it takes shape and functions. Phenomenology thus joins in the general scientific effort to rise above "mere" worldviews in order to discover the one true world.

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According to Husserl, however, our scientific traditions tend to frame the distinction between mere worldviews and the one true world in a way that detaches the latter from the sphere of intuition [*Anschauung*] available to the reflecting individual, whose life in the world inevitably develops a subject-relative perspective. When framed in this way, the distinction results in speculation and skepticism inimical to the aims of science itself. It is thus an important task for the phenomenological critique of reason to rehabilitate the distinction between mere worldviews and the one true world. In what follows, I outline three ways of framing this distinction. The first two define world-directed sciences in the customary sense (objective and critical-historical sciences, respectively). The third defines phenomenology and opens up the phenomenological view of the world. The question of where and how this view of the world takes place, and what it makes of mere worldviews, is best answered by approaching the phenomenological reduction as a new way of seeing the lifeworld. In his 1911 *Logos* essay, Husserl outlined the task of a «rigorous philosophical world-science» (HUA 25, p. 48).[1] The following reflections incorporate later manuscripts and writings into a general account of phenomenology's stance toward this project.

## 1. An Initial View of the World

Wakeful life constantly enjoys a view of the world. Let us reflect on how this view appears prior to any critical distinction between the one true world and mere worldviews. When I look around, I am aware both of things and of my particular view of them. Under normal conditions, the particularity of my view does not speak against the reality of worldly being, but is rather my natural access to it. Those things I experience as most real are encountered in light of a "can" and a "could" that point to other possible views. The perceptual scene is shiftable in definite ways relative to the movements I can accomplish, and would appear otherwise if I were where that other person is. If I guess about how things might be from these other perspectives, I explicate latencies already inherent what I now see. My most immediate view on things unfolds in the midst of other valid views, which I presume to be realizable either directly or through communication. In the course of these realizations, I may privilege my

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[1] References to Husserl cite the Husserliana edition, as indicated by the abbreviation "HUA" followed by the volume number. Translations are my own.

present perspective above those of others, or of my own past. But my present perspective is itself defined by the conviction that it belongs to an open system of compossible perspectives. Perception, our most direct encounter with worldly realities, involves what Husserl calls horizon-consciousness. A core of real presence is framed by the realizable presence that it indicates.

As we ordinarily use it in the singular, "the world" expresses something all-encompassing. If we search our naive experience for what answers to this sense, we are thus directed away from particular realities. Every object, property, foreground, and background, every relation of indication between the experienced and the experienceable is "in" the world. On the other hand, we cannot equate the world with the totality of realities and relations because while such a totality may be hypothetically postulated, it is never experienced; everything we say to be in the world is rather encountered in an openness pointing to further realities and revisions of established realities. But finally, the world cannot simply be the spatiotemporal openness in which all realities and indications appear. It would then be incorrect to speak, as we naively do, of our seeing and touching *it* in particular perceptions. Reflecting on our naive experience of things, "the world" seems to answer to an underlying conviction that already frames our discovery of discrete realities. This is a belief in a unitary togetherness or «universe» of compossible realities[2], discoverable in an endless continuity of concordant perspectives, in which any and every thing has its place. Thinking of those living in far away places, shifting our gaze from background to foreground, ruminating on the past and future history of our surroundings, we constantly traverse spatiotemporal horizons by means of our belief in the one world onto which they open.

Because every particular appearance of the world is nested in other realizable appearances, there is always room for further world-determination. In our unceasing commitment to the one world, we automatically privilege as normal

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[2] In the late *Lebenswelt* manuscripts collected in Husserliana 39, Husserl frequently describes the world with the term «universe», often employed in the phrases «universe of determinable being» or «universe of appearances». The term is felicitous because it evokes uniqueness and cohesion. It is preferable to "whole", which can be confused with totality, as well as "context" and "background", both of which are confusable with sectors of the world. I agree with Bernet that characterizing the world as "horizon" is misleading. The world is given horizonally, as further determinable, but is itself the unique unity of realities that is so given. Bernet's own phrase, «order of things», also captures what I take to be Husserl's intent (Bernet, 2005, pp. 23–25). In any case, it bears emphasizing that world-horizons function in the direct experience of the world, and are not world-images or pictures [*Bilder*].

the determination that occurs in the harmonious overlapping or deepening of perspectives. When incompatible views emerge within individual or communal life, there is a tug to resolve them such that they are understandable in relation to the one unity of realities in which we continue to believe. Of course, some diverging views do not require resolution because they refer to familiar differences of interest or to forms of normality and abnormality that we already apprehend as typical features of the one world. Still, even cases of genuine disharmony [*Unstimmigkeit*] do not unseat the tacit belief in the one world of concordant perspectives. They are interruptions of a previous harmony and point toward its reinstatement. Further, these interruptions themselves appear as occurrences within the one world, the determination of which has become questionable only in certain details. Husserl thus describes *Unstimmigkeit* as the interruption of a harmony that remains in effect (HUA 39, p. 676). On the other hand, coherent views are restored in corrective experiences (memories, perceptions, etc.) that are necessarily relative to a particular perspective, and are thus themselves provisional (HUA 39, pp. 676–677). The world is the presumed nexus of all relative views of the world, but is experienced as such only *in* a relative view.

## 2. The Objective World and Its Subjective Appearance in *Weltanschauung*

According to Husserl's historical interpretation, the primary reaction of Western philosophy to the relativity of world experience has been objectivism. In sum, objectivism accepts world-determinations based on intuitive experience as sufficient for ordinary purposes, but seeks the truth of this world by determining it with respect to a self-identical, stable reality:

> The characteristic of objectivism is that it moves upon the ground of the world that is pregiven as obvious through experience and seeks the "objective truth" of this world, seeks what in this world is unconditionally valid for every rational being, what is in itself. (HUA 6, p. 70)

For Husserl, objectivism in this broad sense encompasses most of philosophy since Plato, including those idealist approaches that remain guided by the notion of a reality "in itself" (even if only to conclude that reality is inaccessible or an illusion). More decisive for our contemporary situation, however, is a specification of this objectivism motivated by the success of modern mathematical physics. This «physicalistic» objectivism underlies essentially new philosophi-

cal doctrines that «dominate all further developments of world-understanding up to the present» (HUA 6, p. 54).

In one sense, physicalistic objectivism is this-worldly. It seeks objective being at the heart of our naive world-experience: sensibly intuited, spatiotemporal objects. It thus borrows its impulse from the implicit ontology of common sense. In ordinary perception, value and use qualities are immediately present in things. We are also familiar, however, with the constant variation of these qualities according to interest, aptitude and attitude, both within ourselves and within communal experience. Evaluative and practical apprehensions of things and situations indicate, as a structural moment of their reference, sensible qualities belonging to bodies in connection with their surrounding environment. Although these qualities also vary according to conditions of perception and the sensibility of the perceiver, they make up a relatively stable core of world-experience to which our everyday efforts of verification have recourse (HUA 6, p. 108). Because physicalistic objectivism looks for true being in this dimension of experience, it resonates with our ordinary interest in world-determination, in contrast to those «metaphysical» theories that retrain our attention on some other ontological domain in which sensible realities participate.

On the other hand, this objectivism correlates sensible nature to *its* true being in such a way that the latter can never be directly experienced. In *Crisis* §9, Husserl carefully examines this interpretation of true nature and the historical motives that made it possible. His focal point is the mathematization of nature that occurs in Galilean science. In this mathematization, Galileo is guided by the tradition of pure geometry and its application to the sensible world. Husserl's crucial insight here is that although this continued application leads us to apprehend sensible shapes "as" geometrical entities, the latter are themselves strictly non-sensible, incapable of being perceived or imagined. It is precisely by not appearing in world-intuition that they can function as substrates for properties reconstructable as exactly identical. Through a process of «idealization» that Husserl argues has never been rightly understood, original geometrical thought posits its shapes by conceiving an infinite progression toward the actually unreachable limits of "perfect" shape-qualities, which it then treats as positive determinations exhibited in sensible models. The basic hypothesis of Galilean science is that *all* qualities and changes in sensible bodies are related in a lawful way to the extensional forms that underlie them, and are thus mathematically determinable in idealized space-time. What does

Husserl object to in this remaking of nature? It is not the method of idealization as such. Nor is it the experimental methods that discover how typical patterns in perceived nature might correlate to mathematically exact qualities and connections expressible in formulae. Nor is it the methods of measurement and prediction that treat the exact determinations as optima to which perceivable things are approximated. It is rather the interpretation of the success of these methods that attributes to them the discovery of the one true world.[3] For the physicalistic interpretation, the world is a mathematically rational totality of bodies, the lawful regularities of which are progressively discovered through the inductive methods of natural science (HUA 6, pp. 61, 66). These methods thus take on a kind of ontological prestige. Their predicative power in the sphere of possible experience is seen to stem from their going beyond possible experience to discover the world as it really is. The one world to which our experience commits us is finally determined apart from its perspectival manifestation in pre-scientific life.

As a matter of historical judgment, Husserl argues that physicalist objectivism emerges by establishing an ontological distinction between the real world of mathematically rational bodies and the mere appearances of subjectivity. What is new here in comparison with pre-modern forms of objectivism is that experience as such, in all its forms, is inserted in a reality of which it can have no direct intuition. This results, as Husserl writes in a late manuscript, in «a complete dislocation of meaning that nullifies the being-sense of the world and its realities» (HUA 39, p. 731). The open horizons of naive world-experience, in which reality is ever further determinable, are now seen to afford mere appearances, indications of what exists in-itself according to exact properties in a space-time that transcends possible experience. One may question to what extent this ontological interpretation still governs the philosophical understanding of physics and the everyday judgments of educated individuals. For Husserl, it was in any case decisive in determining the problematic for the major philosophical movements of the modern period through Kant. I would ar-

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[3] We here overlook Husserl's analysis of the increasing arithmetization, algebraization and formalization of the mathematics underlying natural science. This process encourages the objectivist interpretation by distancing physical formulae from their grounds in pure intuitions pertaining to the spatial phase of material being. The deduction of possible formulae on the basis of given formulae creates the appearance that the experimental confirmation of the former is an incidental discovery of a truth itself independent of world-experience.

gue, however, that the most important target of Husserl's critique is not the ontology of a mathematically rational in-itself behind the scenes, but the basic attitude toward world-experience from which it arises, and which is also compatible, for instance, with a pragmatic account of natural scientific truth.

This attitude is characterized by its devaluation of naive world-experience as a problem for scientific investigation. It is supported by the seemingly obvious dependence of the experientially given world on the natural world (HUA 6, p. 61). One assumes that experience happens in a human or animal, a psychophysical being in the physical world. Experience thus occurs within the nature investigated by the natural sciences. One is free to abstract from this total reality in order to study "first-personal" world-appearances, but this is precisely to refrain from considering the connections that actually obtain between experience and its physical conditions. The modern science of experience is thus from the beginning understood as a specialized inquiry overshadowed by the problem of its connection to the mathematically interpreted nature that encompasses it. Even where experience is investigated apart from its physiological ground or an analogically constructed causal nexus, the overriding attitude is that the goal of lawful explanation requires transcending world-appearances toward objectively measurable regularities pertaining to them. Husserl's basic critique of modern experimental psychology is that its scientific interest does not actually terminate in lived experience. In directing its efforts toward fixing regularities pertaining to experiences, it is content to make use of «crude concepts» (perception, other person, etc.) taken from our non-scientific talk about the world (HUA 25, p. 18). Husserl's problem is not experimentation per se, but rather that modern psychology has largely neglected the more fundamental task of grounding those concepts describing subjectively relative world-appearances in laws inherent to lived experience itself.

A similar point underlies Husserl's critique of natural-scientific inquiry in *Crisis* §34. Objective natural-scientific truths are only verifiable through experimentation that constantly makes use of world-intuitions. Scientists communicate, read instruments, etc. Husserl makes two observations here. First, these intuitions are made use of according to the meaning they have for us in naïve experience, not according to their objective-scientific interpretation. Communication between colleagues exhibits dissenting or assenting opinions. Vision of the instrument shows the reading as it itself is. Although objective science can apply its methods to these phenomena as well, it is always in their pre-scientific meaning that they function in the scientific judgments. Second,

the specific function of these pre-scientific evidences in objective-scientific judgment is that of a grounding premise. The validity of experienced worldly realities is actually the premise for every objective-scientific conclusion. The evidences of communication and normal vision, for instance, are presupposed in order to draw conclusions about the mathematical properties of physical nature. The "mere" world-appearances undergird the objective truths.

This critique is trivialized if reduced to the claim that objective science cannot tolerate a hyperbolic doubt directed at the world the objective truths *of which* it seeks to determine. If one is prepared to deny the evidence that we constantly make use of in everyday life in the world, then clearly the objective truths about this world are also falsified. If one believes in this evidence, then the truths of objective science obtain. Belief in the world of appearances as the setting of subjective life is naturally the basis for a scientific interest in determining the truths pertaining to it. But Husserl's aim is not to raise doubts about the obvious evidence that functions in objective-scientific judgment (e.g. that my colleague is now speaking his mind). It is rather to show that the orientation of objective science prevents it from developing a scientific interest in world-experience in its original modes of validity and meaning, and that it thus makes use of it naively, as simply available. The proper ground of objective science is indeed the world that appears in experience, but the objectivist impulse to go beyond this ground precludes its scientific appropriation in universally valid judgments.

## 3. My Surrounding World and the Historical Lifeworld

In our initial description, we defined the one world as the correlate of an endless concordance of realizable perspectives. We did not pay attention, however, to how this endlessness is ordinarily centered on familiar surroundings relevant to the established interests of everyday life. In this familiar world [*Umwelt*], things and others are immediately understood in terms of the typical contexts of praxis in which they are involved. Everything has a name by which it can be readily pointed out for others, and its meaning is explicable in terms of other established meanings. Against this assumed background of coherent realities, one knows how to proceed in order to resolve anomalies, and is free to focus on what is interesting or urgent. In reflection, we can recognize the *Umwelt* as an inner-worldly accomplishment of practical life, built up through the habitual direction of interest to particular things, ends and values in communi-

cation with particular others. But for everyday praxis, the possibilities of communication with remote others in remote surroundings are blankly «irrelevant» (HUA 15, p. 431). One lives toward what Husserl calls the «inner-horizon» of the *Umwelt*, which is indefinitely open, but which bears the unknown within the generally familiar (HUA 15, p. 219). In numerous writings of the 1920s and 1930s, Husserl considers how the *Umwelt* gets distinguished from the lifeworld [*Lebenswelt*], the one true world of historical intersubjectivity.

Husserl consistently privileges the encounter with the foreign as the experience in which *Umwelt* is distinguished from *Lebenswelt*. We can capture the scope of his analyses by schematizing the foreign into three *Umwelt*-horizons suppressed by the movement of everyday life into the inner-horizon: the depth, marginal, and outer horizons of the *Umwelt* (each of which is plastic and defines community at various levels). The depth horizon bears historical experience the recall of which as a past present is irrelevant to our everyday world-life. The marginal horizon bears abnormal experience that contributes to this life, but in a problematic way (child, drunken, deranged experiences, etc.). The outer horizon bears alien experience that does not directly contribute to this life because it is wrapped up in its own *Umwelt*, with its own depths, margins and outside. In everyday life, the foreign appears in a domesticated guise because the *Umwelt* can contain well-known, constantly verified facts pertaining to the depth, marginal and outer dimensions.[4] Indeed, everyday praxis often reckons with these facts *as relevant*. There was no television in the 19th century; the blind cannot see; the Iraqis live in a warzone. Such facts are familiar features of *Umwelt* reality.

Every such fact, however, refers to a foreign perspective that is itself not in the depths, margin, or outside, but is the life for which another *Umwelt* unfolds, another everydayness and urgency where things cohere according to different meanings and activities. Facts about the foreign that lie in the inner horizon of the *Umwelt* thus indicate the possibility of pursuing encounters with the foreign perspectives to which they refer. To actualize this possibility, the interests that define what is relevant in "serious" everyday life have to be temporarily set aside, a suspension requiring the combination of levity and atten-

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[4] Husserl often abstracts from the foreign in order to examine the possibility of its original discovery on the basis of a familiar world that historically or structurally precedes it. For the distinction between historical and structural precedence, and the parallel in the latter case between the home/alien problematic and the analysis of empathy in the Cartesian Meditations, see Held, 2005, pp. 39–40.

tion characteristic of curiosity. The encounter with foreign perspectives occurs in empathetic experiences that cannot be harmoniously fulfilled because they intend persons as subjects of a foreign surrounding world that is *valid* in its *own* interwoven meanings (HUA 15, p. 433). Since this foreign validity is emptily intended, one enters a situation where one does not know how to proceed in order to resolve *Unstimmigkeit*. Empathy, through which I intend the other as such, thus opens into a hermeneutics of understanding at a distance.[5] But this distance is necessarily also a connection by which the possibilities of the remote world reach into our own, the very obviousness of which now becomes strange. This movement can be a momentary flight of fancy, but it can also spur a disciplined inquiry aimed at critical historical-cultural understanding of our serious everyday life.

Everyone knows that our *Umwelt* is one among others. But the critical historical attitude stays close to the realization pointed to by this triviality: what we ordinarily take for the one world is merely a coherent context for a tradition of practical life. Our *Umwelt* as such, with exactly these depths, margins and outsides, emerges in its contingent particularity and can be evaluated as a historical product. In this awakening, Husserl sees an original discovery of «history» or «culture» as related to a particular community (HUA 15, p. 216). By stepping back from the *Umwelt* into historical connections and contrasts that normally go unnoticed, critical understanding brings worldviews in the customary sense to explicit awareness. Our ways of making sense of things on the basis of everyday experience are revealed in their utility and narrowness, as products of our belonging to traditions of practical life (HUA 25, p. 50). Even in going beyond "mere worldviews", this attitude remains cognizant of a universal historical relativity, and interprets its world-knowledge as the expression of broadened *Umwelt* horizons, not as their transcendence (HUA 25, p. 52). After all, the exploration of depths, margins and outsides has an inalienable starting point in the everyday life of our *Umwelt*. The one *Lebenswelt* shines through in the estrangement that reveals this life as a contingent but unshakable perspective on the whole of historical experience. But it cannot be directly grasped in terms of the native conceptualities from which we inevitably begin.

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[5] Steinbock's study strongly emphasizes the «transgression» that reveals the inaccessibility of the alien and the non-reciprocal hermeneutics that follow from it. Steinbock (1995, pp. 257-270) eventually likens phenomenology itself to such a hermeneutic. The final section of this article should indicate our disagreement with such a characterization.

It is instead intended as the *telos* of an infinite inquiry that would discover ever more encompassing continuities and contrasts in which our local realities have their true place.

In his 1911 *Logos* essay, Husserl argues, with reference to Dilthey, that this formation of historical consciousness becomes a motive for historicism, a relativist position that, if consistent, restricts the validity of all knowledge to the historical-cultural worldview in which it functions. Perhaps Husserl's best known position on the topic of *Weltanschauung* is his demonstration of the absurdities involved in inferring the impossibility of universal world-knowledge from the fact of historically relative worldviews. It is equally important to note, however, that Husserl acknowledges the historical relativity of world-knowledge as a fact. Indeed, this fact is rooted in the nature of worldly reality itself. Husserl writes in a late manuscript that truths asserted about worldly realities are «final» only relative to governing interests or factual constraints; they are never final in themselves (HUA 39, p. 707). And correlatively: «the world of being is nothing outside of this relativity» (HUA 39, p. 726). If we abstain from objectivist constructions and justify knowledge claims solely with reference to the *Lebenswelt*, the world we intuitively experience, it seems that the assertion of universal truth is necessarily the premature closure of an infinite process of historical discovery. However basic the features proposed as universal to the *Lebenswelt*, such as space, time, subjects and objects, it is impossible to accord any definite content to these conceptions beyond an *Umwelt* in which their meaning is relative to a particular tradition of practical life.[6] Identifying common ground within the world of experience is legitimate as a practical goal for cross-traditional understanding, not as a theoretical goal for universal science.[7] The interest in the one true world that arises from the historical attitude has immense critical power. It even seems to dissolve physicalist objectivism into an interpretive episode in the vast plot of human history. But it, no less than the Galilean orientation, points away from a philosophically rigorous world science.

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[6] Carr (1987) implies that phenomenological world-science aims at a «neutral» world lying «underneath» the various conceptual schemes that passively inform our world-experience (pp. 215–219). We will argue that this is not the case.

[7] In the *Crisis*, Husserl argues that the effort to identify this ground is already «on the way» to objective science (HUA 6, p. 139). One surpasses relativities by positing universally identifiable qualities, devising ways of measuring them, etc. This project is consummated only through objectifying measurements that take non-experiencable qualities as optima.

4. The Lifeworld Taken for Granted and Seen in the "How" of its Relativity

The world that embraces objective science is subjective-relative through and through. Critical historical understanding achieves clarity within this relativity by making us aware of our place within the vast reaches of possible experience. Husserl himself acknowledges this relativity as a fact, and employs critical historical analysis in order to grasp the scientific situation of our time. And yet, he sees these critical analyses as preliminary to a science composed of universal insights into the essence of the *Lebenswelt* as such. If this science does not penetrate the depth, marginal, and outside horizons of our world, and if it is not the notorious "view from nowhere", then where do its reflections occur, and what do they reflect upon?

In the *Crisis*, Husserl presents this science as concerned with worldly realities in their very subjective relativity. It is the structures of this relativity itself that will become the subject-matter for universally valid judgments (HUA 6, p. 142). Ordinarily, our relative views are our natural access to worldly realities. Our interest is in determining things on the basis of our views. When we reflect on these views, it is in order to decide what they are views of. Husserl introduces the phenomenological reduction by shifting our attention away from objects onto the inherently relative ways in which they are given in experience. The target of reflection is no longer, for instance, the perceived object, but rather the sides or aspects that actually appear and that, in the anticipated continuation of their harmonious unfolding, exhibit one self-same object. In shifting attention from various kinds of objects and validity-modes to the "how" of their appearance, one becomes attuned to the ever-presence of an intentionality that animates presenting appearances with a sense that unifies them, namely the object that appears as it appears in *its* unfolding aspects. Presenting appearances thus bear an objective sense that betrays a subjective life of meaning. The primary insight into the essence of the lifeworld is not that it contains this or that sort of reality, but that all of its realities lie in intentional experiences that synthesize manifold appearances. Though Husserl recognizes an ontological task in the eidetic description of lifeworld entities, this task is a mere guide for the reflection on the structures of intentional life in which all such

entities exist. This latter reflection reveals the essence of the lifeworld as such, and is identical with phenomenology.[8]

We have said that the subject-relativity of worldly being is a fact. As a fact, it is established in certain world-directed experiences in which relativities are revealed: spatial perception, memory, empathy, imagination, etc. When we live through and reflect upon these experiences we ordinarily take them to be events in the world. But phenomenological reflection holds fast to the realization that it is *in* these experiences that the world is originally there in its native relativity. This is the case not only for encounters at the fringes of the *Umwelt*. It is already the case for the perception in which I see this ordinary thing from my particular perspective, for the empathetic apprehension of this body as belonging to a person with her own view, for the memory in which the past present appears as such. In their original functioning, these experiencing are not facts in the world, but are the transcendental life through which the world counts as being there in its subject-relative modes of validity (*qua* far off, for the others, past, etc.). Experience is originally a movement of world-showing or discovering. If we completely shut down our interest in world-determination, we cease reflecting on experiences as events in an already discovered world, and are free to reflect on them in their world-discovering function. There is thus a stark difference between synthetically identifying lifeworld realities by researching the relative views of various traditions, and reflecting on the structure of the experiences in which these views are originally given *as relative* to time, place, community, etc. The depth, marginal, and outer horizons, in which the discovery and synthesis of relativity occurs, require a transcendental clarification of their possibility. In the phenomenological science of the *Lebenswelt*, theoretical interest does not curiously traverse world-horizons, but reflects on the experiencing in which they are first of all given as traversable.

It is this naive life of world-showing that methods of essential insight will attempt to articulate into «an immense system of novel and highly astounding a priori truths» (HUA 6, p. 169). These truths are ramified with respect to categories and modes of entities, but first of all in terms of the general divisions pertaining to experiencing as such. Husserl describes these integral moments

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[8] Landgrebe (1968, p. 156) states the situation clearly: «The philosophical fundamental science of the lifeworld is thus nothing other than the carried out transcendental phenomenology itself, with its task of discerning the world-constituting accomplishments of transcendental subjectivity...».

of intentional life according to the threefold Cartesian model of *cogitatum-cogito-ego*: the objectivity as intended, the subjective appearances in which it is intended, and the subject that performs the intention. Husserl's presentation of this threefold in the *Crisis* explicitly reverses the order of discovery he employed in *Ideas I*, where the ego of intentional life is discovered prior to the reflection on *cogitata qua cogitata*. In the *Crisis*, Husserl begins with the correlation between that which appears and the subjective appearances in which it appears, only then discovering the intentional life latent in this correlation and finally the ego to which it refers. But this new approach is a pedagogical strategy for avoiding basic misunderstandings of phenomenological doctrine, not a new doctrine. The problem with the old approach, Husserl says, is that it presents the ego of intentional life as «apparently empty of content», such that it is hard to see how phenomenological subject-matter is crucial to the aims of universal science (HUA 6, p. 158). By moving backwards from worldly realities, one is constantly aware that the reduction is the way of access to «the absolute sphere of being in which they ultimately and truly are» (HUA 6, p. 193). The reduction is the method that lets the true world appear to reflection.

Still, even if I first discover the transcendental ego as the source and bearer of worldly validities, I am nevertheless free to question the status of its intentional life vis-à-vis the world it discloses. One can see Husserl's infamous *Weltvernichtung* in §49 of *Ideas I* as an attempt to answer this question. While Husserl does not repeat this exercise in the *Crisis*, it is perhaps the most forceful way to illustrate phenomenology's comprehensive view of the lifeworld beyond its stepwise illumination of world-intuitions. Husserl argues that reflection on the nature of intentional life shows that it does not essentially depend upon the world of appearances, and correlatively, that I cannot derive an appearing world from the essence of this life as such (HUA 3, pp. 103–104).[9] In short, a life of consciousness is conceivable in the absence of a world. In the context of the critical-historical aims of the *Crisis*, this reflection decisively distinguishes phenomenology's worldview not only from the objectivist construction of a world beyond experience, but also from Kantian-style approaches for which the world of experience is a formation of «concealed transcendental functions» that operate «with unwavering necessity» (HUA 6, p.

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[9] Husserl's *Weltvernichtung* stays within the framework of intentionality, indeed of intuition. For a brief treatment true to this point, see Sokolowski, 1974, pp. 196–197. For a dissenting view, see Bernet, 2005, pp. 21–23.

120). The intentional nature of consciousness does not rule out the pure possibility of an experiencing for which appearances do not cohere into an order of realities, a world. The discovering transposition of the world into a phenomenon for my transcendental life thus includes the realization that this life, according to what makes it essentially life and what makes it essentially mine, neither requires nor necessitates the world it displays.

What does this imply for the possibility of rigorous philosophical world-science? The world has no conditions of possibility beyond the flow of transcendental life in which it concretely appears. This life is the only proper object for a science aiming at the ultimate grounds of worldly being. Philosophically rigorous world-science cannot secure the being of the one world that our experience continuously motivates us to presuppose. It rather discovers the truth of this world by explicating the structures in which it appears as a contingent revelation to conscious life. This contingent revelation is appreciated as such in the attitude of wonder. Husserl's much-maligned *Weltvernichtung* has the virtue of making clear that every essential necessity about regions of worldly-being is an articulation of the essential contingency of the world itself. For phenomenology, the primary deficiency of all "mere worldviews" is not their narrowness compared to the open horizons of history, nor their naïveté compared to the experimental findings of objective science, but rather their insensitivity to the wonder of the pre-given world, which they take for granted in pursuit of more interesting or relevant problems. But what problem is more interesting or relevant than our original contact with the world, the myriad forms of which we sum up with the expression "life"? Phenomenological interest treats each episode of world-disclosing life as an event that requires understanding and faithful expression if I am to know what the world truly is.

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# Heidegger and the *Weltbild*

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ABSTRACT

I give an account of Heidegger's transformation of his early concept of the "world" in *Being and Time* into the conception of the *Weltbild*, of the world as a picture, in *The Age of the World Picture*. Such concepts as "subject", "object" and "Vorstellung", which in *Being and Time* are regarded as mistakenly applied to the world and our relationship to it, are, in the later work, regarded as correctly applicable to the modern world. In particular I consider the connection between Heidegger's religious beliefs and his view of the modern world. I raise the objection that Heidegger's account of the modern world is self-refuting, in that, if his account were accurate, he would be unable to give that account. I conclude by suggesting that neither the encapsulation of the world in a picture nor Heidegger's conception of it is as novel as he supposes.

The concept of the world is central to the major work, *Being and Time*, that Heidegger published in 1927.[1] *Dasein*, or man, is essentially "in-the-world". Conversely, there would be no world if there were no *Dasein*. For the world, in Heidegger's usage, is not simply «all the things there are» or «beings as a whole»; it essentially involves the «significance» conferred on things by *Dasein*'s presence in it. The world radiates out from the familiar *Umwelt*, our "environment" or the "world around" us. Things are knit together to form a unified world by significance: the tools we use refer to other tools, and together they form a workplace, which in turn refers to the wider world beyond the workplace. The craftsman's hammer refers to his nails, to wood and leather, and the bench on which he works; beyond the workplace are his customers, the

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[1] Heidegger, 1962. My page references are to the pagination of the first German edition, which are printed in the margins of the translation. I abbreviate the title as BT.

cows that supply the leather, the forest that supplies the wood, and so on in indefinitely expanding circles of decreasing familiarity. *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world involves familiarity with the world, knowing one's way around in it (BT, p. 80). But neither individually nor collectively does *Dasein* know everything about the world or have the world in its control. *Dasein* is "historical". Among other things, we have an awareness of the history of our world before we entered it and of its persistence after we have departed from it. But there is no clear indication that the world changes radically over the course of its history. The world that *Being and Time* describes seems to be the sort of world that *Dasein* inhabits at all times and all places.

On the whole, the book does not suggest that this world is seriously defective. We are, however, prone to make certain mistakes in our account of the world and of our place in it. For example, philosophers, and not only philosophers, often assume that our relationship to the world is that of a «subject» in relation to an «object» and that this relation consists in the subject's having a *Vorstellung*, a «representation» or idea of the object that reflects it more or less accurately. Heidegger rejects the subject-object model for several reasons: it ignores our being-in-the world that is a precondition of our encounters with objects or beings as such; it implies that the subject and the object have the same mode of being, that they are both «present-at-hand» [*vorhanden*]; it «thematises» entities, makes them conspicuous, neglecting what we see out of the corner of our eye, what we are vaguely, unobtrusively aware of (BT, p. 363); it suggests that our primary mode of access to things is cognition or theoretical knowledge; it implies that the subject is like a snail in its shell (XX, pp. 223f)[2], separated from the object by a gulf that can only be surmounted by a representation; and it suggests that a person is primarily an I or ego, detached from the body, the world and from others, and aware of itself by reflection on the I, when in fact *Dasein* is primarily aware of itself in what it deals with (BT, p. 119; XXIV, p. 227). Heidegger similarly disputes the role that philosophers have assigned to «representations». The assumption, made by Descartes, Kant and Brentano, that every judgment and emotion is based on a representation, involves an unwarranted theoretical bias. I do not fear something because of a prior representation of a threat; rather, I perceive a threat only because I fear it (BT, p. 139; XX, p. 396). Fundamental moods such as anxiety and boredom

[2] Roman numerals refer to the volumes of Klostermann's *Gesamtausgabe* of Heidegger's works.

do not have an object that might be represented. We do represent things, but this does not entail that what we primarily perceive, remember, etc. is a representation. *Vorstellen* is «letting something be seen» [*Sehen-lassen von etwas*], not something that is itself seen, like a picture (XX, p. 45). Seeing a picture, and seeing something in a picture, are quite different from seeing things in the flesh. Seeing does not involve a mental picture: «Nothing of that sort is to be found; in the simple sense of perception I see the house itself» (XX, p. 56).

In the 1930s Heidegger modified, or at least developed, his account of the world. Whereas *Being and Time* portrayed the human condition as relatively unchanging, he now believes that the world changes radically over time. The world of the ancient Greeks was quite different from the medieval world and this in turn was different from the modern world. The changes, he believes, are brought about by «metaphysics», by our fundamental view of the nature of beings. Metaphysics is concerned with beings as such, not only with our parochial environment, and so he now becomes less inclined to characterise the world in terms of human needs and practices and more inclined to speak of it as «beings as a whole» (*das Seiende im Ganzen* – an expression that occurs only once in *Being and Time* – p. 248 – and in a derogatory sense). He regards the history of such changes as the «history of being» [*Seinsgeschichte*]. In the *Question Concerning Technology* (1949)[3] Heidegger assigns the first appearance of the concept of *Seinsgeschichte* to his *On the Essence of Truth*, delivered in 1930 and published in 1943, when he wrote:

> [The] ek-sistence of historical man begins at the moment when the first thinker takes a questioning stance towards the unhiddenness of beings by asking what beings are. [...] History first begins when beings themselves are specifically promoted to unhiddenness and maintained in it, when this maintenance is conceived in terms of questioning about beings as such. The initial unconcealing of beings as a whole, the question about beings as such, and the beginning of western history are the same [...] Man ek-sists - this now means: the history of the essential possibilities of a historical mankind is maintained for it in the unconcealing of beings as a whole. The rare and simple decisions of history spring from the way the original essence of truth essences. (Heidegger, 1978b, p. 188; 1993b, p. 127).

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[3]See Heidegger, 1954, p. 28 and Heidegger, 1977b, p. 24.

The concept of *Existenz* referred in *Being and Time* to man's or *Dasein*'s stance towards the world in which he is, but now it refers to the establishment and maintenance of such a world. In the 1930s, when Heidegger began to use the expression *Geschichte des Seins* (Heidegger, 1987[5], p. 70; 1961b, p. 77), he insists that the history of being is not initiated or promoted primarily by men, but by being itself. Metaphysics or philosophy plays a dominant part in the history of being. But metaphysics springs from the history of being, not from human choices. A thinker is «one of those individuals who have no choice, who must give expression to what beings *are* at any given stage in the history of their being».[4] *Seinsgeschichte* is thus associated with *Geschick* (fate, destiny), but for Heidegger «a sending, what is sent», owing to its affinity to *schicken* (to send). For example, the medieval distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* reaches us from a *Seinsgeschick*, from «being's fateful sending» (Heidegger, 1978a, pp. 326, 332f; 1993a, pp. 232, 238f). Heidegger's *Seinsgeschichte* differs from Hegel's history of «spirit» (1978a, p. 332; 1993a, pp. 238f), since there is no law by which being progresses, no «dialectical» change of one category into another (LXV, p. 135). The major turning-points in the history of being are «providentially sent» and opaque to us, not intelligible consequences of what went before. Nor is there any sense in which one large historical stage represents an improvement on its predecessors. Science, for example, makes progress no more than art does:

> we cannot say that Galileo's doctrine of the free fall of bodies is true and Aristotle's doctrine that light bodies strive upwards is false; the Greek conception of the essence of body and place and their relationship rests on a different interpretation of beings and thus engenders a correspondingly different way of viewing and examining natural processes – no more than we can say that Shakespeare's poetry is better than Aeschylus's. (Heidegger, 1950, p. 71; 1977a, p. 117)

Nevertheless, Heidegger, like Hegel, believes that philosophical thoughts are the mainspring of history and that, since such thoughts form and transform human beings, they must be the product not of ordinary human thought and activity, but of a large impersonal force such as being or spirit. He still adheres to the view he expressed in *Being and Time*, that being is «projected» (NH, II,

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[4] Heidegger, 1961a (cited hereafter as NH), II, p. 37, and Heidegger, 1981–1987 (cited hereafter as ET), IV (*Nihilism*), p. 7.

p. 235; ET, II (*The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*), p. 178; LXV, p. 231). The project is thrown and the projecter is thrown in the project. But the pro- jecter is not a definite, historically situated individual, choosing his project from a pre-existing menu. He only becomes an individual capable of choice in virtue of his project. The project is thus governed by being itself.

The history of being involves various «epochs», *Epoche(n)*. Heidegger re- lates the term to the Greek *epoche*, "restraint". Throughout the history of metaphysics being «keeps to itself, restrains itself», and «from the particular distance of its withdrawal» – a distance which varies over time – it determines «a particular epoch of the history of being» (NH, II, p. 383; ET, IV, p. 238). *Epoche* comes from *epechein*, "to hold on, stop, etc."; a historical "epoch" begins when ordinary time-reckoning "stops" – at a point that Heidegger calls an *Augenblick*, "moment (of vision)". Being has a history because it withdraws from us and provides only partial and occasional glimpses of itself:

> All events in the history of being, which is metaphysics, have their beginning and ground in the fact that metaphysics leaves the essence of being undecided and must do so, since from the start metaphysics remains preoccupied with the salvation of its own essence and indifferent to an appreciation of the question- worthy. (NH, II, p. 459; Heidegger, 1973, p. 56).[5]

Metaphysics focuses on beings; it does not explore the full abundance of being, or reduce it to a single aspect of itself, extruding everything else from it. So being can unfold its essence through the ages, revealing hidden aspects. Being is like a rich text. If a commentator were to destroy the text, leaving only his interpretation, interpretation of the original text would cease. But if the origi- nal remains along with its interpretation, interpretation can continue, succes- sively revealing different aspects of the text.

In his essay *The Age of the World Picture*, Heidegger mentions three such epochs: the ancient Greek, the medieval and the modern. In the usual sense of the term "world-picture", he would say that each of these epochs is marked by a distinct world-picture. The word *Weltbild* is composed of *Welt*, "world", and *Bild*, "picture", and is naturally and commonly taken to mean a «picture *of* the world». A world-picture in this sense is distinct from a *Weltanschauung*. This word is similarly formed from *Welt*, "world", and *Anschauung*, "view, etc.", and means "view of, outlook on, the world". A *Weltbild* is usually associated

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[5] Cf. Heidegger, 1957, p. 64, and Heidegger, 1969, p. 66.

with science or a science ("the mechanistic world-picture", "the physicist's world-picture", etc.), while a *Weltanschauung* can be prescientific as well as scientific. A *Weltbild* is usually a theoretical view of the external world, while a *Weltanschauung* is essentially a "view of life", a view of our position in the world and how we should act (cf. Heidegger, 1950, p. 86; 1977a, pp. 133f). Adherents of the same *Weltbild* may hold different world-views, and enter into conflict, employing the weapons supplied by their common *Weltbild* (Heidegger, 1950, p. 87; 1977a, pp. 134f). Communists, fascists and liberals, for example, have different world-views, but according to Heidegger they share the same world-picture. A *Weltbild* is only one constituent of a *Weltanschauung*. In lectures delivered in the winter of 1928–9, he said: «According to [Dilthey's] characterization we thus have three features in the structure of the *Weltanschauung*: life-experience, *Weltbild*, and, arising from the relation of these, an ideal of life» (XXVII, p. 236).

The modern *Weltbild* underlies several phenomena that differentiate it from its ancient and medieval predecessors: science, especially mathematical science, with its «ongoing activity» [*Betrieb*], its rigour, its specialisation, and its institutes; machine technology; the reduction of art to an object of «experience» [*Erlebens*]; the conception of human activity as «culture» and as the realisation of «values», the concern of a «cultural policy»; a godlessness that coexists with the «modernization» of the «Christian *Weltanschauung*» and with intense «religious experience» (Heidegger, 1950, pp. 69f; 1977a, pp. 115f). Underlying all this, even natural science, is the very idea of a *Weltbild*. At first sight it means a "picture of the world", where the picture is not coextensive with the world. But if we read it in the light of such expressions as "being in the picture", "putting oneself in the picture", "getting the picture" – which, like their German equivalents, imply a complete mastery of what the picture is a picture of – we see that

> world-picture essentially means not a picture of the world, but the world conceived as picture. Beings as a whole are now taken in such a way that they are in being first and only insofar as they are presented [*gestellt*] by man the representer and producer [*vorstellend-herstellenden Mensch*]. The emergence of the Weltbild involves an essential decision about beings as a whole. The being of beings is sought and found in the representedness of beings. (Heidegger, 1950, pp. 82f; 1977a, pp. 129f).

So, for Heidegger *Weltbild* is distinctively modern. There is no medieval *Weltbild*: men are assigned their place by God in his created order. There is no

Greek *Weltbild*: man is at the beck and call of being. There is no ancient or medieval «system», an essential requirement for the reduction of the world to a picture (Heidegger, 1950, pp. 93f; 1977a, pp. 141f). Ancient and medieval man was not a «subject»: «The world's becoming a picture is one and the same process as man's becoming a *subjectum* among beings» (Heidegger, 1950, p. 85; 1977a, p. 132). Hence humanism arises at the same time as the *Weltbild*, a «philosophical interpretation of man that explains and assesses beings as a whole in terms of man and with a view to man» (Heidegger, 1950, p. 86; 1977a, p. 133).

Since man is "in the picture", is the central focus of the world as picture, *Weltanschauung*, which concerns man's position in the world, goes together with *Weltbild*: «As soon as the world becomes a picture, the position of man is conceived as *Weltanschauung*» (Heidegger, 1950, p. 86; 1977a, pp. 133f). *Stellung*, "position", comes from *stellen*, "to position, set up, stand" – which also forms *vorstellen*, "to represent". It can mean a military "position", a physical "posture" in relation to one's surroundings, or one's "position, attitude" towards a person, question, etc. Man's present «position in the midst of beings» not only differs from that of ancient and medieval man: «Now for the first time is there anything like a position of man at all» (Heidegger, 1950, p. 84; 1977a, p. 132). For just as modern man decides about the contents of the world as picture and their arrangement, so he decides what his own position in it is to be; he positions himself, takes up a position, in way that no previous type of man has done. Our age is "new" or "modern" not only because it differs from previous ages, but because «to be new belongs to the world that has become a picture» (Heidegger, 1950, p. 85; 1977a, p. 132). The whole picture and our position in it is within our control, so we can start from scratch and remake everything anew.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argued that certain concepts – notably those of a subject, an object and representation – were misapplied by philosophers so as to distort our conception of ourselves, of the world and of our relationship to it. Now Heidegger applies these concepts to the world itself, believing that they accurately capture the nature of the modern world. Modern man is not simply mistakenly regarded as a subject. He is a subject, and to that extent he is not Dasein (NH, II, p. 25f; ET, III (*The Will to Power as Knowledge and*

*Metaphysics*), pp. 179f).[6] This «subjectivity» is descended from Descartes's quest for an «absolute and unshakeable foundation» (NH, II, pp. 429ff; Heidegger, 1973, pp. 26ff), but it has gone beyond cartesian confines. The subject is no longer an individualised I, it is embodied man, even collective man. It is no longer restrained by a barrier; its dominance of producible and manipulable objects is unrestrained (NH, II, p. 25f; ET, III, p. 179f; NH, II, p. 171; ET, IV, p. 121; Heidegger, 1950, pp. 85f; 1977a, p. 133). It is no longer a sheer mistake to describe the world as consisting of objects. Objects are represented [*vorgestellt*], but this no longer means that man has a mental picture of them; it now means that man places [*stellt*] them before [*vor*] himself, that it is man who decides whether and what they are. Everything is an object for this subject: there are no unexplored areas or aspects of the world beyond man's theoretical and practical reach. Subjectivity, and the «objectivisation» [*Objektivierung, Vergegenstandlichung*] it involves, may go so far that «subjects» disappear in favour of a comprehensive utilizability (NH, II, p. 26; ET, III, p. 180), and humanity becomes a «human resource» [*Menschenmaterial*], to be managed and exploited like any other material (NH, II, p. 387; ET, IV, pp. 241f).

There remains, however, an «invisible shadow that is cast over all things, when man has become the subjectum and the world a picture». To manage the world as picture we need to think in terms of quantity and measurement, the "calculable". «Each historical age [...] has its own particular concept of greatness», and our concept of it is purely quantitative, the «gigantic» – not only gigantic monuments, but the traversal of vast distances at immense velocities, etc. The difference between one concept of greatness and another is not, however, a quantitative, but a qualitative difference. Hence the «gigantism of planning and calculating [*Berechnung*] [...] veers round into a quality of its own» and then it becomes incalculable (Heidegger, 1950, p. 88; 1977a, p. 135[7]). Just as the essence of technology is not itself technological, so the essence of calculation and the calculable is not accessible to calculation. We should not retreat into tradition and reject the *Weltbild*, but think it through in an uncalculating way.

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[6] Cf. LXV, p. 90.
[7] Cf. LXV, pp. 441ff.

Heideggers's picture analogy deserves more attention than he gives to it. There are two relevant senses of "in the picture". In one sense, which we might call the "literal sense", something is in a/the picture if it is portrayed or depicted in a/the visual representation, that is, a drawing, a painting or a photograph. Anything might be in a picture in this sense: a rock, a tree, an animal or a human being. But such a picture does not contain *everything*. It depicts a selected segment of the world, not the whole world. Moreover, while the author of the picture and the spectator might appear in the picture, they are not *exclusively* in the picture, but also exist outside the picture. If the author of such a picture –the drawer, painter, or photographer – is sufficiently skilful, she/he has control over the picture and considerable awareness of its form and contents. In another sense, a "colloquial" or "figurative" sense, a picture is a state of affairs or situation, and to be "in the picture" is to be fully aware of such a state of affairs or situation. Similarly, to "get the picture" is to become aware of certain circumstances or facts. Only a human being, or possibly an intelligent creature of some other species, can be in, or get, the picture in this sense. On the other hand, the picture that one is in, or gets, might include almost anything, though the idiom is more commonly used with regard to human affairs. But again the picture that one is in, or gets, does not include *everything*, the whole world, but only a segment of the world. Most of the world lies outside the picture in this sense, as well as in the literal sense. Although someone who is in or gets the picture in the figurative sense is aware of the picture, he or she need not be in control of the picture in the way that an artist or photographer is. A jilted lover may well get the picture, but be unable to do anything to remedy it. Heidegger's handling of this material has two distinctive features. First, he combines elements from both senses of "picture". If the world is a picture, it is not a picture *of* something. (Heidegger does not suggest that it is a picture of *being*. At least it could not be conceived as a picture of being by its adherents.) So it is a picture in the figurative sense, the world conceived as a state of affairs. And it is a picture that we are in, in the sense that we are supposed to be fully aware of it. But it is also a picture that is in our control, and this is a feature derived from the literal sense: the artist is in control in a way that the person who gets the picture may not be.

Secondly, the world-picture is a picture of the world, of beings as a whole, not simply of a segment of the world. But does it include *everything*? In particular, does it include human beings themselves? Heidegger does not give an unequivocal answer to this question. On the one hand, human beings are be-

ings and should therefore be included among beings as a whole. On the other hand, a literal picture does not include its maker or its spectators in such a way as to eliminate their existence outside the picture. Again, Heidegger distinguishes sharply between subjects and objects; human beings are subjects, not objects. The complete objectification of human beings, the elimination of subjects and their transformation into utilizable human resources is mentioned as a future prospect, not as an essential feature of the modern world-picture.

Heidegger's implicit answer is that the modern world-picture involves the doctrine that "Man makes himself" – a doctrine espoused by, among others, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Existentialism and Humanism*, and by the Marxist archaeologist V. Gordon Childe in *Man Makes Himself* (Sartre, 1946; Childe, 1936). «Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. [...] man is nothing other than what he makes of himself», Sartre wrote.[8] Expressions of the doctrine are conveniently ambiguous. They might mean either that each man individually makes himself or that mankind collectively makes itself. Sartre no doubt intended it in the former sense, while Childe meant it in the latter (and more plausible) sense. But for Heidegger this makes little difference. Man, whether collectively or individually, is placed at the centre of things. In effect, man replaces God. On the traditional view, God makes (or causes) himself, or at least he is not made or caused by anything else. God creates the world as a whole and has complete knowledge of it and complete control over its contents. For God therefore the world is somewhat like a picture and God is both its omnipotent creator and its omniscient spectator. But now man has assumed this role. Sartre and Childe were straightforward atheists. Heidegger was neither a straightforward atheist nor a straightforward theist. He did not believe in God as traditionally conceived, as an omnipotent and omniscient creator. Being is not God, he insists, because, unlike God as traditionally conceived by e.g. Thomas Aquinas, being is not *a* being or entity. But to say this does not amount to atheism: «better to swallow the cheap accusation of atheism, which in any case, if intended ontically, is fully justified. But is not the supposed ontical faith in God at bottom godlessness?» (XXVI, p. 211, n.3) and: «What looks, and must look, to the ordinary understanding like "atheism" is at bottom the opposite» (NH, I, p. 471; NH, II, pp.

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[8] Sartre, 1946, p. 29: «Cela signifie que l'homme existe d'abord, se rencontre, surgit dans le monde, et qu'il se définit après. [...] l'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il se fait».

207f). Belief in God or gods, Heidegger claims, stems from the understanding of being that *Dasein* requires in order to be-in-the-world, to "transcend" to the world or to beings as a whole (XXVI, p. 211, n. 3), and he often speaks of God and gods in writings from the same period as *The Age of the World Picture*. Heidegger's view is this: In order to be properly human, we need God or gods, since they serve as our life-line to being. But they are not being itself, nor are they Aquinas's "God". They are historically variable manifestations of being. Greek antiquity and medieval Europe had their gods, but in the age of the world-picture gods have been supplanted by man. The Greek gods died with the Greek city-state, though poets and scholars intermittently revive them. The Christian God is now dead or dying, killed off by, and partly responsible for, the metaphysics and technology that threaten humanity's survival. To survive this danger we shall, like every preceding age, need a new god or gods – the number is yet to be decided (LXV, p. 437) –, the last god, quite different from the gods of the past, especially the Christian god (LXV, p. 403; cf. also XXXIX, pp. 93ff). The last god is the «truth of being», not being itself (LXV, p. 35).[9]

   The claim that Heidegger sees no order of merit between different epochs therefore needs qualification. Whatever may be the case about the relative merits of Aristotelian physics and Galilean physics, the modern age is, in Heidegger's eyes, inferior to its predecessors in that it has severed the life-line to being that they retained. Neither being nor the gods can be accommodated in the world as picture. They cannot be completely known and controlled by man and are therefore excluded from the world as picture. But being, and the need for gods, are constants, not relative to any particular epochs. An epoch that excludes them is therefore deficient in comparison to those that accommodate them. Heidegger then faces a problem concerning the status of his own thought and discourse. If our access to being and the gods has been closed off and if the world as a whole has been firmly clamped into a manageable picture, how is it that Heidegger himself is able to glimpse being and the gods, to discern what is missing from the picture or, indeed, to see that it is a picture at all? It may well be the case that, as Heidegger says, adequate thought *about* the world-picture cannot be conducted in the "calculating" terms allowed by the

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[9] This is presumably what Heidegger had in mind when he said «Only a god can save us» [*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*] in an interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1966, but published after his death in *Der Spiegel* 30 (May 1976).

world-picture itself. But this would only mean that if the world has been transformed into a picture without remainder, then the occupants of the picture cannot adequately think about the picture and their position in it. Heidegger might respond that the encapsulation of the world into a picture is not yet complete, that subjects have not yet been transformed into utilizable objects, and that he himself has even avoided becoming a "subject" by steering clear of Berlin and remaining in Freiberg, one of the remaining pockets of refuge that have escaped incorporation in the world-picture. But that still leaves another problem. Heidegger does not simply claim to have a hazy vision of something – being and the gods – that philosophers in earlier ages saw more clearly. He lays claim to a better understanding of being than any of his predecessors, except possibly such pre-socratic thinkers as Parmenides and Heraclitus. How can this be so, if the modern world is as blinkered as he describes it? Within Heidegger's own terms we might say that the modern world-picture (or "globalization") has a flattening effect similar to that induced by the moods of anxiety and boredom, which Heidegger regarded as a stimulus to, perhaps even a necessary condition of, philosophical thought. We can also say that even if Heidegger is right about the general characteristics of the modern age, it still leaves unincorporated pockets from within which one can range in imagination over other times and places, for example, benefitting not only from the modern historical researches that Heidegger disparages, but from earlier histories that are still reprinted and which compare favourably with Heidegger's own rather skimpy excursions into history. We might learn from Hegel, for example, that the world has been a picture before and that the picture eventually shattered:

> Napoleon, in a conversation which he once had with Goethe on the nature of tragedy, expressed the opinion that its modern phase differed from the ancient, through our no longer recognizing a destiny to which men are absolutely subject, and that politics occupies the place of ancient fate [*La politique est la fatalité*]. This therefore he thought must be used as the modern form of destiny in tragedy – the irresistible power of circumstances to which individuality must bend. Such a power is the Roman world, chosen for the very purpose of casting the ethical individuals into bonds, as also of collecting all deities and all spirits into the pantheon of world dominion, in order to make out of them an abstract universality. [...] Through its being the aim of the state that individuals in their ethical life should be sacrificed to it, the world is sunk in melancholy: its heart is broken, and it is all over with the natural side of spirit, which has sunk into a

feeling of unhappiness. Yet only from this feeling could arise the supersensuous, the free spirit in Christianity.[10]

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[10] Quoted, with modifications, from Hegel, 1956, p. 278.

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# Human Being, World, and Philosophy in Karl Jaspers

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ABSTRACT

According to which ideas does the human being manage her/his relationship with the world in which s/he lives? Is this relationship shaped by psychic invariable structures influencing the interaction between the subject and the objective reality? What is the existential role of knowledge and what is the connection of the philosophy with the individual's life? These are only some of the questions characterizing the philosophical thought of Karl Jaspers. Focusing on ideas like *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung* the paper highlights both the way Jaspers answered those questions and the originality of his philosophical approach in the twentieth-century panorama.

## Jaspers between Psychology and Philosophy

For a long time Karl Jaspers was considered by philosophy professors and university colleagues only as a self-taught philosopher. Actually he studied law at first, later medicine and psychiatry, and he read the classics of the philosophical thought by himself. His first studies were about personality disorders, nostalgia and crime, jealousy and dementia, schizophrenia. Through his voluminous book *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913; cf. Jaspers, 1965[8]) he gained the public acknowledgment as innovative researcher in the field of clinical psychiatry. As psychologist at Philosophy Departments Jaspers was an outsider in the German academic panorama, and the collection of his lectures, revised and published in 1919 with the title *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, was a sign of that hybrid position. Thanks to the publication of this essay Jaspers got the chair of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg: against the opposition

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of the established academic professors, first of all the famous neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert.

Jaspers' important contributions as «researcher of the human nature» (Saner, 1970, p. 31) can probably not be explained and properly understood without consideration of his medical background and of his unconventional development. In particular there are three ideas directing his way of thinking first as psychologist and then as philosopher:

- The centrality of the individual. This is thought on one hand as a whole and on the other in connection with an objective background. Constitutive for the subject-object-relationship is the fact that each existence is an historical existence.
- The idea that each logical, conceptual or rational issue depends on an extra-logical, unconditioned factor, so that each form of knowledge is necessarily always partial and incomplete.
- A dynamic view of life marked by paradoxes. If, on the one hand, the human knowledge is the result of conceptual tools, categories and methods which as such are out of the flow of life, on the other hand life is so much rich of possibilities and contradictions that it is quite necessary to regulate and control its variety, sometimes even to enforce an artificial order on it, in order to foster and further it, and finally to be able to experience it fully.

These approaches influence the way Jaspers builds his philosophical point of view. They are evident also in his conception of the *Weltbilder* and in the relation of these with the *Weltanschauungen*.

## *Weltbild* and the *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*

Answer the questions "what is a *Weltbild*?" or "what is a *Weltanschauung*?" means to inquire the psychological and existential need which corresponds to the building of these concepts.

According to Jaspers, live is reacting to a condition of be-thrown-away and to the feeling of weakness and seclusion connected to it: human beings[1] in fact are surrounded by a world made of things and persons that they perceive as

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[1] The expression "human being" is used with reference to the individual as such without consideration of the individual gender.

deeply distinct from themselves. However, this feeling of separateness is closely related to the will of adaptation and the desire for relation. The reaction of the individual goes through the knowledge and through the idea of a world totality. By speaking of the human condition Jaspers observes: «I appear to the others, in this world, only as another "I" and as such I am, for me and for them, only a particle. But even though I am almost a nothingness dissolving in a point of the space and time immensity, I am a particle able to turn towards the totality [...] *as if* I could embrace it» (Jaspers, 1932a, p. 78).[2] This *as if* is an idea, the reflected image of a world connection, in which everything fills its own place and order. The actual totality of being remains uncatchable but this idea is exactly the way making possible that each "I" does not reduce himself to be-only-a-particle.

In Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* the leading idea of the analysis is the scission of subject and object. This idea plays a fundamental role not only in philosophy, but also in the psychological research. Here the «totality of mental facts» has to be inquired, as it is experienced by a subject living in a world of objects and being itself a possible object. Without conceptual order no comprehension can be reached. This order is possible only through a series of forms and intellectual schemes, shaping the variety of possible or real relations existing between subject and object. According to Jaspers, in fact, the way between the one and the other is not «a straight line»: it goes «through networks of different kind, which are, as such, out of space and time, neither subject nor object» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 23).

These forms condition and define everything that is objective; they can be found every time a subject meets an object. Through his need of unity and his search for synthesis the human being opposes to the feeling of tear – arising from the perception of being only a part of an impenetrable whole – and to the situation of duality, whose clearest evidence is the cleavage between subject and object. These constructed synthesis give answers to the fundamental questions of the human-beings, offer a system of meanings, and so make the human life *in* the world possible. By writing a *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* Karl Jaspers intends to describe the different ways the relations between subject and object can be, and has historically been, managed. Let us consider that the different types of life explanation correspond to «the various frames in which the

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[2] Unless otherwise stated, all the translations are made by the author of this article.

mental life of the individual takes place» (Lefebre, 1981[2], p. 489). Consequently, by illustrating in a systematic way the positions the human mind can hold by facing the world, Jaspers makes the internal structures of the psychic life psychologically clear; more generally, he outlines the various possibilities of human nature.

The different combinations of subject-object-relationship can be observed from different points of view. If they are considered from the side of the subject, then we have a series of attitudes corresponding to the manners through which people experience the world. According to the goals the human being sets himself, the choices s/he makes, the way s/he perceives her/himself, reality and time, the functions s/he assigns to the reason or to the senses, it is possible to characterize an active or a contemplative, an aesthetic or a rational, a mystic or a reflective, an hedonistic or an ascetic attitude. These are the themes dealt in the first chapter of Jaspers' essay.

Complementary to such a view is the consideration of the forms shaping the human way-of-being from the side of the object. This is the field in which the world pictures [*Weltbilder*] are formed. «From attitudes to world pictures there is the same "jump" to make by proceeding from the subject to the object, from subjective behavior to objective expression, [...] from the pure and simple possibility to the real expansion in an objective space» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 38). *Weltbilder* are neither «existential spheres» nor logical forms, they bring neither impulses nor spiritual forces to the consciousness: they are rather schemes enabling the comprehension of the way the objective world appears to the individual. «In themselves they are nothing mental, but are conditions as well as consequences of mental experience» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 122).

However, also in this case the reference point of Jaspers' analysis is the subject. World pictures are not interesting for themselves, says Jaspers, nor wants he to establish what is true or false, right or wrong, worth or not in each of them. They become important for the psychological analysis only because they are «an object for a subject» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 25) and, consequently, they offer a new, alternative perspective for understanding the subject (Jaspers, 1919, p. 38). *Weltbilder* are like forms of intellectual representation for the real world, indissolubly corresponding to a way of being of the human soul. So, according to the different ways the space and the life environment are figured, there will be world pictures explaining the universe as finished or infinite, other considering the nature as a machinery, or representing the reality as a living spiritual organism: the highest form of human wisdom is here not the

scientific and technological knowledge, but the mythological comprehension of the connections existing among phenomena, between natural and spiritual world. From a cultural point of view the world can be imagined as uniform or not homogeneous, as mostly determined by cultures or single personalities, as a perfectly made cosmos or like an endless completion process – what heavily affects the self-perception of the human being and the representation of her/his possibilities *in the* world. The highest confidence degree in the world totality (that is to say, the confidence in the world *as* a totality) is yet to be found in the metaphysical world picture where, according to the different views, the validity or the being of the reality is made dependent on the relationship that it has with the absolute. In this psychic context it is natural to think that «each single part is a whole and at the same time it is in the whole» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 164).

Considering the close correlation existing between the subject and the corresponding world picture it is no cause of surprise that Jaspers indicates two sources for the formation of a world picture: on the one hand, there is what is given to the individual from the outside, from his world and life experience, and on the other there is what is due to the natural character of the individual, to the inner disposition of her/his soul (Jaspers, 1919, p. 125). Unlike philosophy, which investigates the connection of the one with the other from the point of view of the systematic validity and with the aim to realize an all-embracing world view, it is typical for the psychological attitude to take into account what *is* as *it is*. Psychology is not interested in answering the question about the reality of a universal, or universally accepted, world picture, nor in demonstrating the absolute value of such a picture. In its enquire the psychology proceeds *as if* this picture exists, analyzing the whole of its possibilities and of its contents. This is an application of the (Kantian) regulative idea of the *als ob* and it has a double implication. Firstly, hierarchy and value judgments about the different world pictures are removed. The scientific value of a *Weltbild* lies exclusively in the fact that it is *a* way the objective world manifests itself to the subject, «even if it is a mythical world picture, the illusion of a lunatic, the utopia of a dreamer» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 21). Secondly, the consideration of «what was mentally true and still possible» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 4) *as if* it would be still true and constantly possible implies the necessity to build comprehension patterns which open the door to the classification of different phenomena and events of the psychic life: here not the present, existing reality is taken into account, but the possible, potential reality of the human mind. In so far the

human intellect can enter the flow of the psychological experience, crucial points, by which the psychic life crystallize, are taken to the consciousness. The task of Jaspers' psychological inquire is to measure not only the horizon, but also the limits of the human psychic experience (Jaspers, 1919, pp. 125–126).

Jaspers writes: «By speaking of the world pictures we intend to typify, to point out what in our opinion has the marks of essentiality» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 38). In order to highlight what is essential, the scientific observer has to classify the various facts of the experience and to bring them into types, which as such do not correspond exactly to the real experience: compared to this one, those types are only ideal schemes bringing the experience to its extreme expressions. This is the way – Jaspers adopted this methodological approach by Max Weber – the human intellect can manage with the tangled mass of psychic facts and bring the flowing life to the level of consciousness.

But knowledge is as dynamic as life is. There is no pre-made truth: there are only processes, achieving as much truth as possible for the individual. So, also the building of a world picture is a process. In fact, there are different consciousness degrees in the perception of a world picture. This is due to the fact that a world picture is not an artificial scheme extraneous to the nature of the individual: on the contrary, it arises with the human being and grows up through her/his actual life experience. The world picture which has not yet been penetrated by the intellect is the most efficacious: it is all the same with the immediate being and acting of man. At the opposite side of the degree scale there is the world picture not experimented in the psychic life: since it is only a matter of intellectual knowledge, it can be explained, understood and transmitted without being something alive. Finally, there is a third different case, when the world becomes the object of a cognitive act and exactly this process gets the building of a further interior world going (Jaspers, 1919, p. 126).

This graduation of awareness represents a form of classification used by the observer to distinguish the different relationships the subject can have with a world picture. Getting consciousness of a life situation means tearing the immediate life process the subject lives into. But that is also the necessary condition to make the individual more able to act in the world.

> W*eltbilder* are subjective, since they are forces and creations carried out by the subject, but they are objective too, since through each of these creations the human being enters the world of the universal being, which is ruled by its own

laws. The human being in fact gets soon dominated by what he has created by himself. (Jaspers, 1919, p. 124)

A world picture is to understand as an intellectual medium the individual has to provide himself in order to survive in a world presenting insoluble contradictions and value-conflicts. By means of a scheme of interpretation offering a comprehensive system of meaning, the individual can figure out his role in the world, his priorities, his frame of thoughts, and the way to manage collective issues together with other human beings.

The transformation of the subject-world-relationship into an object of reflection has however a "dark side": it is not only an opportunity of world adaptation, it implies also a tendency towards a general, indistinct objectification. The result of this process is double: every subject considers himself legitimated to regard his own world picture not only like the only right and valid, but even like the only possible one. Furthermore, there is always the risk that a personal scheme of world interpretation gets absolute, placing itself above the real life and usurping it. When a series of theoretical principles take the place of the real experience, the knowledge – whatever its origin may be: religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, or ethical – becomes sterile and loses its touch with the concrete life of the human being. Here a self given belief changes into a stiff dogma, a catechism of rules, notions and prejudices becomes a "cage" where the changeability of real life is stifled and restrained, in the worst case even hidden and repressed. Jaspers is very clear about this point: «A *Weltbild* is like a shell [*Gehäuse*], in which on the one hand the mental life is jailed, on the other it is what the mental life is able to generate by itself and to bring outwards» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 122). A "shell" is an inanimate structure in which each expression of life is reduced into a mere object of theoretical speculation.

Jaspers calls the attention also to other processes: the dispersion or the lack of authenticity, easily changing into inauthenticity; the formalization abstracting from the experience; the differentiation; finally, the absolutization that isolates the part from the whole. By pinpointing these phenomena, that cause degenerated world representations, Jaspers reveals a constant attitude which stays at the basis of his thought: the fear for each form of extremism. It may be either in the political or in the scientific or philosophical field, regarding the clarification of the historical world, the explanation of a political doctrine, or the comprehension of a religious feeling: at any occasion Jaspers launches his philosophical appeal for avoiding the radicalization of principles and ideas, for preventing concepts from devouring the humanity of the human being. He em-

phasizes the necessity for the individual of keeping himself open to the possibilities of the existence and to the uncontainable richness of it: open to the life as a whole [*Ganzes*].

Jaspers' philosophy is a philosophy of the *aurea mediocritas* calling for practicing the ancient virtue of s*ophrosyne* and for balancing the opposites. He constantly stresses that «without schemes neither knowledge is possible, nor an order in the conceptual world, but without the capability of throwing these schemes away and, after having known and used them, of surpassing them, no culture can be possible» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 41). The idea of the whole as a regulative programmatic idea and not as a substance, the aspiration to the synthesis of divergent attitudes and feelings, the quest for conciliating analytic issues with the comprehension of life connections, the building of intellectual schemes to match with the intuition of the unrestrainable mobility of life: these are the issues orientating the philosophical way of thinking of Karl Jaspers. Evidences of them can be found also in his theory of the world pictures.

Each world picture is in fact the result of a psychic-gnoseological process aiming at providing the subject with an intellectual apparatus for the orientation in the world. But a world picture is something more than a sign of the human desire for knowledge: it is the evidence of the human quest for totality and the expression of the impossibility for the human being to be satisfied with the only mechanical addition of facts and experiences. The human being needs an interpretative framework giving him a symbolical representation of all the possible connections s/he has with *her/his* world. The *Weltbild* represents an answer to this unconscious demand in so far that it puts together the knowledge of the world as fact and as series of facts with the interpretation of it as a source of meaning. In so far that a world picture expresses «the whole of the objective contents of a person» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 122), it is to consider like the outcome of the effort the human existence makes in order to achieve a personal point of view upon his way of being-in-the-world. This is a personal truth that is neither absolute nor generalizable. But as shared intellectual *habitus* the world picture can help the people living it (and not only in it) to find a common horizon suitable for acting and for entering in touch with each other. The search for a unitary idea of the world entails something going further the intellectual arrangement of the reality into a system: it already represents a genuine manifestation of the human being's natural inclination to keep himself open to

infinity, to the otherness, to the overcoming of each partial truth; or, to use a Jaspers' world: open to transcendence.[3]

## From *Weltbilder* to *Weltanschauungen*

Between Karl Jaspers' psychopathological studies and his philosophical works one can recognize an invariable lodestar orienting his intellectual activity: the attempt to think of the human being over the split existing between subject and object, and then over the division between what is scientific and what it is not. To consider the human being from the point of view of the existential totality he is (a totality that is beyond each possible or eventual objectification) means to rethink upon completely new grounding the ways of dealing with the being of the individual. Jaspers was not only interested to explore what the human being knows: he starts from the assumption that also «how the human being knows» becomes constitutive for the meaning of the knowledge. But this "how" is not a neutral or an accidental factor: it is closely related with the «existential a priori» which is different by each person. What Jaspers most of all intended to realize with his works was not to grade the types of human knowledge according to their internal validity, but rather to understand the significance each intellectual topic, each experience has *for* the human being in the specificity of her/his life situation. The interest without prejudice for «man how he is» represents the fundamental issue of a psychology, but also of a philosophical program, aiming at understanding [*verstehen*] sooner than explaining [*erklären*], at clarifying rather than classifying.

Starting from these premises Jaspers' *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* looked like to be an innovative book which, as regards the way of considering the manifestations of the abnormal or morbid psychic life, remains by many aspects still «unsurpassed» (Van der Berg, 1955; Galimberti, 2000[7]). The *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* turned those intuitions into a method: here Jaspers intends to examine both the forms in which the reality presents itself to the human being and the existential forms by which the human being plans the

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[3] Here it is to recall the influence exerted on Jaspers by Kants' doctrine of the transcendental ideas. Among these ideas Kant indicates also that of the world, defining it as the «absolute unity of phenomena' conditions», or, in another passage of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, «as the totality of all the phenomena», cf. Kant, 1998, pp. 432, 437, 442. In the Introduction of his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* Jaspers mentions Kant's doctrine of ideas as a fundamental source of his work.

building of his world and at the same time of himself too. The comprehensive analysis of the ways the human being relates himself to the surrounding world, making it *his own* world, is in fact all the same with the comprehension of the meanings the world assumes *for* the human being. In this interpretative context there is no distinction between what is healthy or unhealthy, right or wrong. There are only as many different ways of looking at the world and of taking spiritually or mentally possession of it as there are many human beings. Each single case is a personal, intentional, individually defined relationship. In the *Psychopathologie* Jaspers observed that each form of understanding is like a «light thrown on the human nature» (Jaspers, 1965[8], p. 260). The same spirit inspires Jaspers to consider that «wherever a subject is confronted with an object – it may be in the hallucination of a raving man or in the illusion [...] of an insane person – there are [interpretative] forms to find» (1919, p. 23). The *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* intends to point out exactly these forms. It is however much more than a mere catalogue of schemes. As Martin Heidegger – reader, correspondent, friend and finally silent observer of Karl Jaspers' personal history – noticed in many occasions, the unquestionable merit of that study is to attract attention for the problem of «what the human being is» and «what he can be according to his life possibilities»: in a word, this is the problem of the human existence.[4]

This is the interpretative and methodological framework to consider also by discussing about *Weltbilder*, *Weltanschauungen* and their mutual relationship. Then, what is a *Weltanschauung*? This is the question opening Jaspers' essay of 1919. And this is the answer he gives: «It is something total and universal at the same time. [...] The worlds views are forces and ideas, anyway they are the highest and total manifestations of human being» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 1). Since they represent the whole possibilities of human existence, they are the proper topic of philosophy.

Essential, however, for the comprehension of this topic is the distinction Jaspers underlines again and again between the intellectual and the axiological level, between the apperception of knowledge – it may be scientific or sense-grounded, rational or empirical – and the determination of a life orientation: or, using Max Weber's terminology, between the identification of *facts* and the

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[4] Cf. Heidegger, 2001, pp. 301–302. For a critical, original analysis of the essay, more specific is Heidegger 1973.

constitution of *values.* «A world view», Jaspers remarks, «is not a mere form of knowledge, but it shows itself through evaluation, through the hierarchical order of values which one chooses» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 1). What characterizes a world view, distinguishing it from a theoretical world system or from a pragmatic ideology, is its connection with life: that is, more specifically, with the sources of individual's life taking a specific *Weltanschauung*, developing specific beliefs and thoughts, showing a peculiar, interior way of being and a personal way of re-interpreting the experience. By speaking of «forces of life» Jaspers means the principles and the spiritual energies making of a human being the person s/he actually is.

Exactly the consideration of such forces makes the change from the world picture to the world view level possible. If the first one corresponds to a pattern of world interpretation considered from the point of view of the object, the second one implies the frame of thought which has been inspired, built and carried out directly by the subject, through his life experience. Consequently, *Weltbilder* are «dead reflected pictures» as long as they are not filled up by the «alive forces bringing about, in the movement of experience, the choice and the direction of life» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 190). Between world picture and world view there is the same difference existing between a well known system of knowledge and a practiced doctrine of life.

Jaspers is careful both to keep the two dimensions apart from each other and to integrate them into a suitable comprehension form for the world life of the human being. Each *Weltanschauung* is in fact like a network of connections and criss-crossing levels. Nevertheless its dual conformation remains unequivocal: beyond the intellectual, systematic order there is an a-logical, *un*theoretical nucleus relying on the ontological, and consequently mental, structures of the singular human existence. «*Weltanschauungen* are not produced by thought [...]. The knowledge of reality is an important moment by their development, of course, but it is only a moment. *Weltanschauungen* issue from individual's attitude in life, from life experience, from the structure of our psychic totality. [...] Each genuine *Weltanschauung* is a form of intuition arising from the being-situated-*in*-the-life-itself» (Dilthey, 1931, pp. 86, 99). This words have been written in 1911 by Wilhelm Dilthey in his famous essay *Die Typen der Weltanschauung und ihre Ausbildung in den metaphysischen Systemen*, which represents one of the most important sources not only for Jaspers' work, but also for the whole debate about world views taking place in Germany and Europe between the 19th and the 20th century. The same words

could however have been written by Jaspers too. For both authors the form of association between faculty of representation, individual's feeling and volition results from the peculiar position each single man has to the general problem of life: this position impacts on the way a form of rational knowledge turns into an all-embracing life project. The authenticity of the world view is just given by the inner, immediate commitment of the individual by taking part in it (see Cantillo, 2001, pp. 35–42).

However, a world view has not to be only authentic and genuine: it ought to be also real, that is to say, life-orientating. In so far that it has been formed and taken by a subject it becomes a part of his world and, consequently, of the world. Jaspers notes: «Each existence has a concrete content, in the same way all the corresponding *Weltanschauungen* are concrete, and have a content» (Jaspers, 1919, pp. 25). This "content" gets evident through those objective manifestations by which an historical subject expresses *in the world* his personal way of being, of viewing, of believing. That is the way by which theoretical systems, political, religious and ethical doctrines, past interpretations, teachings and theories originate. All these are the necessary outcome of a process of objectification – that is almost a rejection process – by which the inner life of the human being comes outside, in the world and, therefore, into reality. Without exterior, objective and communicable manifestations, it is as if that life and that being do not exist. But just in the moment in which a spiritual force gives the evidence of being present and actual, it needs a whole series of thoughts, ideas, values, and arguments in order to support its own points of view and to make them taken into account. The acknowledgment is made particularly necessary by the fact that each human being is closely connected with other subjects, other individuals, therefore with other spiritual forces. This is the reason why Jaspers considers the world views in a double perspectives: both as «the actual existence of a mind considered in its whole» and also as the whole of «rational doctrines, imperatives and objective images which the subject shows, applies, and uses in order to justify himself» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 33), his way of being and acting. Considered from this perspective the role of the world view, and of each inwardly participated doctrine, becomes clear: it is an essential, communication-grounded framework for the existence of the subject and for his historical survival and adaptation *in the* world.

As for the subjective attitudes and the objective world pictures, also for the world views Jaspers identifies many types of systems. They differ in the values admitted for interpreting and orientating the life processes; they vary from

each other in the role attributed each time to the absolute towards the finite, and vice versa. According to the «hierarchy of values» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 194) chosen by each individual it is possible to distinguish nihilism and skepticism, authoritarianism, liberalism and absolutism of values, rationalism and vitalism, organicism, mysticism, realism, romanticism, and so on. A particular prominence is given by Jaspers to the philosophical systems, representing the highest form of objectification, and therefore of rational clarification, of the existential forces (Jaspers, 1919, pp. 275–278). Common to all the world views, although in different degrees, is their character of being a totality, that is a combination of psychic connections, values and spiritual ideas embracing the whole being of the human being, shaping his experience and orientating his action in the world. Through the different «spiritual types»,[5] which each *Weltanschauung* corresponds to, the man comes in touch, maybe only in an unconscious way, with an unconditioned origin, with the spring of life staying always beyond each objective manifestation of it, always at the end of each possible knowledge, unsuitable for any rational understanding or clarification. Jaspers will make this point clear in the first book of his *Philosophy* by writing: «Faith [*Glaube*] is the nucleus of each world view» (Jaspers, 1932a, p. 246).

By introducing the concept of faith, that Jaspers already mentioned in some significant passages in the essay of 1919 (pp. 298–303), all the elements useful to explain the relationship between world picture and world view acquire a new light: the passage from the first to the second one is not only a change from the rational to the existential level, from a theoretical world orientation to an experienced life praxis, but also a transformation of a learned doctrine into a belief – what by Jaspers corresponds to see knowledge turning into an all-embracing way of thinking: more properly, into philosophy. In so far it can be both a practice of life and a science of existence, philosophy is the highest form of knowledge; in so far it is life-taken-to-clearness and at the same time consciousness of life's individuality, philosophy is expected to indicate an overall meaning for life, a framework of principles, a scale of values: to give, in a word, a world view.[6]

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[5] This is the topic of the third chapter of Jaspers' *Psychologie*.
[6] For a critical reflection about the "philosophical" meaning of Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* and the ambiguous relationships between philosophy and psychology, cf. Rickert, 1973.

## Weltanschauung and Politics

From the level of the *Weltbilder* to the level of the *Weltanschauungen* there is a quality step: this is a change of perspective and of consciousness, not only an extension of knowledge. This change is due to the fact that a *Weltanschauung* is not only a more complex *Weltbild*, an intellectual more sophisticated picture of a world connection and totality. Rather, a *Weltanschauung* is an all-embracing belief motivated by existential forces, whose activation depends on the choices made by the individual, on his life orientation, and on the values selected and taken over by him. Compared with world pictures, i.e. the intellectual ways of giving a systematic and unitary order to the manifold experiences connected with space and time, world views have a stronger practical and therefore ethical connotation and efficacy: they «have been chosen through the life existence, through experience and action, but not as theories. [...] All what is theoretical is not other than the objectification of something which was already actual, otherwise it is something merely intellectual and therefore without essence. Life is all» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 277). After all, as Dilthey noted, *Weltanschauungen* represent nothing else than «attempts to solve the mystery of life» (Dilthey, 1931, p. 82).

*Weltanschauungen*, and not *Weltbilder*, can be taken into account by political issues. Not because there are world views purely or typically political, but because of the capability of each belief to turn easily itself into a – at least potentially – political tool. What is in fact a world view if not a form of world comprehension motivated by faith and therefore able to influence the way of acting of an individual which lives side by side in the world with other human beings? And what is, on the other side, politics if not the activity which takes charge of making different subjects, having different perspectives, believes and interests, live together in the world in the most possible pacific, orderly, and just way? This is even why in the political sphere the facts take the importance of applied or practiced values, and the values are – whatever they may be: the peace or the war, the force or the justice, the power or the solidarity, the liberty or the equality – the essential matter of politics.

The relationship between politics and *Weltanschauung* is determined not by the type of value assumed as overriding either in the political action or in a philosophical belief, but by the intensity this value is believed, pursued and concretely promoted. The gradation of faith can originate a scale of political behaviors: or, by using Jaspers'word, of *politische Stimmungen*.

This is in fact the title of a lecture Jaspers gave in 1917 in a "club" established in Heidelberg during the First World War and made up of professors from different departments of the university (cf. Jaspers, 1977, p. 70). In this lecture the young scholar examines the relationship between *Politik* and *Weltanschauung*, namely between politics as an independent and self-governing sphere of human life and a world view supported by faith. What he finds out is a sequence of types, where each of them corresponds to a peculiar way to combine together sense of reality and willpower, life and idea.[7]

Beyond of the single aspects of this lecture, representing Jaspers' first political text, there are two things to be noted, which make this text relevant in our perspective. The first one is the centrality of the idea of *Weltanschauung* in a conference about political behaviors. Considering that in 1917 Jaspers were probably writing the essay published in 1919, and considering also the political moment of that war time, it is plausible to think that Jaspers would like to put his psychological knowledge and observations about world views in connection with the actual problems and problematic, political issues of his time. Secondly, a thematic uniformity is to be observed between, on the one hand, Jaspers" consideration of the forms of world interpretation, and his description of the ways the experience of the political world can be possible on the other. In both cases, Jaspers remarks the danger that the balance between different issues and opposing values gets lost – a loss which results from misunderstanding the relationship has to exist between the particular and the whole, the form and the real life. The manifestation of such a phenomenon may be different: the inauthenticity and the indifference for the original forces of life; the consideration of an intellectual framework as universal scheme; the lack of consciousness about the variety of life; the degradation of faith to mere utilitarian means of power or to a programmatic doctrine for the mobilization of masses; but also the transformation of a personal or group world view into an absolute truth, an

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[7] Jaspers illustrates, also with reference to historical examples, the different ways the relationship between *Politik* and *Weltanschauung* can be thought: so politics can be considered as a means for the organization of the common life or as a belief, as a field without values but the power, or as a field led by principles coming from an external (religious, moral, philosophical, aesthetic) world view. Sometimes a strictly political view can change into an absolute faith: this means that politics itself becomes a world view influencing the way of being of the man, the way of believing of the people and, finally, the action of a whole State. This is what happened, according to Jaspers, in Russia with the Socialism (exactly in 1917).

unconditioned belief. In all cases Jaspers sees the same danger coming into being: the losing sight of the real highest value, the human existence.

As observer of the human psychic life he is aware of the practical function of individual feelings and convictions. Jaspers recognizes that also the political activity is driven by vital forces, therefore values and faiths are an essential component also of the political sphere. Furthermore, he knows how much useful for the human life the transformation of personal attitudes into objective views and collective behaviours can be: this is the way elaborated by the human being since the beginning of his cultural development in order to find – or even better, to build – in the world a suitable order for her/his existential need, for her/his call for orientation, for her/his quest for engagement and unity. At the same time Jaspers is very careful with fixing limits, whatever they may be: the limits of a theory, because «everything going exterior gets soon relative» (Jaspers 1919, p. 25); the limits of philosophy, since it «goes round a pole without managing to put a foot on it» (Jaspers, 1932a, p. IX); the limits of each conceptual or scientific system, which «becomes wrong whenever it wants to be definitive» (Jaspers, 1919, p. 16); finally, the limits of politics, whose task is to take care of the external conditions for the social and civil life of the human beings. On the contrary, the personal existence of each individual – her/his possibilities and her/his search for absolute values, her/his peculiar, irreplaceable way of being the person s/he actually is – is out of political competence. And it ought to (*sollen*) remain out of it. The field or the topic Jaspers is speaking about may be different: unchanged it is his focus on the individual *as* individual, as moral being living in a world together with other subjects and facing many different life possibilities.

Without success we can read Jaspers' writings looking for an answer to the question: "How is it to live?". His philosophy focus on questioning and wondering, on setting limits and "calling for" getting continually over each self-imposed limit. But Jaspers' lecture dating back to 1917 is prophetic. Exactly the 20th century has showed, often in a dramatic way, how much dangerous and anti-human the political faiths can become, how inhuman the transformation of a political doctrine into a totalitarian system can be. At the same time Jaspers warns his readers against the illusion that liberty is the same as the absence of great visions, as if the new freedom of the modern age would rely on the incapability of the individual at having a distinctive perspective on life or a personal world view. Exactly this illusion can turn into an absolute doctrine, which can become as fanatic and mortifying for the humanity as the strictest

dogmatism: in both cases an intellectual scheme, a doctrine of life change into a "shell", into a cage without life.

On the contrary, «the world view [...] comes in communication with the others through struggle, understanding and discussion; by disclosing itself, in time, as incomplete, the world view puts itself in movement and, by meeting the others, it searches for itself from its own depths» (Jaspers, 1932a, p. 242). Through the connection with the philosophical thought on the topic of «possible existence» (*mögliche Existenz*), on the open possibilities of it, and the ways it can become authentically itself (the communication, the love struggle, the limit-situations, the ciphers ...), the doctrine of the world view achieves its proper meaning. *Weltbilder* and, most of all, *Weltanschauungen* are to consider as conceptual tools and comprehensive supports human beings resort to in order to pursue their existential struggle for life, for authenticity, for the clarification of the world and of themselves. They are essential moments of the way human beings can, and have to, go for reaching the deep sources of their being, and therefore the transcendent being.

In the present time, in which – as Jaspers already noticed in 1917– all the modern world views have collapsed (Jaspers, 1999, p. 248); in which each doctrine or science is in danger of being self-referential and each knowledge risks of losing its connection with the life by becoming an over-specialized technique; in a time in which the human being can be dealt everywhere like an object, like "one of the many", or, at best, like a customer, Jaspers' works reminds us that each individual is a self-related and a world-related subject. It is the totality of both mental connections and world relations that changes a subject into a whole: into an existence. Jaspers' words keep their validity intact: «Each new existence ought to attain freedom by his own source, keeping in view other existences and getting in touch [*in Kommunikation*] with them. The freedom exists only if it is attained by oneself» (Jaspers, 1932b, p. 392). This is the message of Jaspers' most famous work, dating back to the time of his biographical and intellectual maturity. But after all, in the preamble of the *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* he had already made the point clear:

> Who wishes to find a direct answer to the question "how have I to live?" would look for it in this book without success. Here the essential is closed and impenetrable: it lies in the concrete decisions of the personal history. (Jaspers, 1919, *Vorwort*)

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# The World in Images.
## Subjectivity and Politics in Max Weber

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ABSTRACT

This essay sets out to reconstruct the main characteristics and performances of the notion of *Weltbild* in Max Weber. The underlying idea is that world image is the principal place for deciphering the profile of subjectivity in a particular age and the decisive factor for understanding the subject's physiognomy. The essay is divided into three parts. The first (§§ 1-2) reconstructs the Weberian notion of world image. The second (§ 3) deals with the relationship between materiality and world images. The third (§ 4) reconstructs Weber's world image as it emerges from *Politics as a Vocation*, highlighting how this world image provides the background from which Weber draws lines of argument for his normative proposal on the relationship between ethics and politics.

## Introduction

This essay sets out to reconstruct some characteristics, performances and systematic values of the notion of world image [ *Weltbild*] in Max Weber. The underlying idea is that world image is the decisive dimension for understanding the physiognomy of subjectivity in a particular age. The world image defines individuals' attitude towards the world in that it delimits their possible performances and makes it more or less possible that a particular type of practical conduct will be produced and/or spread. In short, the world image is the principal place for deciphering the profile of subjectivity in a particular age and the

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decisive factor for understanding the subject's physiognomy, resources, as well as what he/she can and also cannot do.

The main systematic value of the notion of world image in Weber's theory is that it allows anthropology to be radically neutralised. Man's position in the world is not an anthropological given, but the product of a world image. Weber was the first author to have more coherently stressed the extraordinary variety and changeability of man's attitude towards the world and his dependence on images. What is important for man's relationship with the world is not human nature, but something less ultimate and inaccessible: the concrete physiognomy of the image, or rather images, of the world. Hence, human subjectivity's position with regard to the world is a contingent given. It is not determined by anthropology. The anthropological presupposition consists exclusively of the fact that man's relationship with the world is always mediated by images, by subjective depictions whose validity lies simply in the fact that they are believed.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first (§§ 1-2) reconstructs the notion of world image by analysing the only context in which Weber explicitly thematises this topic. The second (§ 3) deals with the relationship between materiality and world images. The third (§ 4) reconstructs Weber's world image as it emerges from *Politics as a Vocation*. At the same time this part seeks to highlight how this world image provides the background from which Weber draws lines of argument for his normative proposal on the relationship between ethics and politics, and, simultaneously, and more radically, determines the efficacy of his proposal.

## 1. The World in Images

As regards the concept of world image, it has been noted how little consideration is given to this concept in critical literature and how, in any case, it is analysed exclusively within the specific context of the consequences of world religions on practical conduct and in particular on the economic ethos of the followers of the great world religions. With the exception of the work by Kalberg 2004 – whose view diverges significantly from the perspective put forward here – the few essays that have set value by the role of this notion have done so with a view to reconstructing Weber's sociology of religion. There have been no investigations from a more global perspective of a theory of society and politics, despite the background presence of this concept in the reflection Weber

devoted more explicitly to diagnosing his own era, namely *Politics as a Vocation*.

While it underlies the vast amount of work produced by Weber on the subject of the sociology of religion, the topic becomes explicit in an extremely famous passage from the *Introduction* to the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions*:

> The conception of the idea of redemption, as such, is very old, if one understands by it a liberation from distress, hunger, drought, sickness, and ultimately from suffering and death. Yet redemption attained a specific significance only where it expressed a systematic and rationalized "image of the world" and represented a stand in the face of the world. For the meaning as well as the intended and actual psychological quality of redemption has depended upon such a world image and such a stand. [...] "From what" and "for what" one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, "*could be*" redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world. (Weber, 1974c, p. 280, italics mine)

Albeit in the specific context of describing the religious image of the world – or rather, describing the world image of the religiosity of redemption – here Weber focuses on some aspects that are typical to every world image. First, the world image gives an interpretation of our condition: it selects the (material and ideal) elements that we deem intolerable and defines or focuses on the goods that we intend to pursue. In other words, it defines the core of what we are interested in and the fundamental object of our care and concern. It is only within the framework of a particular world image that needs, passions and requirements receive a definition.

In the definition of what we wish to be redeemed "from" and "for", an absolutely decisive role is played by the second performance typical of every world image: the definition of the *horizon of what is possible*. Defining the possible does not simply overlap with a certain interpretation of our condition, but, to a large extent, actually constitutes it. The *need* for redemption, for liberation from something (whether it be ideal or material) is also and above all conditioned by the perception of a *possibility* of redemption. We wish to be redeemed from something because redemption from that something is possible on the basis of a certain world image: only if that specific redemption is considered possible. Hope and desperation do not come into play in interests and needs that are already defined, but they are the fundamental link pin in order to define them. A generic state of suffering, deprivation and the presence of social strata that are oppressed or thought of negatively, are not enough to "produce"

or "arouse" the need for redemption. There is no perception of material or symbolic deprivation that disregards an interpretation of the world (i.e. a world image), but above all no suffering or deprivation produces the will for redemption or ethic-religious mobilisation without an interpretation of the world that makes a possibility of redemption credible (Weber, 1974c, p. 267).

Third, the world image is the decisive element in order to define the tools needed to obtain our goals, whether they be liberation from suffering or achieving a condition of salvation. For example, the individual or collective, peaceful or violent nature of the means that are indispensable to achieve each goal we pursue depends on the world image. In the same way so do the forms of self-governance and discipline of the passions connected to these goals. Lastly, defining the means and procedures for satisfying the requirements promoted by each world image in turn produces secondary material and ideal interests, directly connected to the specific ways of obtaining the primary goals.

World images are not "simple" ideas, metaphorical intuitions essentially consisting of a compact core of intuition that cannot be broken down. If anything, ideas are the initial core that is then developed and used in the world images: «[...] Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest» (Weber, 1974c, p. 280). Therefore, for Weber, world images are essentially conceptual, rational and systematic constructions, which take shape thanks to intellectual strata who process ideas and intuitions generated by charismatic types of forces. Intellectuals are the main actors in building world images. They are not always, indeed hardly ever, their creators. Weber's world images are complex and sophisticated constructs in which small differences can lead to profoundly different practical and also political attitudes. In terms of world images, the distance between Luther and Calvin, or between the Baptist movement annihilated at Münster and the Quakers of New England, is by no means a chasm, while the differences in their attitudes towards the world, and to political violence in particular, are extremely significant. On the other hand, even a radical pluralism of *Weltbilder* does not dent their capacity to structure individual attitudes towards the world in the slightest.

The world image does not necessarily correspond to the belief in an objective ethical sense of the world. The latter characterizes all religious *Weltbilder*, but does not belong to them alone. As we will see, secular world images also exist that attribute an objective sense to the world and its future. Nevertheless,

the world as a meaningless infinity is no less a world image than a meaningful world is. The image of a world lacking an objective meaning has exactly the same kind of impact – though in many ways the contents are the opposite – on the forms of moral experience, on the type of expectations and on the perception of temporality as the impact of world images that insist on the existence of an objective meaning.

Finally, to speak of world images is to neutralize any claim of truth with relation to the way one conceives of the world. Contrary to the notion of ideology as false consciousness, the notion of an image does not refer to the idea of a true/authentic depiction of the world. Access to the world is always and only through images because we cannot give an answer to the question of "what is the world?" that we can claim to be true. The question relating to the world as an ideal totality of phenomena is at the same time misplaced in theory, undecidable in science and unavoidable from a pragmatical point of view. For Weber a world image conditioned and influenced by modern science is no *truer* than the world image of religions in general or that of Christian monotheism. For Weber, the world image's capacity to orient practical conduct and model subjectivity is nevertheless separate from its value of truth. Modern science does not demonstrate atheism. The world is a metaphysical entity. It can be given a particular shape only through an image, which results from an interpretation that can be said neither to be true nor false, which is effective insofar as it is believed and not because it is authentic.

Therefore, in Weber, the world image is a *single and systematic* intellectual construct (lacking in significant gaps). Not necessarily coherent, it interprets the world as a constitutively indeterminate totality of phenomena for essentially practical ends. The world image is a *world in images*: a product of human artifice that makes a selection, a summary (an order) and integrates – real and possible – experience. This provides the framework of reference in order to interpret our conditions and define our requirements and expectations. Here the image is not imitation, a reproduction, or a likeness. Instead, it is something projective, something that is necessarily creative, that is put forward as a single way of relating with something that cannot be grasped but that has to be referred to. The image is (the only) way of determining (which is indispensable from a practical viewpoint) something that by its constitution is undetermined, and is objectively inaccessible. Weber's world image is a conceptual image that is the result of human work. It makes the unmanageable manageable, because

it rids the world of its excess of complexity, its surplus of experience. The world can either be given in an image, or not given at all.

The fundamental variables of the way in which individuals behave towards the world – from adaptation to extraneousness, from indifference to rejection, from escape to domination – do not refer to human nature, but to the image that individuals, groups and civilisations form of the world.

## 2. Indifference towards the Origin: Neutralising the Imagination

The most singular feature of Weber's approach to the topic of world images is shown in the two moves that he uses to deal with the issue of the origin and diffusion of a *Weltbild*: in that he forgoes formulating a theory on the role of the different faculties – in first place the imagination – in creating a world image and, I would say in a specular manner, in that he emphasises the material conditioning that decides the success of a world image.

One of the most striking aspects of Weber's recognition of ancient Jewish prophetism – one of the crucial phenomena for the genesis of the Western Christian *Weltbild* – is his lack of reference to the imagination as the faculty directly or indirectly involved in creating new world images. The few references to the prophets' fantasy [*Phantasie*] are essentially used to describe the aural rather than visual nature of Jewish prophetism (Weber, 1952, p. 312). Nevertheless, in this case, the centrality of hearing is more an effect of the world image than an indication regarding its productive strength: Weber's reasoning does not aim to single out the mental faculties involved in creating a *Weltbild*, but to underline how the image of the world and of God typical of ancient Judaism selects the emotional states recognised as charismatically prophetic.

The reasons for this lack of interest lie, first of all, in his emphasis of the intellectual nature of world images. It is precisely owing to their nature as constructions of the intellect, their physiognomy and, above all, their concrete impact on conduct in life that these images essentially depend on the work of intellectual strata who do not correspond to those who provided the original core of ideas. The capacity of a particular *Weltbild* to orientate, its effective capacity to direct practical action is not linked to the original core connected to the charismatic personality, but to the intellectual strata's global work of arrangement and elaboration. It is only once it has been crystallised in a world image that the idea produces its effects. It is only after the idea has been elabo-

rated and harnessed in a complex and composite intellectual construction that the practical effects of a world image can unfold. In producing world images, the constructive – intellectual/conceptual – element clearly predominates over the simple ideational moment in terms of understanding the practical effects of *Weltbilder*.

But the totally decisive point is that Weber does not direct his interest at the moment that one could say gives rise to the creation of a world image, since what essentially grasps his attention is the question of which elements determine its success. It is here that Weber's perspective takes on its most typical appearance, when he introduces the notion that the success of a world image depends on its capacity to give plausible responses to the threats that a society perceives as decisive. It is here that the conceptual tool proposed by Weber to read subjectivity, its possibilities and limits, meets the material analysis of society and the reconstruction of the actors' physiognomy as the conditions for understanding the success or failure of a particular *Weltbild*.

### 3. The Material Conditioning and Autonomy of World Images

The whole of Weber's sociology of religion project could be summed up as the attempt to render account of a dual process of influence or conditioning: on one hand, he tries to grasp the effects of different world images on individual conduct and – through these effects – on the economic, social and political arrangements of a human group; on the other hand, he attempts to explain the success or failure of a particular *Weltbild* – or of some specific variant of it – as a result of the (broadly speaking) material conditions of social life, of its hierarchies, and of the physiognomy of its main actors.

The crucial point is that the relationship between *Weltbilder* and the material dimension does not give a general theory, nor a philosophy, nor provides a total reconstruction that can be called a determinism. The whole reflection on world religions is an attempt to develop a theory of world images, while thinking of both their material conditioning and autonomy at the same time. Weber's reconstruction of the influence of the materiality of social life on world images indeed contemporaneously excludes any determinism that makes the latter a mere reflection of the material dimension. If what it is legitimate to expect individuals to do depends on the combination of their material condition and their world image, their world image does not appear determined neither

by their material condition, nor by the material conditions of the whole human group that they belong to.

The nature of the relationships between the material dimension and world images is thematised by Weber in the *Introduction* to the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* in a polemical comparison with two positions that are in reality very distant: on one hand historical materialism and on the other Nietzsche's theory of resentment. What these two perspectives nevertheless have in common is a deterministic connection between an interest-situation and the religious ethics of a specific *Weltbild*:

> In various ways people have sought to interpret the connection between religious ethics and interest-situations in such a way that the former appear as mere "functions" of the latter. Such interpretations occur in so-called historical materialism – which we shall not here discuss – as well as in a purely psychological sense. A quite general and abstract class-determination of religious ethics might be deduced from the theory of "resentment", known since Friedrich Nietzsche's brilliant essay and since then spiritedly treated by psychologists. (Weber, 1974c, p. 270).

The thesis that there is a deterministic tie between material condition and world image is what the two theories have in common, and what Weber had rejected just a few lines earlier with an explicit reference to historical materialism:

> It is not our thesis that the specific nature of a religion is a simple "function" of the social situation of the stratum which appears as its characteristic bearer, or that it represents the stratum's "ideology", or that it is a "reflection" of a stratum's material or ideal interest-situation. On the contrary, a more basic misunderstanding of the standpoint of these discussions would hardly be possible. (Weber, 1974c, pp. 269–270).

While the materialistic conception of history and Nietzsche's theory of resentment may both deterministically reduce *Weltbilder* to the material dimension, nevertheless they possess a very different idea of the materiality upon which the images are made to depend. In addition to establishing a binding tie between materiality and world images, historical materialism and the theory of resentment appear marked by a specular defect with relation to the way in which they conceive the materiality that *Weltbilder* are supposed to derive from: while materialism reduces materiality to the economy, the theory of resentment proposes a barely determined idea of materiality whose definition ends up being

the alternative of whether the social group that one belongs to is favoured or not. This is the reason why the critique of the theory of resentment moves on a dual level: the explicit level which disputes the thesis of resentment as the common ethical-religious source that judges suffering as positive – and the world image that upholds it – and a more implicit level linked to the defining the dimensions of materiality that are significant in the establishment of a particular *Weltbild.*

As far as the first level is concerned, Weber's lines of argument can be boiled down to two observations. Weber puts forward the first not in the *Introduction* to the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions*, but again in explicit reference to Nietzsche's position, in the paragraph of the *Religiöse Gemeinschaften* dedicated to *The Religion of Non-Privileged Strata*:

> The limited significance of the factor of *ressentiment*, and the dubiousness of applying the conceptual schema of "repression" almost universally, appear most clearly when Nietzsche mistakenly applies his scheme to the altogether inappropriate example of Buddhism. (Weber, 1978, p. 499)

In reality, it is precisely Buddhism, according to Weber, that belies Nietzsche's theory since it is «the salvation doctrine of an intellectual stratum, originally recruited almost entirely from the privileged castes, especially the warrior caste, which proudly and aristocratically rejected the illusions of life, both here and hereafter» (Weber, 1978, p. 499). Buddhism shows how the origin of the religiosity of redemption is not to be sought in the social situation of the disadvantaged social strata, but in an intellectual need that can also be harboured in the privileged social strata.

In the *Introduction* to the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* Weber instead follows another path. Here his critique of Nietzsche's line follows an argument that takes the emphasis on duty, typical of the religiosity of redemption of the unprivileged strata, away from the root of resentment:

> The sense of dignity of socially repressed strata or of strata whose status is negatively [...] valued is nourished most easily on the belief that a special "mission" is entrusted to them; their worth is guaranteed or constituted by an *ethical imperative*, or by their own functional *achievement*. [...] One source of the ideal power of ethical prophecies among socially disadvantaged strata lies in this fact. Resentment has not been required as a leverage; the rational interest in material and ideal compensation as such has been perfectly sufficient. (Weber, 1974c, pp. 276–277)

But it is at the second level that Weber's critique of Nietzsche allows us to fo-cus on what his idea of materiality is. In fact, at the conclusion of his critical assessment of the resentment thesis Weber hisses: «The specific nature of the great religious and ethical systems has been determined by social conditions of a far more particular nature than by mere contrast of ruling and ruled strata» (Weber, 1974c, p. 277). The materiality that needs to be called upon in order to understand the conditioning exercised on world images cannot have the closed confines of economic interest, nor the coarse-grain alternative between the privileged and the unprivileged.

We can identify at least four distinct dimensions of materiality that have conditioned religious *Weltbilder*, and influenced decisive aspects of them. The first consists of geographical and climatic/natural conditions: the importance of rain for crops and the necessity – of course depending on geographical and climatic factors – of regulating water – building dams and canals for protection against flooding and internal navigation – for example, were not only a funda-mental factor in building a central power and patrimonial bureaucracy in China, but also had significant consequences on the world image and divinity of Confucianism (Weber, 1968, pp. 21ff). The second dimension consists of the international political context and the role of the phenomenon and the ex-perience of war in the perception of collective destinies. In China,

> [t]he unification of the empire, which proceeded with only minor interruptions from the third century BC onward represented the internal pacification of the empire, at least in principle. No longer was there the legitimate opportunity for internal warfare. The defense against and the subjection of the barbarians became simply a governmental police duty. Thus, in China, the God of Heaven could not assume the form of a hero-God who revealed himself in the irrational destiny of his people through its foreign relations, or who was worshipped in war, victory, defeat, exile and nostalgia[,]

in the same way as the god of ancient Israel (Weber, 1968, p. 26).

While the third dimension of materiality significant for defining a world im-age is the one more directly linked to economic interests, it is on the fourth and last dimension that Weber dwells at length on several occasions:

> The chivalrous warrior class, peasants, business classes, and intellectuals with literary education have naturally pursued different religious tendencies [with regard to the kind of empirical state of bliss or experience of rebirth that a religion should offer]. [...] These tendencies have not by themselves determined the psychological character of religion; they have, however, exerted

a very lasting influence upon it. (Weber, 1974c, p. 279)

Every social stratum has a tendency towards a particular type of *Weltbild* and religious experience. Not only does this tendency not necessarily configure a bond, but it turns out to be founded more on the nature of the profession, on the physiognomy of the activity carried out and not on economic interests in the strict sense of the word. The element that for example inclines warriors or farmers, artisans or bureaucrats towards a certain world image cannot be formulated in terms of economic interests and does not depend on the quantity of wellbeing or economic resources at their disposal. Rather it refers to the physiognomy of a relationship with the world that is rooted in their social identity and unites subjects who, from the strictly economic point of view, possess interests that may even be opposing. There is a *tendency* among castes, classes, social strata and particular characteristics of the religious world image that is rooted in the concrete physiognomy of the contribution that each group gives to social reproduction: a sort of ontological-social root to the world image.

It is on this basis that for each of the great religious *Weltbilder* Weber identifies the social stratum that was its carrier, propagator and privileged representative:

> If one wishes to characterize succinctly, in a formula so to speak, the types representative of the various strata that were the primary carriers or propagators of the so-called world religions, they would be the following: In Confucianism the world-organizing bureaucrat; in Hinduism the world-ordering magician; in Buddhism, the mendicant monk wandering through the world; [...] and in Christianity, the itinerant journeyman. To be sure, all these types must not be taken as exponents of their own occupational or material "class interests," but rather as the ideological carriers of the kind of ethical or salvation doctrine which rather readily conformed to [*sich besonders leicht vermählte*] their social position. (Weber, 1978, p. 512).

The crucial question that comes up at this point relates to identifying the elements that decide which social stratum manages to model "in its own image" the world image that is then also shared by all or nevertheless some others. The implicit answer in Weber's investigation of the world religions singles out the reasons for the success of a particular *Weltbild* as its capacity to appear more persuasive owing to something that individuals already believe, or more plausible owing to a certain experience of the world, or more suited to providing convincing answers to the challenges that a human group perceives. Hence, what essentially governs which basic features are selected for a world image are

the challenges and threats that an entire society perceives as incumbent. In addition to a world image being rooted in the inclination [*Neigung*] of a particular social stratum towards a certain type of religiosity, Weber insists that the success of a *Weltbild* depends on its suitability for the nature and physiognomy of the challenges that the natural and social, economic and political context is experiencing. The world image that best reflects the nature and dimensions of the existential threat that a society is exposed to and the forces/resources needed to deal with it is the one that succeeds.

The non-deterministic bond that links social identity and world image is also due, therefore, to the fact that in the end the image imposed upon the whole of society and all the strata is the one that is in close harmony with the social being of one particular stratum alone. "Ready conformity" between a social position's materiality and religious world image singles out the carriers and privileged representatives of a certain type of religiosity, but it is not the indispensable requirement for adopting a particular religious *Weltbild*. The various *Weltbilder* are also accepted/shared by those for whom there is no ready conformity between social position and religious world image. The expression "readily conformed to" serves to single out the social strata that are the main supporters and propagators of a particular (religious) image of the world, but this image is also shared by other social strata (sometimes by all the other social strata) for whom there is no ready conformity. Not only does a certain social position simply incline towards a world image with which there is a ready conformity, but the image that a particular social stratum adopts is not necessarily the one that readily conforms to its material condition.

In the face of conditioning by a plurality of material dimensions, *Weltbilder* possess an autonomy essentially linked to two factors. First of all, their greatly inertial nature: world images possess a duration that by far exceeds the material constellations that conditioned them, and that makes them an independent and significant factor conditioning both the material organisation of a society and the possible directions in which the same world image can be transformed.

The autonomy of the world images with respect to their material conditioning is linked, in second place, to their possessing an autonomous evolutive capacity, to the existence of an autonomous legality that governs their "lives" and that can produce significant changes – with significant effects on the ethical conduct of individuals – regardless of any conditioning of a material kind.

## 4. Weber's World Image

In Weber's line of thought, the notion of *Weltbild* is conceptualised and explicitly applied in reference to the world religions only. Nevertheless, in my opinion it is possible to glimpse its application in a different context too: in Weber's diagnosis of modernity. Or rather, the context in which he sets out the normative proposal that he puts forward on the basis of the transformations of modernity.

In the two conferences (*Science as a Vocation* and *Politics as a Vocation*), the texts in which Weber's take on his times becomes more explicit, it clearly emerges how his normative proposal on the conditions for giving a single meaning to life cannot be separated from the expression of his "own" image of the world. It is in this particularly significant sense that the author who perhaps more than any other stressed the objectivity and non-valuation of scientific work is "forced" to come face to face with undemonstrable assumptions as soon as he has to motivate a practical option, or to assess its burden on the subject. It will be helpful to outline the fundamental features of Weber's *Weltbild* in order to highlight how world image is the inevitable reference for a practical stance towards the world even in «a godless and prophetless time», since science is not able to respond in an objective – definitive and universal – manner to the question of what the world is, and, finally, since the answer to this question is the fundamental variable that decides the (non-material) burden of a certain attitude towards the world.

The first characteristic trait of Weber's world image can be seen as his denial of the existence of an objective meaning. For Weber meaning is subjective property: it is not a property of things, but a capacity of the subject. The world does not have a meaning, it does not express any normativity. This position implies first of all that he distances himself from any religious world image:

> The inward interest of a truly religiously "musical" man can never be served by veiling to him and to others the fundamental fact that he is destined to live in a godless and prophetless time by giving him the surrogates [*Ersatz*] of armchair prophecy. (Weber, 1974b, p. 153)

What is worth observing immediately is that it is not late modernity that is lacking a god and prophets, but Weber's world image. From an empirical point of view because Weber's contemporary times do not sociologically show generalised atheism, and from a theoretical viewpoint because modern science does not demonstrate atheism. As is well known, Weber defined himself relig-

iously as *unmüsicalisch*, he did not believe that scientific development in any way demonstrated the unsustainability of religious faith, instead he believed that modern science "enforced" a redefinition of the forms and nature of religious experience, that it pushed the perception of God to the sidelines, but in no way could the image of a world without God be demonstrated by means of science. There is no space for any truth in the blunt alternative between the religious and non-religious image of the world.

Not just that: Weber's times celebrated the splendour of two world images that defend the idea of an objective meaning of the world without being religious images. First of all, progress, as the secular surrogate for an objective religious meaning of the world.[1] Second, Marxism and the communist prophecy of the advent of the reign of freedom:

> Even as late as, 1906, a mere minority among a rather considerable number of proletarians gave as reason for their disbelief in Christianity conclusions derived from modern theories of natural sciences. The majority, however, referred to the "injustice" of the order of this world – to be sure, essentially because they believe in a revolutionary compensation in this world. (Weber, 1974c, pp. 275–276)

The growing modern detachment was not exclusively the result of the effects of modern science and did not in any way imply the decline of faith in an objective meaning of the world. Religion, communist progress and a godless and prophetless world were co-present world images and the choice still remained a question of faith all the same.

The place where the "nominalistic" torsion and denial of an objective meaning of the world become more evident is in the second characteristic aspect of Weber's world image.

> Every empirical consideration of this situation would, as the elder Mill remarked, lead to the acknowledgement of absolute polytheism as the only appropriate metaphysics. [...] It is really a question not only of alternatives between values but of an irreconcilable death-struggle, like that between "God" and the "Devil". (Weber, 2011, p. 17)

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[1] «Der "Fortschritts"-Gedanke stellt sich eben erst dann als notwendig ein, wenn das Bedürfnis entsteht, dem religiös entleerten Ablauf des Menschheitsschicksals einen diesseitigen und dennoch objektiven "Sinn" zu verleihen»; Weber, 1903, note 83.

There is explicit reference to classical polytheism and the rebirth of the ancient gods in *Science as a Vocation*. Equally as explicit – and repeated several times – is the distinction between polytheism and relativism. Nevertheless, it is precisely the reference to Greek classical antiquity that enables us to appreciate the differences and the effects on the subjectivity of reproposing polytheism outside a metaphysics that gives a statute of objectivity to the fight between life orders and values.

> The shallowness of our routinized daily existence in the most significant sense of the word consists indeed in the fact that the persons who are caught up in it do not become aware, and above all do not wish to become aware, of this partly psychologically, part pragmatically conditioned motley of irreconcilably antagonistic values. They avoid the choice between "God" and the "Devil" (Weber, 2011, p. 18).

In a world image that does not attribute objectivity to polytheism, but embeds it in the overstepping of a certain threshold of intensity of meaning in the relationship with objects, the boundary between polytheism and relativism loses its inevitability. For the ancients it was inevitable to choose between Apollo and Aphrodite because their struggle was an inevitable, objective conflict. Modern man only has to experience conflict and need to choose after adopting a stance with regard to life that does not let it go by like a natural event: something that not only does not turn out to be inevitable, but, from the viewpoint of a comfortable life, even turns out to be preferable. The superficiality of everyday life indicates the absence of reflexivity, the lack of distance from life that corresponds to the reign of routine and habit, to the domination of the obvious: something extraordinarily convenient that makes choosing the only demon to whom to entrust one's life strings onerous and not inevitable.

With the third aspect of Weber's world image we start to come across some of the fundamental issues to which religious world images have also tried to provide an answer. It is the aspect of human action as destiny, the heterogenesis of the ends as the logic within worldly happenings: the matter of Puritanism's contribution to creating a bourgeois method of living «instructs us in the paradox of unintended consequences: i.e., the relation of man and fate, of what he intended by his acts [*Absicht*] and what actually came of them» (Weber, 1968, p. 238). Human action in the world has to resign itself to the idea of the paradoxical nature of consequences with respect to intentions, of what is prompted by the action with respect to what the subject proposed as his aim. It is the paradoxical nature of the relationship between intentions and outcomes

that world images have tried to account for through the idea of providence and postulating an otherworldly level of compensation.

Weber's insistence on the ethical irrationalism of the world can be interpreted as a specific dimension of this aspect: namely, the denial of the idea that in the world «from good comes only good; but from evil only evil follows» (Weber, 1974a, p. 122). The world is not the place of congruence between destiny and merit, the place of coherence between the moral quality of the action and the moral quality of the effects, but the realm of «undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice, and hopeless stupidity» (Weber, 1974a, p. 122). Weber's indication with regard to the centrality of this aspect for the development of all religions enables us to cast light on a crucial point: world images possess different capacities of meaning, a different explicative power. Where the religious image had pinpointed a problem to which it responded with faith in another world, in Weber's world image this place is taken by the tragic enactment of the world's ethical irrationality as a given without remedy.

The last characteristic of Weber's *Weltbild* is disenchantment, in the dual meaning of objectivising the laws on how the world works, but also of faith in the possibility of man obtaining knowledge and experience of the world. Disenchantment does not mean more effective knowledge of the processes and conditions of life that surround us, but «[the] belief that if one but wished one could» and that «one can, in principle, master all things by calculation» (Weber, 1974b, p. 139). A disenchanted attitude towards the world is the trait of Weber's *Weltbild* that is most directly affected by modern science, but it is nevertheless still a world image, something that goes beyond scientific knowledge in the strict sense and is constituted as the horizon of expectations, as faith in the capacity of reason for which we can have arguments, but no proof. It is feeling at home in the world despite its objectivity: it is having faith without wonder.

Nevertheless, the world image alone is not the only thing that defines the individual's condition in late modernity and dictates the outlines of Weber's proposal on how it is still possible to give a meaning to life as a whole. An integral part of the problem is also Weber's analysis of the material processes that define late capitalistic modernity. It is a complex diagnosis that nevertheless can be described with three theses: the transformation of the economic cosmos into an iron cage (capitalism as the most deadly of the powers of our times); the incumbent threat of bureaucratic petrification (the cage of future servitude);

and finally material satiety owing to the overabundant availability of consumer goods.

In this material scenario, Weber's fundamental question is this: on what conditions is a conduct possible that can provide answers to the question on the meaning of life? The general lines of Weber's answer are clear: on condition that a bond can be reactivated between individual action and ethical powers. It is here that the centrality of the relationship between politics and ethics is rooted. If there has to be a relationship, the concrete physiognomy that Weber tends to give to this relationship is decided on the basis not just of the economic and material conditions in the broad sense of late capitalism, not just on precise institutional conditions, but also on the resources and the horizons of meaning made available by a particular *Weltbild* with their capacity to establish the global burden of a particular practical conduct.

The exposure of Weber's world image therefore provides the background that holds up the normative line of argument concerning the particular inflection that ethics can take on in politics. Hence, political action is guaranteed its resources of meaning. The solution that Weber proposes is for the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of intention to complete each other: an indication taking note that – in a world full of goods, by now the only world available – an ethics that radically rejects the world is unlikely to be feasible. Beware: Weber's discourse and his world image cannot demonstrate that, in particular in politics, the choice to follow the ethics of intention is ethically indefensible. He can only provide arguments to support his position and to this end he does not disdain from using strained, polemical interpretations that demand a coherent performance from the interlocutor who is hypothetically in favour of an ethics of intention. However, at the close of the lecture, Weber himself admits he is unable to provide one.

Indeed, it is not exactly a logically coherent and linear solution to toughen the excessively compromissorial tendency of the ethics of responsibility with the intransigency of ethics of intention. Nevertheless, it does respond to two diverging requirements of Weber's world image and his analysis of the present: the difficulty to radically reject the world once the world has become the only available horizon, but also the awareness of the world's ethical irrationality and the need to remain unwilling to totally adapt to its logic.

*Translated from the Italian by Karen Whittle*

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# Franz Borkenau on the Mechanical *Weltbild*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at thoroughly analyzing Borkenau's 1934 book *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild* (*The Transition from the Feudal to the Bourgeois World Image*), which not only is a hidden classic, but it is also particularly relevant in the contemporary effort to re-think technology. Specifically, the paper focuses on Borkenau's use of the term *Weltbild* with regard to its relation with modern science, mechanism, and technology, showing that Borkenau's idea of *Weltbild* represents a crucial ring in the chain between Dilthey and Weber on the one hand, and Heidegger and Foucault on the other.

## Introduction

The term *Weltbild* (world image or world picture) is contained in the title of Borkenau's 1934 book *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild* (*The Transition from the Feudal to the Bourgeois World Image*).[1] However, this title also contains the adjectives "feudal" and "bourgeois", setting up a contrast between two world images. These terms belong to completely different theoretical universes. What led Borkenau to opt for such a strange way of proceeding, due to which one of the most innovative works of historically oriented social theory is still all but ignored?

Borkenau's life is just as fascinating as his ideas.[2] Born into a well-to-do Viennese family, with an uncle being head of the political police in Austria both before and after WWI, Borkenau became a militant Communist after the War,

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[1] I'll use the 1976 German and 1984 Italian editions; the latter contains an excellent Introduction by Giacomo Marramao.
[2] For details, see Szakolczai, 2000a, pp. 26–32.

leading the youth wing of the German Communist Party. However, his disillusion was just as quick as his engagement, and by the late 1920s his political and intellectual disengagement with Communism, even Marxism, was completed. Through his old Austrian Marxist contacts he got then a position in the newly founded *Frankfurt Institute for Social Research*, becoming one of its first assistants. However, the director nominated, Carl Grünberg, died very shortly, and Borkenau found no favour with Max Horkheimer, who quickly discovered that Borkenau's Marxist credentials became shaky.

Time and place also played their role. In January 1933 Hitler rose to power and most members of the *Institute* went in exile, first to Paris, where the book was published in 1934, in German. Borkenau's options were extremely limited: he had to publish the book through the *Institute*, which employed him to write it, while he knew that his ideas and person were not appreciated. He was forced to play a hide and seek. We must peel off any aspect of the text placed there either by external force,[3] or by Borkenau's attempt to comply with the expectations of his fellow exiles. Such an effort, however, is worth the trouble, as the book is not only a hidden classic, but has a particular importance in the contemporary effort to re-think technology.

## 1. *Weltbild* in Dilthey and Max Weber

In his use of the term *Weltbild*, Borkenau represents a crucial ring in the chain between Dilthey and Weber on the one hand, and Heidegger and Foucault on the other, in particular concerning its association with modern science, mechanism, and technology.[4]

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[3] Indicating only one issue, originally Borkenau did not intend to write about manufacture. It was Horkheimer who first insisted that he must refer to the «manufacture period» in the subtitle and first chapter of the book; and then made it sure that it would be reviewed by Henryk Grossman, a *bona fide* Marxist economic historian specialised in the period, who then focused his most negative critique on this – completely alien and irrelevant – aspect of the book.

[4] Heidegger started to use the term *Weltbild* in his 1938 paper *The Age of the World Picture*, a main step towards *The Question of Technology* and its analysis of *Ge-Stell* (enframing) (both are in Heidegger, 1977). It was originally entitled *The Establishing by Metaphysics of the Modern World Picture*, and presented on 9 June 1938 at a conference in Freiburg in Breisgau on the theme of the establishing of the modern world picture (Naugle, 2002, p. 139).

## 1.1. Dilthey

*Weltbild* as a philosophical concept is closely associated with the work of Dilthey. It is part of his typology of worldviews [*Weltanschauungen*], a central aspect of Dilthey's thought, which exerted a considerable impact on the sociology and philosophy of the past century. It is also closely linked to another major part of his work, the attempt to go beyond Kant's constructivist approach to experience [*Erfahrung*], by offering an analysis of the very structure of the lived experience [*Erlebnis*].[5]

These terms are part of Dilthey's effort to overcome the agenda-setting dualism between "object" and "subject". He attempted to develop a philosophy that is at the same time *concrete* – dealing with life as lived by real human beings in the world (Dilthey, 1985, p. 25); but that nevertheless is concerned with *wholeness* – not fragmentary, disconnected individual experiences, but living the world as part of a harmonious whole. His great intuition, which he never managed to fully substantiate, was that this implies starting in the middle, instead of dividing and separating everything from the start into irreconcilable dualisms and dichotomies. *Erlebnis*, *Weltanschauung* and *Weltbild* each belong to this in-between, at the same time foundational and formative space. *Weltanschauung* and *Weltbild*, in particular, are aspects of those conceptual tools by which human beings try to make sense of their experiences, interpreting the events around them, giving and discovering meaning in their lives.

A central novelty in Dilthey, and the point where he goes beyond Kant, is the idea that the human mind (whether transcendental or not) does not simply "construct" a view by which to see the world, but rather takes for granted a concrete and yet all-encompassing "image" of the world that on the one hand is historically given, and on the other is a cognitive imposition as condition of possibility of any interpretation of our experiences. Our evaluations of the world and life [*Lebenswürdigung*][6] are already based on such cognitive structures (Makkreel, 1975, pp. 349–351).

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[5] This part of Dilthey's work was picked up by the anthropologist Victor Turner, who in some of his last writings argued that the term "liminality", developed in social and cultural anthropology on the basis of a study of rites of passage, actually confirms Dilthey's intuition; for details, see Szakolczai, 2009.

[6] Note that this word implies directionality, as rooted in the word *werden* (becoming).

The question concerns the nature of these cognitive orienting maps, in particular their sources. Dilthey was searching for this foundational level in two directions: psychology and aesthetics. However, both Dilthey and his interpreters became hopelessly entangled in the conceptual web spun around these terms since centuries. At times Dilthey gives the impression that such cognitive "world images" are themselves rooted in certain "life moods" [*Lebensstimmungen*], indicating a subjective or psychological perspective; while at other time he offers an aesthetic perspective (Makkreel, 1975, pp. 351–352). The solution to this particular problem can only be given by realising that the two are *one*. The basic "life moods" for Dilthey are not individual, subjective emotional states, but fundamental predispositions or stands of which there are very few. The term *Stimmung* is particularly helpful here, as on the one hand it refers to the musical quality of being attuned to something,[7] closely rhyming with Nietzsche's philosophising with a forking tune;[8] but on the other hand it implies a perfect fit, oneness, or harmony with the world. It implies the absence of any gap, schism, split, division at that *fundamental* level.

This point has two corollaries. First, this means that in a very real sense only two "alternatives" exist: either being attuned to the world (whether approached through Heidegger's *Gestimmtheit* "attunement", or Weber's *Objectivität*);[9] or being "split" from it, experiencing living in the world as having to accommodate oneself to an external, alien reality. These two basic predispositions are sometimes defined as "optimism" and "pessimism", but such terms have a too subjective colouring. This generates confusion, as the two basic predispositions are not symmetrical. A split represents a certain kind of *violent* dismantling of a previous, harmonious unity; and a move back from a "split" existence to an intact mode of being is by no means as simple.

Second, this *Stimmung* is by necessity an aesthetic category, not in terms of subjective feelings one might experience when encountering a work of art, rather in the sense of the profoundly aesthetic character of the two basic modes of experiencing life. The first implies beauty, grace, and radiance, an ode to life; while the second despair, nausea, glorification of suffering, deformity and ugliness. "Psychology" and "aesthetics" are thus different aspects of the same

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[7] On the etymology and semantics of *Stimmung*, see also Agamben, 2005.
[8] See Nietzsche, *The Twilight of Idols*.
[9] For a perfect representation of Weber's meaning, see the megalithic tombs of the Neolithic.

phenomena. The perspective from which their belongingness can be recognised is the philosophy of Plato, especially as exposed in the *Timaeus*.

## 1.2. Weber

Max Weber was the other main source of inspiration for Borkenau's book. Weber's significance concerning "world image" lies in radically shifting the relative weight of the terms *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung*. One aspect is purely negative: while Dilthey used *Weltbild* as part of a general typology of *Weltanschauungen*, Weber identifies the latter with ideology, and only uses analytically the former. The reason is in a passage of the *Science as a Vocation* lecture, where Weber argues that teachers should not use their position to «sell» their students «a *Weltanschauung* or a code of conduct» (Weber, 1948, p. 150). By that time the term gained a meaning different from Dilthey's, propagated by Marxist movements.[10]

On the positive side, central for Weber's use is a crucial passage in the *Einleitung*, one of his most cited passages. It indicates how Weber went beyond the dichotomy of idealism and materialism (and also how faithfully he followed Dilthey's hint about trying to stay in the middle). It states that, even though the direct sources of the conduct of life (*Lebensführung*, also taken from Dilthey's *Weltanschauunglehre*) are interests, not ideas, «images of the world» can function like «switchmen» that define the tracks alongside which actions can take place (Weber, 1948, p. 280).

Three points require further attention in this passage and its context. The first concerns the exact meaning Weber attributed to the term *Weltbild*. The term is used several times, always closely linked to its *rationalisation* and *systematisation* by intellectuals. While such an "image" is rooted in religious experiences, Weber shifts the focus to systematic elaboration. Second, the perspective from which Weber is interested in the concept is religious *revival*. Such a revival (which assumes a prior "split", or a corrupted state) cannot be simply rooted in religious experiences, but requires the work of rational systematisation, thus the work of intellectuals. This is quite a striking and surpris-

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[10] This position would be fully formulated by Georg Lukács in his famous *History and Class Consciousness*, published in 1923. It should be added that even scholars closest to Weber did not follow him in this regard; one could refer to Jaspers's important and very Weberian 1919 book *Psychology of the World Views*; or Mannheim's 1923 essay *On the Interpretation of* Weltanschauung.

ing point, as here Weber's use fits uneasily with Dilthey's terminology, show-
ing affinities with the constructionism characteristic of neo-Kantian uses of
*Weltanschauung*.

The third and central point is that the formation of such a *Weltbild* for We-
ber is connected to "taking a stand" [*Stellungsnahme*] with respect to the
world. This idea has serious problems. Such stand implies a *negative* attitude,
taking for granted a "split" image of the world as a starting point, and Weber
evidently does not even consider that another type of "stand" is possible.

## 2. World Image in Borkenau

*Weltbild* plays a central role in Borkenau's work. Following the word and spirit
of Dilthey, it refers to basic assumptions about the transitoriety and historicity
of forms of thought (Borkenau, 1984, p. 4). The heart of Borkenau's interest
are *changes* at this level, as specified in an «intermediate reflection», just be-
fore the central chapter on Descartes, where he states that his book is con-
cerned with «transformations of the forms of thought» (1984, p. 262).[11]

Following a hint from Weber,[12] Borkenau applied the term to an area that
lay outside Dilthey's scope: the (natural) sciences themselves. Borkenau is
quite conscious about the novelty of his approach, stating that the history of
science is a neglected field.

This represented a radical departure from Dilthey's project, rectifying a
major shortcoming, the neo-Kantian separation of the two sciences. Borke-
nau's work, far from accepting the necessary primacy of the scientific method
as developed in the "natural" sciences, rather argued that the mechanistic as-
pect of the modern scientific world image is itself outcome of a social process.
Such an idea seems to have affinities with the Marxist position, where "bour-
geois" science is explained by the rise of capitalism. While Borkenau pays a lip
service to this perspective, his ideas are quite different.

Partly through the mediation of Weber, Borkenau combined Dilthey's
ideas about the formative role of history with elements from Nietzsche's gene-

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[11] This terminology is extremely close to Foucault's; see his terms *episteme*, «historical a priori», and
«positive unconscious».
[12] Weber there tries to define in a conclusive manner the project underlining his *Protestant Ethic*, and
argues that another, parallel project could be devoted to the «mechanisation of technology», «the
creation and diffusion of the rationalist and antitraditionalist' spirit», and the project of a «history of
modern science» (Weber, 1978, pp. 1128–1129).

alogy.[13] This resulted in an ingenuous combination of Dilthey and Nietzsche that underpin Borkenau's work: the new *Weltbild*, or the cognitive axioms about the nature of the world, was based on a certain existential stand; and this was due to the character of the historical conditions out of this *Weltbild* emerged.

## 2.1. The Birth of the Mechanical World Image

At a first level the shift can be characterized as a contrast between the "optimism" of Aquinas and the "pessimism" of the 16–17th centuries. The change, however, was not a matter of individual psychology, rather due the collapse of the medieval world order. It was a *social* collapse, in the sense that a series of socio-political events, culminating in a state of permanent religious and civil wars,[14] rendered the vision of the world still characterizing the Renaissance untenable. Yet, in contrast to Marxists or even Hegelians, Borkenau did not establish any positive social causality, and explicitly rejected the Enlightenment idea of progress (Borkenau, 1984, pp. 9–10). Socio-political developments were "causes" only in a negative sense: the medieval worldview, as formulated by Aquinas in his theory of natural law, became impossible. The articulation of the new world image required a work of thought. This could not to be reduced to social factors, like the rise of the bourgeoisie. Following Dilthey, the solution for Borkenau emerged out of the middle, through efforts to reflect on contemporary, quite apocalyptic experiences.[15] Even Borkenau's only use of a social explanation has a Diltheyan ring: the emphasis on the gentry, defined as an «in-between» class, given that it consists of people whose social status was mostly due to their capital, and yet also had feudal privileges (Szakolczai, 2000a, pp. 146–147).

Following Nietzsche, Borkenau also tried to specify, as closely as possible, the conditions out of which this new *Weltbild* emerged. Living through the collapse of one's own taken for granted world, when the previous order of things degenerates into a series of unending and increasingly violent warfare, marked by truly apocalyptic scenes, like the sack of Rome in 1527, or St Bar-

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[13] Borkenau developed this aspect of his work together with his friend Norbert Elias; for details, see Szakolczai, 2000b.

[14] About this, see also Koselleck, 1988.

[15] See also the similar concept *metaxy* in Voegelin, 1978.

tholomew's Night in 1572, culminating in the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), is certainly an anguishing experience. Contemporaries lived their life as an existential terror, resumed by Jean Delumeau as the «century of fear» (Delumeau, 1978). Under such conditions, a harmonious fit [*Stimmung*] with the world was out of question.

At the level of "problematisation", the new way of experiencing the world was formulated through two basic assumptions. The first was anthropological, and posited a radical corruptness of human nature, crystallized in the position of Calvin, but shared by the Jesuits and the Jansenists. The second was about the very nature of the world, asserting that the world itself was corrupt, bad, or even outright evil (Borkenau, 1984, pp. 165, 182, 205, 251). Corruption is so omnipresent in the world (pp. 219–223), that it is outright an alien place (pp. 293–294). If the former position took up and deepened certain negative presumptions about fallenness contained in the works of Paul and Augustine, to be traced back to the Book of Genesis, the latter can be called outright Gnostic, in the sense of Eric Voegelin (1952).

Contemporaries were searching for an exit out of this intolerable situation, trying in this «earthly inferno» to give «meaning to a terrifying life» (Borkenau, 1984, p. 10). Borkenau starts by reviewing the positions suggested by his main sources, Dilthey and Max Weber. Dilthey's work about the 16th and 17th centuries focused on the importance of neo-Stoicism. According to Dilthey, stoic morality, with its emphasis on reinforcing the self from the inside, rendering it stable and constant even in the face of overwhelming external adversity, played a major role in developing a new ethic of life. For Borkenau, however, this solution was restricted to the upper classes.[16]

Concerning Calvin and the radical Reformation, Borkenau agrees with Max Weber that this made a major contribution to the development of a mass morality that enabled a larger number of people to live a meaningful life in a disturbing universe, and even connected it closely and positively to the rise of the ab-

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[16] The more recent work of Gerhard Oestreich (1978) on neostoicism emphasized the broader, socio-political effects of this way of living, partly through the development of "police", "policing" and "policy", both as concrete institutions and also as ways of thinking; and even more importantly through the impact the neostoics had on the organization of the modern army. Given the emphasis attributed by Michel Foucault (1979) to the military in the development of the rational "technologies of power", and by Eugen Weber (1979) in his classic work of about the contribution of obligatory military service to the rise of modern democracy in France, the impact of neostoicism on aspects of the modern world might well be worth taking up again.

solutist state. Yet, this still remained too close to a negative experience of world collapse.

A convincing solution, which restored a degree of confidence in the world, was only found by Descartes.

## 2.2. Descartes

The chapter on Descartes constitutes the core of the book; a centrality visible by its sheer size. It contains a number of striking insights, anticipating ideas by Heidegger and Foucault, while still preserving its freshness and originality, and also the challenge it represents for a deeply-rooted self-understanding of modernity.

Borkenau's central claim is that only Descartes managed to offer a proper solution to the anxieties of the age at the level of the "mood" [*Stimmung*] that underlies a world image. Here we again must take the word *Stimmung* seriously. This must express some kind of fit or oneness with the world at large. Otherwise, a moral or religious ideology that merely expresses the crisis cannot have a healing effect, and only reinforces, even fixates a schismatic perception. Philosophical schools and religious sects that merely express the tensions of a historical crisis cannot provide a world image that enable human beings to live with a degree of security and confidence. Modern science, up to our "knowledge society", pretends to offer such a comfortable and secure vision; and, according to Borkenau, to a significant effect its foundations were laid down by Cartesian philosophy. This is why Descartes, even more than Kant, is the unremovable cornerstone of modern thought, whose fundamental contribution cannot be questioned without facing marginalization, even ridicule. Borkenau attempts to explain why this is the case.

The fundamental conviction underlying Descartes's oeuvre is extremely simple, though the full implications of the position are not so easy to realize. It is that the solution to the profound existential and socio-political crisis can be given at the level of "mere" thought and knowledge. The radical novelty of the position can be illuminated first by contrasting it with Weber's idea in *Science as a Vocation* that scholars should not impose on their students an overall vision of the world. This is exactly what Descartes did – *in a way*.[17] Weber of

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[17] One way to put this is that for Descartes *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung* exactly coincided. This implies the reduction of the "vision" of the world to a purely cognitive map.

course meant taking up a political position. Descartes's vision is not ideological, but purely scientific, though with theological implications. The singularity, and also the problem, with Descartes's position lies elsewhere: it concerns the idea that *solutions* to the problems of the *broader* social and political world can be provided by *pure* knowledge. In other words, *knowledge saves*.

Up to Descartes, men of knowledge had various possibilities in putting their ideas into practice. Most of these were religious: to found a sect or monastic order of like-minded people. Philosophical schools in Antiquity were small, closed, and strictly restricted to the aristocracy. Any thinker searching for real effects needed patrons. The new idea of Descartes, and the reason for its attractiveness, was that all this is not necessary: a single thinker can change the order of the world by simply sitting down, placing a sheet of paper in front of him, and discover the true nature of the eternal world.

The radical novelty of such a perspective is the combination between setting aside and defining "pure" thinking as something completely separate from life as experienced, on the one hand; and to make a claim for the external, socio-political potency of such *pure* thinking/ knowledge on the other.[18] Of course, human beings "thought" even before Descartes. But this thinking was not separated from participation in reality. The person who performed the work of thought was either identical with the person who made the decision – the artisan, the statesman, or the commander; was a councilor or affiliate to these; or was somebody merely ruminating on general matters, without any effective power. The moment in which a "thinker" pretended to "solve" problems, outside the entire fabric of interwoven institutional arrangements, he became a sectarian heretic with minimal hopes for success, as even declaring direct divine inspiration implied a delicate uphill battle (after all, even Jesus was crucified). Descartes went beyond all this – and evidently succeeded: his life was not taken away, and we still live in the mental universe "discovered" or "created" by him. How did this happen?

Borkenau addresses this question at three levels: Descartes's personality, his life experiences, and the character of his thought. Concerning the first, Descartes possessed an exceptional intellect, but he soon developed a similarly exceptional pretence on this basis: anything that happens in his personal de-

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[18] The ambivalence is inevitable here, as Descartes is halfway between Bacon, for whom knowledge was power, and Kant, whose focus was on the power of thinking. Here again, Descartes's position can be characterized as an exact coincidence between knowledge and thinking.

velopment must have exemplary value (Borkenau, 1984, pp. 268–269). Such self-confidence gave him a great force, but also a terrible doubt, as he became intensely preoccupied with anything happening to his education: whether his studies promoted his movement forward, or only wasted his time. It was this conviction that gave him the force to break away from the entire corpus of scholastic knowledge; but – given that doubt became the driving force of his thinking – it turned his entire life into a permanent crisis, being continuously assailed by anxiety.

The word to characterize such an attitude toward one's own intellectual capacities is *hubris*. This is a central term for Greek legal thinking as well as mythology, hubris being distinguishing feature of Prometheus, the titan, selected by the Sophists as their hero. The idea that knowledge saves, the intellect having a unique significance in human life, is also a basic conviction of various Gnostic movements and sects. Thus, even at the level of basic personality structure, Descartes had a fundamental affinity with the Sophists and the Gnostics.

Given his learning and intelligence, and also due to his deep religiosity, Descartes was aware that such hubris and excessive importance attributed to the intellect and in particular the pursuit of the method of doubting could compromise his salvation. It is here that the most important personal experience of his life provided reassurance, where – beyond the stove-heated room, where he coined *cogito ergo sum* – a crucial role was played by a series of dreams, which Descartes interpreted as giving divine approval to his "method" (Borkenau, 1984, pp. 282-5).

Descartes was thus ready to offer a solution, through knowledge, to the problems of his age; even to human life itself. This solution has so much become the taken for granted foundation of our life that its specificity is difficult to see; indeed, most people would consider that Descartes simply "discovered" something. Yet, the idea is highly specific, and extremely problematic. Its central core is the following. The "mind" and the "body", or the human intellect and the external world are completely separate – a perspective that is simply a hypostasis of the most simple and unreflected part of human existence: here I am, writing this article, and outside me there are this computer, the furniture in the room and the park across the street, just being there, independently of my being and action. The second step is the idea that this *external* world, everything that is outside human life, not simply exists, but is governed by *laws*, which are similarly *external* to human or even organic life, and are furthermore

*mechanical*, thus follow identical, predictable regularities (Borkenau, 1984, pp. 355-64). Given that these laws are not affected by human action, they are also outside the scope of the existential and socio-political anxieties of the period in which he was living. The world is not chaos, rather a perfectly functioning mechanical whole. Only the human world is chaotic, whose order however can be assured and restored by imposing on it a conformity with the mechanisms governing nature. Human and social life can also return to normality and order if such natural order, with its mechanical regularities, is taken as the model of human existence. The implication of Cartesian pure science and pure rationality is an effective and in a way optimistic mass morality: one simply must take as model for life the mechanical laws of nature, which are equal for all. In this way Cartesian meditations replace the *Imitatio Christi* with the imitation of nature, prescribing a similar way for the social and human sciences, which they are indeed increasingly following. The proportionality of a harmonious and beautiful order of the cosmos, which we can only apprehend – as we do it all the time, for e.g. when we listen to the singing of a bird[19] – by participating in it, is replaced by the mechanical and quantitative, equalitarian perspective of an external world that, due to the predictive regularity of its laws, is no longer alien. Science and knowledge, which discover the external regularities of the "natural world" indeed solved the problems and thus have a saving power. Q.e.d.

## 2.3. Assessing the Cartesian Solution

The Cartesian solution offered a way out of a schismatic world, restoring meaning to life, but at a tremendous price; no surprise that such an idea did not occur to anybody before the terrifying anxieties of the 16-17th centuries. It simply severed the link between human beings and the surrounding world, ending our participation in the cosmos, thus rendering the experience of alienation, or living in an external, alien world, not simply a matter of individual or social pathology, but the natural condition of human existence. It also opened the way for a infinite growth of the will to knowledge. It must therefore be explained how such an idea could have been accepted at that moment; and why does it survive up to our own days.

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[19] On the philosophical significance of the position of Descartes concerning birds and their singing, in contrast to the views of Augustine, see Matthews, 1999.

Concerning the first question, the answer indeed is in the conditions; but we must be precise here. The explanation lies in the peculiar manner in which Descartes restored an "optimistic" *Lebensstimmung*. The medieval and Renaissance world picture was not optimistic in a "subjective" sense, rather simply exuded a confidence in the nature of the world, thus finally overcoming the "dark ages" that came after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Once this world image collapsed, human beings in Europe, each and every one of them – though especially those living in centres like cities or courts – needed some kind of personal reassurance about the meaning of life; some reason for continuing to go on living, and not just surviving. Descartes managed to provide exactly this. The terrible price of the Cartesian solution was accepted partly due to the world-rejecting component strongly entrenched in the Scriptures, and partly to the tempting egalitarian aspect of Cartesian rationality, which made it possible that, as first pointed out by Rousseau, some kind of "participation" was restored in this way, though not in the *cosmos*, but in politics. However this was nothing but a mere palliative, given that politics was reduced to the performance of mechanical duties, governed by the purely formal, mechanical regularities of the economy.

The problem with the codification of such an exterior position is not simply a negative break with participation, a resignation to giving up the idea of a *cosmos*, with its proportions and harmony, but – and here I move beyond Borkenau – of not just tolerating but positively affirming a non-participatory mode of existence, the position of the *outsider*. Here we need to bring in a concept from contemporary anthropology, the figure of the Trickster (Horvath, 2008), and admit that in so far as the Cartesian *Weltbild* of the universe is concerned, the "world" is indeed created by the Trickster (Hyde, 1998). Such raising of the outsider into a not simply tolerated but normative position also implies that the machinations of actual tricksters become impossible to recognize, directly preparing the conditions for the 20th and even 21st century, where trickster figures in politics become celebrated as charismatic leaders of their people.

This shift from the classical understanding of "natural law" as a beautiful cosmos to a universe of mechanical exterior regularities also implied unlimited trust in something that was quite unreliable: the sheer regularities of a dehumanized and despiritualised universe. And while for Descartes, just as for Newton, the discovery of purely mechanical regularities, to be formulated through mathematical expressions, were part and proof of a theological position, even-

tually leading Leibniz to return through them to a universe of proportion and harmony, even divine providence, its untenability was rendered evident by the Lisbon earthquake, and exploited by Voltaire to maximal purpose. The shaky foundations of subjective optimism were thus shifted, with Kant, whose philosophical position was drastically altered as a consequence of the Lisbon earthquake, into a "constructivist" position, further elevating the status of the abstract thinker. The ever progressing "democratisation" of such a position through Husserlian phenomenology, mass media and social constructivism ensured that in today's internet world everybody can *think* that he or she is living in a world "constructed" by oneself.

Descartes's position was perfectly compatible with the political philosophy of Hobbes, just as Kantianism has strong affinities with the political philosophy of Rousseau, who was indeed one of Kant's preferred thinkers, and corresponded to the shift in European politics from absolutism to democracy. The deep problems underlying this position were recognized by Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), as Borkenau argued in the concluding chapter of his book.

## 2.4. Pascal

The fundamental difference can be recognized at the level of personal character. If Descartes' project was driven by unlimited hubris, Pascal's response to the crisis of his age (he was born into and brought up during the Thirty Years War) was humility. Hubris or humility are not just a matters of subjective preference, but have a fundamental affinity with the respective visions of the world. The central aspect of Cartesian hubris was already identified and dismissed by Shakespeare, in *Hamlet*; in fact, it is the heart of the dilemma of that play. Even if «time is out of joint» (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.189), a single human being *cannot* and *should not* try to "set it right"; this is outside human possibility. The very idea destroyed Hamlet. Taking up a "stand" of trying to "resolve" the problems of the "world" is absurd, implies nihilism, as recognized by Nietzsche.[20] This is because no matter how much the problems of an age seem overwhelming, the "world" as such does not change due to it; and if philosophers and mystics for centuries and millennia all around the globe asserted that

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[20] See for e.g. *Gay Science*, No. 346.

the world indeed was a cosmos, they must have had a reason for doing so. Pascalian humbleness represents a return to this basic position.[21]

In fact, the idea of a *return* is exactly the reason why Borkenau finished his book by a chapter on Pascal and the need for humility. As, while the book has no concluding chapter, it indeed does have a conclusion, explicitly evoking a crucial passage from Rainer Maria Rilke, the concluding phrase of his *Archaic Torso of Apollo*: «You must change your life»;[22] or a call for conversion. Beyond a religious concern, as conversion is usually interpreted, and which is clearly not intended here, Borkenau alludes to a move between two fundamental attitudes, or basic stands with respect to the world: a mechanical vision of the world, based on experiences of anxiety and terror; and the recognition of the world as a beautiful *cosmos*. Conversion implies a tearing away of oneself from a dehumanized and spiritless universe, back to recognizing the beauty of the cosmos.

## 3. Conclusion

Modern science, since the discovery of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, does not live inside the mechanical image of the world. Yet, this does not mean that Borkenau's work has no direct relevance for the present. Apart from the lasting in-depth effects of this world image, it is still a dominant force in its most mechanized form in an area that since decades, together with genetic engineering, is at the forefront of scientific and especially technological progress: communication technology. This can be seen through a short glimpse into the recent, milestone book published by Roberto Calasso (2010).[23]

Calasso's work is an in-depth study of the oldest layers of the Vedanta, the *Brahmana of the hundred ways*. Yet, right at the start of its concluding chapter Calasso makes it clear that his purpose is contemporary, and from a particular diagnostic angle: the *Satapatha Brahmana* is a «powerful antidote to the actual mode of existence» (Calasso, 2010, p. 417). This is because it offers a «world

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[21] Not surprisingly, humbleness or humility is not a theme in Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations*.

[22] «Du mußt dein Leben ändern»; the exact words used by Borkenau are «das Leben zu verändern» (1976, p. 559).

[23] For a recent attempt to trace technological thinking even further, into the Paleolithic, see Horvath, 2010.

image» [*immagine del mondo*] that represents the exact opposite of the modern image of the world, rendering this image visible. In the *Brahmana*, the religious pervades the smallest gestures, while the modern world image is secular, thus the «incompatibility between the two visions is total» (p. 419). The contrast is also visible in their attitude towards two basic modes of thinking, defined as «connective» and «substitutive». Traditionally, the «connective» always preceded the «substitutive». Thus, in the *Brahmana*, it is because things in the world are connected in so manifold ways, and because such connections are to be cultivated and preserved, that certain sacrifices must be performed. This can be called an «analogous» way of thinking. In the modern world, however, where formal acts of sacrifice became unthinkable, emphasis shifted to the «substitutive» mode of thinking, with connections being established on the principle of mutual substitutibility. This way of thinking – and here we jump right into the heart of the present – is termed *digital*.

The shift from "analog" to "digital" is most evident in our days in communication technology; but for Calasso this is only part of a long-term historical trend, connected to experimentation and quantification, based on the principles of repetition and substitution. This is usually interpreted as scientific or technological progress, the two perceived as almost identical. Yet, for Calasso there is some irony in the fact that while modern intellectual life considers the ritual killing of an animal barbarian, literally millions of animals are killed daily in slaughterhouses in the most mechanical and soulless manner. We might be more "developed" technologically, but we are by no means more "noble" – using another central Nietzschean word.

Understanding the connection that existed in the past between nobility and sacrifice[24] would help us retrieving our links with our past which – and here, in the very last sentence of the book, the striking parallels with Borkenau's project become suddenly radiant – could help us «to restart again» [*partire di nuovo*]» (Calasso, 2010, p. 451).

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[24] Calasso here suggests a move beyond Girard's understanding of sacrifice (2010, pp. 434–435). The point should not be taken lightly, as Calasso published practically Girard's entire oeuvre in Italian.

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# The *Weltbild* Concept According to Ernst Cassirer[*]

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### ABSTRACT

The intention of this paper is to ask Cassirer, within the framework of an ideal dialogue, a fundamental question: does the notion of *Weltbild* exist and, if it does, how has it taken shape in his philosophy? In order to do so, the paper briefly defines Cassirer's theoretical reference background and then it analyzes the question of the construction of the "worlds of sense", focusing in particular on their connections with language, myth, art, and knowledge.

## Conceptual and Methodological Background. *Weltbild* and Autotelia of Symbolic Forms

The intention of this paper is to ask Cassirer, within the framework of an ideal dialogue, a fundamental question: does the notion of *Weltbild* exist and, if it does, how has it taken shape in his philosophy? In order to do so, our essential strategy requires firstly to briefly define his theoretical reference background in a conceptual way which is neither philological nor historiographical.

The ideal background for Cassirer's argument consists, on the one hand, of the phenomenological approach, which justifies the "natural" symbolism of consciousness. It was this approach, with its gnoseological-style validity, which Cassirer, ever a fervent upholder of phenomenalism, employed in order to outline his very first indirect debate, with the views upheld by the young Heidegger, in the two-year period from 1912 to 1914. On the other hand, the reference background consists of the genealogical analysis of the forms of construction of the truly human dimension, or rather, the symbolic-cultural dimension;

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such forms are defined by Cassirer, in his later years, as autonomous and auto-telic spiritual functions, capable of producing not only specifically designated individual symbolic constructs, but also the cultural spheres, or worlds of sense which these constructs include: language, myth, art, science. The dynamic principle of autotelia characterises the function which creates the particular symbol and configures the symbolic reference sphere: this means that this function *self-determines dynamically*, not just once and for all, continually set-ting out conditions for itself and rejecting hetero-determinations. This dy-namicity, although free, is also oriented towards individualisation and is mir-rored, during "periods of grace" in history (and not only the history of cul-ture), by a typical and "model" precipitate of history. That is to say, it is mir-rored in a symbolic construct, which is of an extremely relevance due to the fact that the universal and the particular come together perfectly within it; it is an «oeuvre», yet also an act, a rite, a momentous historical event (Cassirer, 1929, p. 25), in which the specific formative function is condensed and realised. It is this "special" model, prototypical and altogether inexhaustible, which is de-fined by Cassirer as the original symbolic phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]: *what simply is, is, with no more explanation needed.*

That said, Cassirer points out the fundamental difference between *Ur-phänomen* and the «basic phenomena» which form the grammar of symbolic consciousness, taking us back to where we started talking about the conceptual reference background; it is the network of creative functions of «objectivity» in which the reality of culture *sui generis* leads the way for being the anthropo-logical «signature» of our species. Man is an *animal symbolicum* due to his mental and conscious make-up. The fact that this topic can define the philoso-pher's entire theoretical outlook is demonstrated by the fact that the corner-stone of the primacy of the natural phenomenology of consciousness reap-pears, in simple terms, also in the *Nachlass*; in particular, it appears in the col-lection of notes and observations contained in the first volume of the unedited manuscripts, which should have been the fourth volume of Cassirer's system-atic work, the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.[1]

Secondly, let us now turn our attention to the phenomenological investiga-tion of consciousness. We are never walled-in behind our intra-subjective con-

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[1] The late J.M. Krois, curator of the critical edition of Cassirer's posthumous writings and fine inter-preter of the philosopher's works, rightly entitled this text *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen*; see Cassirer, 1995.

sciousness; on the contrary, not only do we *experience* it perceptively as passers-by from one state to another, but also as *agents* and *operators*. The three basic phenomena, which we are unable to explain any further since they constitute the key to reality, are 1) the phenomenon of the "I", 2) The phenomenon of action and 3) the phenomenon of work (Cassirer, 1995, p. 170). In Cassirer's words: the Self, the Other, the World. The third phenomenon corresponds to the object, to reality, where the construction of sense takes place in the perceptive, acting, working consciousness. It is upon this basic and transversal selective and constructive grid that the individual directions of consciousness are rooted. Let us not, however, think that strict divisions exist between the three basic phenomena; on the contrary, as Cassirer states paradigmatically for all forms, starting with language itself, the living flow which connects these phenomena is the spontaneity of their vital and spiritual energies, necessarily projected towards their own symbolic embodiments. That is to say: the forms of perceptive and sensorial elaboration which, through their own making, primarily reveal "the real" to human vision according to a specific orientation of sense, which is also a figural style, are referred to by the philosopher as *symbolic forms*. Axes (functions) of symbolic consciousness, individual and unmistakable products, spheres or worlds of sense, all these meanings merge in the conceptual constellation of symbolic forms. The latter are autotelic: having a purpose in and not apart from themselves [*Selbstzweck*].

These arguments lead us to state that the typical styles of construction for each formative function can be equated to the notion of *Weltbild*, and can be declined to the plural [*Weltbilder*] right from the outset. This wording, whenever it appears in Cassirer's writings, could be translated as: *the world of myth*, *the world of science*, etc. (Cassirer, 1999, p. 89). It is not a case of advocating one particular hypostatisation over another, something that Cassirer would find inconceivable, but of suggesting an equivalent, to indicate in the autotelia the typical constituent and auto-descriptive structure of each symbolic principle *as much towards itself* as *towards the sphere of its own self-realisations*. Such a thesis is highly premature here and comes from the analysis of the fundamental systematic function performed in relation to Hermann Cohen's overall idea of the ethical doctrine of freedom as an autotelic form, which self-determines dynamically and not just once, continually setting out conditions and creating challenges for itself. This careful scrutiny occurred in the same period (1912–14) as the debate between Cassirer, adherent to the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, and the young Heidegger, at that time restless inter-

locutor of Rickert. This debate had already touched on the question of reality and the question of truth as correspondence, a topic which Heidegger later took up, in perpetual conflict with Marburg neo-Kantianism, both in *Kant und das problem der Metaphysik* (Heidegger, 1973[4], p. 83–84) and in *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*.

In order to understand and "unravel" the philosophical-political implications of this topic, our brief sketch of Cassirer's theoretical background needs a third step, i.e. we must take for granted the theoretical heart of the *Realität-problem*, whilst making reference to the historiographical and historical-conceptual reconstructions set out elsewhere (Henry, 1990, pp. 445–458). We must do this in order to understand how the constant and well-discussed rejection of the definition of gnoseological realism paved the way for Cassirer's own theoretical view of it as the philosophy and science of culture. As such, his thinking inspired some decisive acquisitions within the qualitatively-inspired social sciences, as well as within aesthetics as an interpretative discipline of the symbolic-perceptive phenomena of present time. In fact, if we look at the direction of the gnoseological debate over the last fifty years, it becomes unnecessary to point out the distinction between sensation and perception, insofar as it is not in itself worthless; however that may be, and finding ourselves with Cassirer at the heart of the philosophy of neo-criticism, let us remember that perception designates a complex and structured cognitive process which includes a wide range of individual feelings and refers them to a given "quid" which differs in respect of both the percipient and the other givens. The single symbolic function colours and shapes the numerous perceptions it addresses according to its own characterising form.

## 1. A Question of Reality, the Truth of Being, Styles of Construction of the Worlds of Sense

> Question: What is Being? What is Reality?
> Answer, from an enchanted illustrated children's book: If this [a sheep ridden by a Martian] lives in a book, then this sheep also exists. (Cousseau, 2010, p. 7)

In other words: could we picture an image which consists of nothing other than its external aspect, without validating the objection that the most important thing is missing? The answer to the question about validity is yet another question, or a need – the need for there to exist a construct endowed with sense, in

the form of an image of the world. From the above, we know that, according to Cassirer, every symbolic form contributes in a particular way (modality) to the formation of both the concept of the "I" and the concept of the "world". The modality is understood as a principle of the context and style of construction, since it circumscribes and gives rise to the semantic sphere which gives sense to that which it contains. For example, certain spatial configurations can be adequately represented as an artistic ornament in one case and as a geometrical figure or a mythical-magical iconic formula in other cases.

This can occur because language, myth, art and knowledge are not merely mirrors which do nothing more than reflect the images of a datum of the internal or external self (the being): they are not images duplicated within the two selves, but rather they are the truly bright sources, the conditions of seeing itself, just as they are the source of all formative activities.

Cassirer follows a dual strategy. On the one hand, he puts forward arguments against the mimetic theory of knowledge assuming only the original or natural symbolism of consciousness, the representation of consciousness in its entirety, which is already contained in or about to develop in every instant of conscious activity itself. On the other hand, he introduces a formative spontaneity (which is poetic only in terms of the consistency of its individual precipitates) into the cultural, linguistic, mythical, artistic, logical-mathematical products and into the reality *sui generis* of culture. It is a reality which is in conflict with us, which resists us and which we must confront, with a modality and a structural style which differs from the way in which science apprehends and processes reality. Even the mathematical formulae with which physical sciences decipher natural phenomena are a result of the very same symbolic consciousness. It is not actually acceptable to conceive of an insurmountable duality between the principle of validity and formation on the one hand, and the world of effects which such a principle puts into action and renders consistent, tangible, accessible and capable of being interpreted, on the other hand. This is the unifying motive between all the functions of symbolic productivity, from language and myth to science, by way of art. In fact, Cassirer's purpose was always to achieve a reconciliation between the universality of the formative code and the particularity of the single result, not in an abstract way but through the unity of living manifestations, that is through individual cultural artefacts which are themselves conceived and limited in the individualised context/world of sense. This world of sense is indeed the only thing that can make

them open to the interpretation and reflection of single symbolic worlds, these clearly being intrahistorical and potentially universalizable.

As a confirmation of this, what Cassirer disagreed with in his writings and in public debate was Heidegger's stance with regard to the problem of knowledge, starting from the early years of the last century, up to the posthumous notes in Cassirer's *Nachlass*, which concentrate on the contradictions of Heidegger's later gnoseological ideas. The origin of the deviation lies in the gnoseological theory, the theory of ways in which a valid apprehension, i.e. one that is true to reality, is activated, and consequently, the epistemological theory, the reflection on assumptions and on the status of the different sciences which, in their reciprocal autonomy, analyze the different aspects of their own configurations. Of particular relevance are Cassirer's observations on *Kulturwissenschaften*. In the pages of the *Nachlass* which deal with the persistent confusion, both in *Sein und Zeit* and in the works of Heidegger's *Kehre*, we read that:

> It is not possible to separate the ontological from the ontic, the individual from the universal, as Heidegger seeks to do – as the one is found only in the other. We [Cassirer] conceive the universal as "objective spirit" and objective *culture*. [...] It is here where we differ fundamentally from Heidegger – for us, the objective spirit is not born and does not die in the structure of daily life – the "impersonal" does not only consist of the vague social form of the mean, but rather in the form of the *supra*-personal sense – and this supra-personal aspect means that Heidegger's philosophy has no basis.

We might, if we are feeling generous, believe that such a basic theoretical irregularity disappears with the *Kehre*. This is not the case, however. Let us consider Heidegger's notion of *Unverborgenheit* [unhiddenness]; according to this, we can *autonomously develop* (and hopefully with adequate critical efficiency) the reading perspectives already identified by Cassirer in order to weaken his opponent's structure. We will see how this notion comes into play particularly in the Heideggerian definition of the connection between the truthfulness of vision as non-concealment and the ontological validity of that which is acquired from the vision itself. It is, therefore, necessary to retrace in a

stylised yet exhaustive way the stages of the retranscription of the myth of the cave, carried out by Heidegger in his essay course *Vom Wesen der Wahreit*.[2]

Let us make clear to start with that, according to Heidegger, the veiling as an initial condition of the existence-Being connection, as well as the entity in its own effectual singularity, progress through stages and that the unveiling of the entity, and the entity's increasing visibility from the point of view of the human being is connected to the progress of the unveiling of the Being, as a condition of seeing the entity. From this perspective, if we consider the Platonic metaphor referred to by Heidegger, the human being always has a connection with the non-veiling, even when s/he finds her/himself at their lowest point, chained at the back of the cave. In that condition, s/he sees only shadows and is unaware as to whether s/he is perceiving only the image of the entities and not the entities themselves. In the second stage, the human being is released from his chains. Now s/he can turn around and look at the entities in the light of day, in a place of brightness and clarity where s/he can finally grasp them as phenomena and no longer as images of entities; these phenomena have an added ontological value since, according to Heidegger's reading of Plato, they are more "ontic" and therefore more real than the shadows.[3] In the third stage, the human being chooses light, chooses to free himself and take shelter in the light. In the Platonic lexicon, s/he contemplates the Idea, as a source and fountain of the viewable and visual perceptive faculty. To my view, this is Heidegger's interpretation of Plato.

In the previous transposition of Heidegger's philosophy, the parallel between the definitive Truth of Being and the unveiling of the Being should be obvious. The unveiling which the philosopher describes in his three stages takes place exclusively in the visual dimension. The metaphor of the sight of the entity revealing itself to the Being and of the interrelated perceptive processes, is reflected in the definition of θεορία. This is a somewhat weighty legacy, if we also consider it as the exclusive strategy for apprehending the Being.

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[2] I have drawn frequently on the clear reformulation by E. Caruso *Die Wahrheit bei Heidegger*, an unpublished manuscript presented at the Philosophisches Kolloquium organised by Volker Gerhardt, Humboldt University, Berlin, 20 January 2011.

[3] Against this misunderstanding see Rudolph, 2011: «Long before the contemporary debate on image sciences [*Bildwissenschaften*] Ernst Cassirer anticipated this diagnosis in his Warburg essay *Eidos und Eidolon*, in the context of an exegesis of Plato. There he observes that in Plato the relationship between archetype [*Urbild*] (*eidos*) and image [*Bild*] (*eidolon*) is primarily characterized not by *mimesis*, but rather by participation, by *methexis*. Original and copy share in one of the other».

In this case, the Heideggerian legacy becomes occlusive, limiting the scope of human perceptive elaboration to a single, exclusive and binding dimension, organised in the same way as an ontological hierarchy, composed of assiologically structured stages between ontological substance and the unveiling of the Being. We must finish by developing the observations made by Cassirer and Goodman on the all-consuming supremacy of the logical-visual paradigm, in order to dignify the different symbolic modalities of sublimation/interpenetration of substance in multiple images of the world, complete and hospitable for the human beings who created them.

## 2. Transmission of Sense due to the Contamination of Artistic Genres. Beyond the Original-Copy Dualism

To start with, we must seriously consider this last possibility, that is, we must assume the reasonableness of an anti-foundationalist and anti-representationist perspective which asymptotically seeks the completeness and beauty of the symbolic construct in terms of its quality and level of significance. We must do this, albeit in an interlocutory manner; if we are not willing to take this step it would mean that we would still feel obliged today, perhaps unknowingly, to pay tribute to the legacy of Heidegger's onerous and despotic ontology, and to a philosophical approach based on the relationship between the epiphany of the being and the truth of the entity, especially in the purely theoretical dimension.

In contrast with this undue supremacy, Volker Gerhardt tells us that: in the times of sundials, the shadow which marked the position of the daily star in the sky was the corporeal, authentic and existent sign of the temporal instant, something fundamental in the sequence of the individual and collective lives of the human aggregations living in a given time, in a given place.[4] In actual fact, the word *Abbild* has three meanings in the German language:

1. (*Bild*) image, portrait.
2. (*Wiedergabe*) copy, reproduction.
3. (*Darstellung*) representation.

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[4] Citation taken from the debate occurred at the Philosphisches Kolloquium, cited in the previous note.

By affirming the full autonomy – *alias* autotelia – of the constituent forms of viewing the world as independent yet, at the same time, monadic and autarchic dimensions of sense, Cassirer remains throughout his entire philosophical and biographical journey one of the most consistent adversaries of the supporters of realistic gnoseology, based on *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, surpassed in this only by Nelson Goodman. If we imagine a perfect, heated debate, we can defend all the more, in respect of Cassirer (who was the precursor to and the inspiration behind Goodman), the views of an Italian observer who wrote of the American philosopher:

> The symbol is an activity of union which implies a dynamic of abstraction and which unifies, in the end, by means of a conventionalistic criterion. Between the symbol and the object to which the symbol alludes there is no relationship constrained by the quality of the object. The linguistic mechanisms which allude to an object are arbitrarily constructed: what is said in respect of an object does not imply the symbol's capacity to translate the quality of the object. In order for there to be a symbol, it is sufficient for the linguistic mechanism for constructing the symbol to fulfil criteria of arbitrary coherency, a coherency between the symbol's linguistic quality and the criteria which establish the *construction style* of the symbol. (Chiodo, 2011)

The severing of the link between the *Abbild* (alias *Bild*) and an underlying essence does not in fact mean that it is not possible to establish – within the code and according to the figural style (the construction style), typical of every single form of construction in the world – highly recognisable degrees of completeness, quality and harmony comparatively inferior or superior to a standard stipulatively considered to be a primary model, which can invalidate further "updates". In turn, these display the unmistakable mark of the symbolic form we are dealing with, either as creators of symbols or as interpreters of the energetic processes and the final oeuvres. Furthermore: a specific symbolic form may be characterised in terms of style and modality of the faculty of representation [*Darstellung*] just like art, without this involving a connection arising from an ontological original or from a pre-constituted immediate essence, which, as would occur with an incision into a cast or in relief, could link the projections/copies in the form of artistic configuration. If this can appear plausible, starting with the most material and ontic of all artistic symbolic forms, perhaps the way will be paved for more ambitious results.

### 3. A World in Motion Also Requires Sculpture to Move[5]

Sculpture is one of the very first subjects of photography. Thanks to experimental framing, selective focussing, variable optics, extremely close shots and focussed lighting, as well as techniques of collage, montage, assembly, and darkroom processing, photographers have not only reinterpreted sculptures but produced unexpected, novel creations. The three-dimensional, tactile, dense and heavy manifestation of plastic art has, over a period of time, been transformed reflexively and technically, at least since the beginning of the last century and thanks to its interweaving with arts originally considered as being of minor importance, due to being structurally reproductive – those arts which copy the original by reflecting it in the second grade eye-mirror of the camera or the movie camera. Let us not forget the opinion of Louis Aragon, who in the 1930s said that photographic art originated in the artist's workshop and had become filmic, through reportages of scenes of daily life or special collective events. Against every Heideggerian prediction, the experience of photography has become the experience of human existence.

Something which still causes a stir and utter confusion is the success of the dematerialising and perspectival *modality* through which such an ethereal and derived expressive medium as photography has managed to enter the creative interpretation of sculpture so forcefully and how photographs have influenced and challenged our understanding of sculpture. Why? Perhaps because plasticity is the most immediate manifestation of the substantial immediacy of the being still subject to Heideggerian legacy. Or perhaps because, as a cultural unsaid, its "objective" and substantive autonomy would be more valuable than the subjective forms of apprehension. Would this still occur nowadays? If it did, the gradual but continuous, unrelentless activity of anti-representationist conceptions – in other words, their positive, constructionistic formulation – would have been pointless.

Despite the persistent essentialistic legacy, the subtle pervasivity of constructionism is evident in all areas of the contemporary – multiple, polycentric, polyarchic, unshakeable and fragmentary – constellations of world visions. We must still dispel this doubt with counter-arguments. In this present condition, the *Zeitdiagnose*, which, for many observers, corresponds to the most sophis-

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[5] «Eine Welt in Bewegung erfordert dass auch Die Skultpur sich bewegt», in the words of Ernesto Luginbühl.

ticated degree of reproducibility in *Technischen Zeitalter*,[6] is seen both as the era of a true or assumed dematerialisation of things and objects of use, as well as the era of subjective relationships with regard to the economic treatment of these things.[7] This is true on the one hand. On the other hand, and relative to the first aspect, the mark of the present time would be the predominant contamination not only of genres and forms in all their meanings, but also of the life situations and experiences, the same social behaviours in respect of plasticity and manipulability of human corporeity, transformed into a changing «totalen Kunstwerk». Let us refer to a crucial and provocative event in the artistic-scientific sphere:

> The question about feasibility [*Machbarkeit*] in all ambits of human life is not negotiated only between science and politics. Here popular culture plays a fundamental role in all its graduations between artistic comparison, media communication of knowledge and criticism, and drastic matter of pain and desire: movies, music, comics, magazines, television and YouTube produce visions, nightmares, "explanations", ties, myths [...] of the new conceivability and feasibility.
>
> Since their beginning, Science Fiction und Horror reflect the development of life sciences and biology. This is not a one-sided relationship: so as popular culture serves science, the last one serves vice versa popular culture not only as a mean, but rather as a quarry of ideas, pictures, and rhetoric.[8]

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[6] «It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty» (Benjamin 1968, p. 233).

[7] As can be read on the webpage http://www.sellingthe.net/: «The originals are free. On the other hand, a unique piece [*Unikat*] exists only through purchasing. Every unique piece [*Unikat*] is a part of the multiple. [...] Then a unique piece [*Unikat*] exists if, in the framework of purchasing, an original is autographed and provided with the rules of the multiple by a buyer and an artist».

[8] The reference is to the event of great impact and enormous profile which started with the Kulturstiftung des Bundes in collaboration with Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik and the Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademia der Wissenschaft: the Congress and Mise-en-scène *Die Untoten – Life Science & Pulp Fiction* (Kampnagel, Hamburg, 12-14 May 2011). Responsibility for the overall concept, from which the previous passages are taken, lies with Dr. Karin Harrasser, Dr. Oliver Müller, Georg Seeßlen, Markus Metz (scientific curators), and Dr. Alexander Klose (Kulturstiftung des Bundes). There is an urgent need for the social and philosophical sciences to recommence a reading of the signs of the times, to reinterpret with courage and restlessness the visual, artistic and literary languages of the present day, avoiding hierarchies and purisms, accepting inter-genre contaminations

And yet... if this seems indubitable, what does remain palpable in this kaleido-scope of conversational and imaginative records is a kind of nostalgia for the myth of immediacy and eternity, the search for something primordial, intact and authentic, something that is and will remain under and beyond its transient manifestations. The myth of the origins of the self and the "we" is still some-thing that people go in search of, as if seeking the "vestals of the holy grail", so that, once its eternal essence has been obtained, this essential, substantiating nucleus can instil a sense of security and guarantee the duration of the self for everyone and the duration of the world itself, at the inevitable end of individual and collective life.

On one side, Mircea Eliade prompted us to search in escapist literature (and artistic expressions) for the imaginary and myths which we believe have vanished from our civilisation. Myths, as symbolic constructs capable of giving sense to many aspects of individual and social life, must never be condemned, and certainly not ignored, nor misunderstood, in that they are structuring ele-ments of the global mass society. Cassirer's lesson is illuminating as far as the question on the proper way of coping with myth is concerned. Symbols and representations are equally useful tools and, potentially, very dangerous, "light" arms, that is pervasive and effective in the most hidden recesses of the sphere of construction of the individual and collective self. How to address and deconstruct them is the first, unavoidable skill to be learned.

### 4. Cultures and Construction of Sense. Political Myths and *Wesenkerne*

With regard to the polyphonic, not always peaceful, connection between these styles and modalities of apprehension and the configuration of the world, and the respective historical-cultural concretisations, Cassirer prematurely pointed out one of the paths which, although well travelled by some particularly sharp and accredited intellectuals and social scientists, has yet to become the main road. Cassirer immediately rules out the idea that formative worlds – the spheres of sense created from symbolic forms – are also carriers of symbolic contents *given once and for all*, which have also made up the foundational nu-cleus, the *Wesenkerne*, of interrelated historical communities.

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(artistic, literary, visual) and rejecting the superciliousness that gives preference to the knowledge of high culture over the knowledge and practices of low culture.

On reading again Cassirer's posthumous works we discover an explicit and detailed critique of the monadic and self-centred vision of plural mono-culturalism, of the contemporary phenomenon of multicultural societies "woven like a mosaic", opposed even by Amartya Sen. Many years ago, Cassirer believed that cultures were units of function, layers for bringing up to date the "sense'; these layers cannot be considered as being limited in time or as something certain or predetermined which is deployed in time, but as the inexhaustible act of pure placement, of beginning itself. Once again: "culture" (but also "nation") is a relationship concept which encompasses the *connection* between something historically given with a dimension of *sense* and therefore with something which is always newly assigned; the notion of culture encompasses a factor which in principle is not empirically perceptible, a pure factor of sense (Cassirer, 1995, p. 283).

We are well aware that, in direct antithesis to a formal-structural perspective such as that of Cassirer, cultures were formed into cultural nuclei, made up of myths, customs, artistic productions and specific and well-defined behaviours. We also know how these "cores" were depicted as molecules, better still as monads, which produce exclusion, indifference, hostility and aggressiveness towards others. This inauspicious circumstance does not, however, exclude the fact that cultures can be an additional and free source for anyone seeking their own identity in the dimension of belonging to a group, on the condition, nevertheless, that these cultures are correctly designed, that is to say, as possibilities for deploying the sense, according to an open generative code. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. Much more frequently cultures are unduly petrified and molecularised by their adherents who concretize them in immoveable essences, transforming them into social factors of indifference, if not quite hostility, towards their non-companions. In fact, tolerance, understood as the indifferent sentiment of the "live and let die" approach, is an attitude which is inadequate for capturing and confronting the pluri-cultural and asymmetric reality of modern-day societies.

The implementational problems of a genuine, not false, peaceful co-existence between explanatory mythographies of cultures can already be seen within the context of a non-extreme, albeit consistent, *cultural* pluralism, as in the case of Europe. In fact, we should look at the example of Spain in order to guard against the risk that could be incurred if the European myths were considered as being equal to the essential cores [*Wesenkerne*] of individual cultural-national identities, that is as "fixed" components of Europe's pluralist

physiognomy, or if, as a matter of course, they were to be accepted within a framework of tolerance of manner and therefore ephemeral (to be understood, both in its meaning of moral behaviour and political practice, as well as reciprocal indifference). Behaviours and practices inspired by tolerance would be misleading, since they would substantiate false visions – visions that were essentialistic, static and monadic – of national identities and myths. We would fall into a sort of essentialistic naturalisation of foundational myths. As a solution, we can list and reveal the components which are common to rival myths, for example, the myths of the Reconquest and Al-Andalus, in order to highlight their normal, instrumental nature. Both these myths are constructs which originated on the stage of Spain's national history in order to achieve supremacy as the nation's main symbolic representations, in terms of its education, its collective memory and, in short, its political culture. The three aspects which are equally present in both these myths are: their nature as artefact, their instrumentality in terms of ideals of socio-political integration (even if these are assiologically opposed) and – the most important aspect in this argument – their *basic narrative structure.* Understanding the flexibility of such a narrative draft to produce *assiologically opposed* myths is a way of escaping from the dualistic and oppositional logic of the mythical nuclei, should it ever be discovered that, despite the pretext of originality, purity and distinctiveness, these rival myths are the product of contaminations and transformations of an important common story-line, one which is essential for both versions of the crucial events concerning the same theme, the mythologem, which is the same plot and narrative of sense being susceptible to multiple variations.[9]

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[9] In 711 a.D., armed units of Arabs and Berbers landed near Gibraltar and conquered most of the Iberian Peninsula. The resident population put up minimal resistance. One hundred and fifty years later, the complex situation had stabilised; the land which the Romans had called "Hispania" now had a new name – "Al-Andalus". In the north of the peninsula, however, kingdoms characterised by a distinct anti-Moslem political identity were formed. From a certain point onwards, the Christian rulers conducted a military campaign of expansion which was to last for centuries, up until the conquest of Granada, the last Arabic stronghold on the peninsula, by Isabella of Castile and Alfonso of Aragon in 1492. The myth of the Reconquest was actually created in the ninth century, in order to justify the Christian rulers' military expansion towards the south of the peninsula; nevertheless, the myth spread, gaining full recognition in later centuries and huge plausibility, since it contributed to the consolidation of a political identity based on a centralised, unified state, in the same way as has been the experience of modern-day Spain. For a detailed reconstruction of the origins and narratives structures of both myths see Henry, 2000.

As we can see from the previous example, the more general, and as yet unresolved, problem is the difficulty in making a scientifically accredited version not only of the notion of "cultural nuclei", but of the notion of culture itself, prevailing in public language. We should systematically turn to a vision which inspires us or which grants heuristic validity to the *standards* of qualitative social sciences and to the most sophisticated and advanced standards of the *Kulturwissenschaften*. This, at least, is the job of those who carry out intellectual activities.

As a crucial remark: here the reflexive paradigm/pattern is explicitly adopted, against the ascriptive one, in order to define collectivities such as cultural aggregations. According to the first pattern, human groups are extremely relevant as active interpreters of their own practices. In many cases there exists a "we", an aggregation of individuals that adopt the first person plural to define themselves, recognising themselves in a series of common features, but not without opacity and conflicts (Henry, 2008, 2010). From the other side, the *identity* of "we" is not a substantial unity of convictions, of rules, of objectivised rituals or materials, but it is rather a combination of routines and symbolic practices, a mobile background of references for the actions of the subjects (men and women) involved in often conflictual and asymmetric symbolic exchanges. Let us consider the corresponding human aggregates encompassing diverse combinations of such *Weltbilder* (linguistic, mythic, artistic style of grasping and creating their own worlds); they are collectivities in progress, porous, permeable, and able to produce as outfits specific interlacements (*imbrications*, the French *géographie sociale*) between socio-cultural relations and spatial and temporal relations, in turn subject to germination through contact and impact (Elden, 2005). Human aggregations outside of a social-cultural structure of space and time are not conceivable. They are what they are only by means of prototypical ways of apprehending and constructing living worlds as textures of meaning. So far, in this contemporary assumption held by some contemporary social scientists, we can recognise as general inspiration the notion of symbolic form; it indicates, as we know, an autotelic and dynamic symbolic world, a specific way of texturing meaning according to a generative code open to free and diverse outputs. This model was coined and developed by Ernst Cassirer as opposite model to an essentialistic, monolithic idea of culture/s.

So far, we agree that cultures as results of such symbolical intercourses are texture and worlds of meaning, always open to controversial and conflictual

reinterpretations. They are neither essences that determine us, nor things that we possess. We could also dismantle the holistic myth of cultural belonging like the merely individualistic belonging of the global cultural consumer. Cultures are shared practices, they are routines, sets of played games, dynamic, conflictual frameworks for culture-interchanging subjects.[10] Therefore, first of all, we need to learn how to play and the constraints and capabilities cannot be easily or automatically universalized. We have to take part in the game, to "be" part of the game itself, if we want to play. Namely, to be inside the cultural game, inside the texture of meaning, to be part of the elementary interchange practices. If we were born and brought up enmeshed in these practices, in this game, it would not be difficult to follow them. Equilibrium between strategic and creative action is needed in order not only to give birth to, but even to endorse and implement the intercourse between each individual and his/her group. Given such highly specific conditions of being part of a so-called culture – a game, in order to make the players' circle more inclusive along the way – we need to produce similar complex conditions and processes of primary and secondary socialisation in the polities we all, according to asymmetrical patterns of integration, still live in.

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[10] See Marramao, 2009; Henry, 2008, 2010, 2011.

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# "What Matters to Us?"
# Wittgenstein's *Weltbild*, Rock and Sand, Men and Women

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is both to understand Wittgenstein's view of a *Weltbild* and its role in epistemic reasoning, and to develop its consequences for our standing as social and ethical beings. Accordingly, the article falls in two parts. The first part (§§ 2-4) is devoted to present a nuanced understanding of the view of a *Weltbild* presented in *On Certainty*. A *Weltbild* is here shown to consist in a system of certainties that form the background necessary for an understanding of the world. The second part (§§ 5-7) addresses the question of how this view of a *Weltbild* should be understood outside an epistemological context and the insights it may bring to our understanding of our ethical and political standing.

## 1. Introduction

What is a *Weltbild*? To Wittgenstein, it is made up by a particular form of trivialities, all the things we take for granted, in my case beliefs such as the beliefs that the world has existed for a long time, that I have two feet and two hands, that I am a woman and that the people presenting themselves as my parents, are in fact my parents. Wittgenstein points to at least two vital features of such trivialities. First, they are not in any straightforward sense examples of knowledge claims, because they have never been subject to testing and confirmation and they are more certain to me than any reasons I may provide for them. Secondly, such beliefs must be in place if I am to be able to pose and investigate

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knowledge claims, because the beliefs form the background of any actual investigation of the world; a background that is itself not rationally justified.

The aim of this article is both to understand Wittgenstein's view of a *Weltbild* and its role in epistemic reasoning and to develop its consequences for our standing as social and ethical beings. Accordingly, the article falls in two parts. The first part is devoted to present a nuanced understanding of the view of a *Weltbild* presented in *On Certainty*. The second part addresses the question of how this view should be understood outside an epistemological context and the insights it may bring to our understanding of our ethical and political standing. This is done by introducing the idea of *an ethical Weltbild* and by evaluating relativist and transcendentalist readings of it. Finally, through a discussion of a remark from *On Certainty* §79, it is shown how our *Weltbild* is embedded in our fundamental interests, and it changes in a *Weltbild* thus arises from changes in our concerns and a related wish to live differently.

## 2. Wittgenstein on Certainty

Wittgenstein primarily develops his idea of a *Weltbild* in his very last writings, many of which are published in *On Certainty*.[1] Here, Wittgenstein is interested in investigating our epistemic language-games, that is, the grounds on which we claim to *know* something, and the conditions that have to be in place for such a claim to be meaningful. Throughout the book, Wittgenstein takes as his starting point G. E. Moore's reply to scepticism about the existence of the outer world, which in part consisted in Moore holding out his hand to his audi-

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[1] In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein uses the concept *Bild* to denote a model of reality and the phrase «Bild der Welt» to talk of the «totality of true thoughts» (TLP 3.01), anything we might think or say about the world that is actually true. The phrase «Bild der Welt» thus encompasses all possible, true beliefs, reaching beyond what we actually believe or not believe. Thus it differs from the concept of *Weltbild* found in *On Certainty* that draws together, not the assumptions of the world that are in fact true or that we know to be true, but those that we cannot think are false, that is, the certainties. In Wittgenstein's subsequent writings, we find a few uses of the concept *Weltbild*, especially around 1930-31. One example appears in a discussion of mathematics from 1930, where Wittgenstein makes a typical self-referential remark describing his own writings as presenting a *Weltbild*: «What I write is always fragments, but whoever understands from this will perceive a complete *Weltbild* (?)»; Wittgenstein, 2000, MS 152, translation by the author. And in 1931, Wittgenstein writes that looking at «Augustine's view of language may show the background of the view of language as a *calculus*, the *Weltbild* from which it springs» (2000, MS 111, p. 18). However, the concept of *Weltbild* does not appear central to Wittgenstein's thinking until the time of the writings of *On Certainty*.

ence during a lecture and stating «I know that here is a hand». Wittgenstein does not contest that in most contexts we find impossible to doubt a sentence such as «I know that here is a hand», but he insists that the impossibility of doubt makes it very unclear what role the word "know" plays in the sentence. If one claims to know something, to have knowledge, this requires that one is able to present *reasons* for its correctness, for example that one is able to refer to the investigation resulting in this knowledge (OC §40, §84).[2] However, in the case of holding out one's hand and saying «I know that here is a hand» it seems impossible to think of anything that could count as a reason for it in the sense of being more certain than the stated sentence, and when the possibility of giving reasons is ruled out, so is the possibility of talking about "knowledge".

Wittgenstein's point is that Moore's claims belong to a group of sentences that are never questioned or assessed in terms of truth or falsehood, despite the fact that they take assertive form. Instead of expressing truths about the world, these sentences seem to serve a completely different role; they are simply what we take for *granted* within a particular area of discourse. Wittgenstein gives a wide and diverse range of examples of such sentences and assumptions, often taken from Moore's attempt to refute scepticism, for example that water boils at a 100 degrees (OC §293), that *this* colour is called "blue" (OC §126), that objects in the world behave in a uniform manner (OC §135, §167), that the world existed long before one was born (OC §138), that his name is Ludwig Wittgenstein (OC §328, §470, §515) and that he has two feet (OC §148). Some of these assumptions appear to be necessary for us if we are to orientate ourselves in the world, such as the assumption that things behave uniformly, while others are definitely contingent, such as Wittgenstein's particular name. Wittgenstein even mentions assumptions which now have changed from a necessary to a contingent status, for example another of Moore's claims that he has never gone to the moon (OC §111).

What is common for this varied group of beliefs is that they play an identical role in our thinking, as that which we cannot meaningfully doubt (OC §137). They are not explicit or implicit factual claims that we have been taught are true; instead, these claims form the background that is necessary if we are to be able to learn factual claims at all. If one is to learn that someone climbed a

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[2] All references to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1969) are marked OC in the text.

mountain years before one was born, there are unsupported beliefs that one needs to accept, for example that the world and the mountains in it existed long ago. «A child [...] doesn't learn at all that that mountain has existed for a long time; that is, the question whether it is so doesn't arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with what it learns» (OC §144). In order to learn and investigate anything at all, we have to be able to rely on beliefs that are themselves not called into question, and any epistemic inquires thus depend on the fact that some beliefs are exempted from doubt and regarded as certain. Wittgenstein is not thereby pointing out a shortcoming in our knowledge of the world, but pointing to the very structure by means of which we can achieve such knowledge.

Wittgenstein describes the way that such unsupported beliefs appear in our empirical inquires in a number of ways. That we treat a belief as certain shows in the fact that we trust it completely, that we do not want to go into discussions about it, and that we use it to guide the way we act and that we never – or hardly ever – would yield to pressure to abandon it, as Wittgenstein insists that he would refuse to abandon the idea that his name was Ludwig Wittgenstein, even if this claim for some reason was heavily opposed (OC §594). Such a belief is not the subject of confirmation or rejection, but is instead, according to Wittgenstein, «used as a foundation», «isolated from doubt», «assumed as a truism», «never called into question, perhaps not even ever formulated»; it simply lies «apart from the route travelled by enquiry» (OC §87-88) or is «removed from traffic» (OC §210). Moreover, the belief «stands fast for me» (OC §116), Wittgenstein notes, «not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it» (OC §144), «it is anchored in all my *questions and answers*» (OC §103).

The certainty of some beliefs does not arise because they have a particular property or a particular privileged status, but rather because of what *we* do with them, by the fact that we ascribe them the role of certainties. It is our way of acting towards them that ensures their particular status.

> That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.
> That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *indeed* not doubted.
> But it is not the case that we just *cannot* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn,

the hinges must stay put. (OC §341-343)

Wittgenstein pictures the relationship between the certainties on which we base our investigations and the investigations themselves by means of the relationship between the *hinges* and the moving door: For a door to move, something else has to remain in place. The certainties are therefore often referred to as «hinge propositions».[3] We should however be careful here, because Wittgenstein's point here is that even if the "hinges" sometimes take propositional form, they do not fulfil the assertive role of a proposition: they belong to another category altogether (§308).[4] The hinges are that which is taken for granted in our investigations and actions, and the possibility of them being false is simply excluded as meaningless. «The truth of certain empirical propositions belongs to our system of reference» (OC § 83). Together the certainties form the necessary framework to make empirical investigations and judgments, and they therefore cannot be justified by such investigation. As Moore's sentence, they themselves fulfil the role of final reason.

## 3. Wittgenstein's *Weltbild*

The idea that the certainties constitute a unified framework or system of references marks a shift in level in Wittgenstein's investigations. The certainties or hinges are not free-floating assumptions that we take for granted individually; instead, our trust in them is acquired as part of our acquisition of the very system in which we make empirical inquires. Moreover, the possibility of inquiry and the system in which such inquiry unfolds are mutually dependent. «The system is not so much the point of departure», Wittgenstein insists «as the element in which arguments have their life» (OC §105).

Wittgenstein describes this system in a number of ways. First, as a picture necessary for us to form empirical beliefs:

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[3] See for example Glock, 1996 under "Certainty", and Hacker, 1996.

[4] Against Peter Hacker's claim that Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* gives up bipolarity as a requirement for propositions, Moyal-Sharrock argues that even if hinges cannot be false and are not bipolar, this does not mean that «Wittgenstein no longer held a bipolar view of the proposition, but that *they are not propositions at all*» (Moyal-Sharrock, 2003, p. 42). I do not want to enter this debate, the important point for our purposes is to stress that hinges do not take the role ordinarily ascribed to propositions as statements which make a substantial claim about how things stand and thus can be either true or false.

> I have a telephone conversation with New York. My friend tells me that his
> young trees have buds of such and such a kind. I am now convinced that his tree
> is. [...] Am I also convinced that the earth exists? The existence of the world is
> rather part of the whole picture which forms the starting-point of belief for me
> (OC §209-210, see also §146-147).

Such pictures are, Wittgenstein insists, both necessary and productive. I cannot, talking to my friend, question whether the world exists, because this certainty is what must be in place for his telling me about his trees to *make sense*.

This means, secondly, that the certainties and the system they comprise have a status comparable to the rules or grammar governing our language within a certain area of discourse. «I cannot doubt this proposition without giving up all judgement», Wittgenstein notes and continues, «But what sort of proposition is it? [...] It is certainly no empirical proposition. It does not belong to psychology. It has rather the character of a rule» (OC §494, see also §124). When we describe the system of the certainties we thus describe a part of the grammar of judgement. In this way, the system of certainties is part of the logic of the epistemic language-game (OC §56). Here, Wittgenstein draws on an important insight from the *Philosophical Investigations*: it is not always easy to recognise grammatical rules as they may take many forms, even that of empirical propositions or particular ways of acting – as in the case of the certainties of *On Certainty* . Moreover, the role we assign to a sentence may differ from context to context. What works as a rule in one language-game may take the role of an empirically testable statement in another. One obvious example is Moore's sentence «I know that here is a hand» – we can imagine situations where this sentence would be the answer to an empirical question, for example if someone was trying to find out whether he had his hand amputated or not (see OC §23). In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein even argues that a main source of philosophical confusion is the temptation to treat a grammatical rule governing our use of language as if it was an empirical proposition saying something about the world (Wittgenstein, 1953, §251).

Finally, in order to characterise the system of certainties, Wittgenstein introduces the concept of a *Weltbild*.

> In general I take it as true what is found in text-books, of geography for
> example. Why? I say: All these facts have been confirmed a hundred times over.
> But how do I know that? What is my evidence for it? I have a world-picture
> [*Weltbild*]. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring
> and asserting. The propositions describing it are not equally subject

to testing. (OC §162)

The concept of a *Weltbild* effectively captures the system's status as the given background on which we are able to make inquiries about the world. Moreover, it highlights the total character of the system of certainties, and the fact that we do not accept it because we are convinced that it represents the best possible standard; we simply accept it. A *Weltbild* cannot be given empirical confirmation, because it is not as it were established before and independently of the possibility of empirical inquires, talking about things as trees for example; it is given *with* this possibility. «I did not get my picture of the world [*Weltbild*] by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false» (OC §94). Similarly, a certainty is not empirically well founded, Wittgenstein insists, it is simply uncontested, that it fits well into my general *Weltbild* (cf. OC §93). Moreover, the attempt to question a part of our *Weltbild* will often leave us baffled. If I really tried to take serious the claim that the world did not exist long before I were born – but for example came into existence just a moment before – this would undermine my understanding of my family, every judgement I ever made of the past, of society, of history, of geology, biology etc. I may try to imagine what this would be like, but I would then not know how to proceed in making judgements of the world. «I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions», Wittgenstein observes of such a situation and continues: «And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house» (OC §248). We only learn to make inquiries and to act in the world, as we acquire a *particular way* of seeing the world, the way expressed by our world-picture. This is the reason why we consider someone denying central certainties, not as proposing interesting hypothesis, but as confused or even demented (see OC §155, §71, §468).

Wittgenstein thus dismisses the possibility of a neutral or unguided understanding of the world, and he even draws the connection between having a *Weltbild* and living according to a mythological understanding of the world and our place in it. «The propositions describing this world-picture [*Weltbild*] might be part of a mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be played purely practically, without learning any explicit rules» (OC 95). However, Wittgenstein further warns us, we should not to let the comparison between *Weltbild* and mythology misleads us into thinking that our *Weltbild* is always accessible to us in explicit form. Its role is to enable us to join in certain ways of acting, such as making inquiries, by guiding or rather

shaping our actions, and it is thus established as part of these practical abilities – particular forms of know-how, one could say – and it may only be present in the form that these abilities take. By drawing out and describing particular certainties, we can however make explicit the contours of particular ways of acting and thus of (a part of) our *Weltbild*.

Here lies an important point. When Wittgenstein says that the certainties of the *Weltbild* are established as part of the learning of a practical skill, he is not devaluing their importance in comparison to, for example, that of explicit forms of reasoning. On the contrary, Wittgenstein finds that such basic ways of acting are what shapes not just our language and inquiries, but also our thinking. «Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game» (OC §204, see also §110). A *Weltbild* cannot itself be rationally justified, because it does not consist of judgements that stand in need of justification, but of practices, the ways of acting that have a point for us. When asking for justification, there is at some point only one answer left, the one Wittgenstein gives in the *Philosophical Investigation*, namely that «This is simply what I do» (1953, §217).

The real difficulty is here to realize and accept that our *Weltbild* is indeed epistemologically *groundless* (OC §166). What forms the source – but not a justification or ground – for our *Weltbild* is that we acknowledge it as certain in action, thought and language, that we allow it to shape our life in a particular way, and that we remain satisfied with this shape. «Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement» (OC §378), Wittgenstein claims, adding in another place: «My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things» (OC §344). Life and *Weltbild* thus becomes two sides of the same coin: by living a certain way, we acknowledge a certain *Weltbild*, and by acknowledging this *Weltbild*, our lives take this particular shape.

## 4. Weltbild, Hard Rock and Sand, Objectivity and Change

We have now reached a crucial point for a proper understanding of Wittgenstein's idea of a *Weltbild*. On the one hand, Wittgenstein rejects the idea that basic certainties, and the *Weltbild* they comprise, can be rationally or empirically justified, because the *Weltbild* provides our groundless foundation for justification. On the other, he definitely does not think that this means that

"anything goes" in terms of *Weltbild*, as he makes clear when pointing out that, in many cases, rejection of basic certainties will simply be unintelligible for us. Wittgenstein's investigation of the certainties does not just show us that something or other must stand fast for us, but that something *in particular* must. «In order to make a mistake, a man must already judge in conformity with mankind» (OC §156). However, Wittgenstein also offers a telling picture of the difference between certainties that we cannot give up, and certainties that may change, either losing their status as part of our *Weltbild* or being integrated in it.

> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.
> The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. [...] But if someone was to say "So logic too is an empirical science" he would be wrong. Yet this is right: The same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.
> And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited. (OC §96-99)

Some certainties are hard rock, others more like sand and susceptible to change. However, the line between what must stand fast and what might be susceptible to change may be hard to draw. If something reacted to my account that the trees in my garden had just sprung into bloom by objecting that the world only came into existence a moment ago, I would not know what to say or how to react. However, if we compare this with the belief, held by some traditionalist Christians, that the world was created approximately four thousand years ago, I can imagine a life where I did believe this and I can understand the possibility of living a life in accordance with this belief, even if I do not share it and do not know of anything that could convince me to accept it. In this way, the certainty that the world did not come into being a moment ago is one of the stonier ones, while the one that the world is has existed for billions of years is more susceptible to change.

The reason why some certainties are necessary to any form of life that we can intelligibly recognise as human is that our *Weltbild* is tied to our intimate familiarity with natural phenomena (1953, §142) and our instinctive reactions and behaviour (1953, §244, p. 185; 1967a, §541; 1980, §151). It thus

evolves in a frame consisting of «the facts of the natural history of human beings» (1980, §78; cf. 1953, §25, §415 and 1967b, pp. 92, 352). This context guarantees the stoniness of certain certainties, their stable and – in that sense – objective character. However, such «steady ways of living, regular ways of acting» (1976, p. 420) are not rational or irrational, they just are. «I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified of unjustified; as it were, as something animal» (OC §359), Wittgenstein remarks, and in Cavell's striking words (1979, p. 207), he aims in this way «to put the human animal back into language».

But this cannot do, some will object. The question whether the world was created 4000 thousand years ago or came into being billions of years before is a rational one, that should be answered through scientific inquiry, and that admits of only one right answer. Well, if I were to believe that the world was created 4000 years ago, this belief would be connected to a host of other beliefs, not just belief in a Christian God, but belief in the Bible as the revelation of the word of God, a belief in the literal character of this revelation and a related belief in the restricted character of the knowledge of modern science. My belief that the world was created 4000 years ago would then stand as certain because it would be an integrated part of (a part of) my *Weltbild* and would have profound importance for what I would find it intelligible to do. The objection that the question of how the world came into being is a matter for modern science does not gain a foothold within this life. If I were to give up or change this belief that would require of me that I came to *want* to give up (this part) of my *Weltbild* together with the related ways of living, that is, the *Weltbild* would have to become unimportant or even offensive to me.

To affect such a change would, Wittgenstein insists, not come about solely through rational argumentation. «I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long ... etc. – We should be trying to give him our picture of the world [ *Weltbild*]», Wittgenstein writes and continues: «This would happen trough a kind of persuasion» (OC §262). A person may herself come to see a need for a change in her way of living. Or she may because others come to see such a need. However, if we want to provoke her to change her "regular ways of acting", if we want to bring about such change in her, that would require something like persuasion, because the aim to make her change, not one of her beliefs, but her way of acting and living.

The rootedness of a *Weltbild* in a natural history of human beings provides it with an objectivity that limits what we can intelligible recognize as a *Weltbild*. This objectivity is however not in any way absolute, as it is tied to the life and actions of human beings that are always both natural and culturally shaped. When Wittgenstein paints a picture of a continuum between the "sand" and the "hard rock" of the certainties of our *Weltbild*, this is not a continuum between cultural (sandy) and natural (stony) ways of acting, but between those certainties we can imagine giving up without our lives becoming unintelligible, and those we cannot. Whether a specific certainty is one or the other requires individual investigations.

## 5. An Ethical *Weltbild* – Personal Certainties

Wittgenstein's development of the idea of a *Weltbild* mainly springs from his investigation of the structure of epistemic investigations, but some of the certainties that form our *Weltbild* have practical consequences that reach beyond epistemology, such as the belief mentioned by Wittgenstein that «the people who gave themselves out as my parents really were my parents, etc. This belief may never be expressed; even the thought that it was so, never thought» (OC §159).

The belief that the people who gave themselves out as your parents in fact are your parents gives rise to other beliefs that are ethical in character: that you have special responsibilities towards these specific people, your parents, that they have a special interest in your well-being, and that the things they have told you about your background are to be trusted. (Something which may be one reason why serious doubts and a sense of crisis often develop for people who as adults learn that «the people who gave themselves out as» their parents were in fact not their biological parents. The crisis may arise because something that was simply believed and trusted, taken for granted, a certainty, suddenly turns out to be in fact questionable – and in this case false).

Another such certainty found in family life is the belief that "a human baby cannot look after itself".[5] That this is in fact a hinge shows in the fact that it is not something we investigate, instead it is part of what shapes our understanding of what a baby is and our actions toward babies. If we encountered a baby

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[5] This example is taken from Moyal-Sharrock, 2003, p. 150.

that could take care of itself, really managed that, we would find it hard to be-
lieve that it really was a baby after all, we might for example think that it only
looked like one. And if we found an abandoned baby, we would take care of it
until we were sure that it was in safe hands. Moreover, we would regard it as an
ethical duty to care of it in this way.[6]

We may thus use the idea of a *Weltbild* to elucidate our understanding of
ethical questions, and an ethical *Weltbild* would then encompass the conglom-
erate of beliefs or certainties of ethical significance that we never challenge, but
simply take for granted.[7] One strong reason for making such an extension of
the use of the concept of *Weltbild* is that we, when we talk or think of ethical
matters, also seem to treat some beliefs as certain, both beliefs such as "A hu-
man baby cannot look after itself", but also more straightforward ethical beliefs
such as "You have special responsibilities towards your parents", "Murder is
wrong" or "You should try to help others in need". To consider such basic
ethical statements or beliefs as parts of an ethical *Weltbild* illuminates a range
of characteristics of such sentences that is often hard to explain.

First, it helps explain why the use of ethical certainties in many, concrete
cases seem completely uninformative. If I was having a discussion with some-
one about whether I should jeopardise doing an important exam in order to
help a friend in need and the other person simply said "Remember, you should
try to help others in need", I would find that utterly unhelpful. "I know *that*
much" is a likely answer, and some sense of frustration is a likely response. If
there were to be a point of invoking this certainty – that I already believe – in
the discussion, it would rather be to discuss whether it should be the decisive
reason for what I choose to do here.

Secondly, the comparison between certainties and basic ethical beliefs
helps us to understand why it is often very hard to offer justification for such
beliefs. I know that I should try to help others in need, but I do not really know
anything I could refer to in order to justify this belief; at least not anything, that
would be more certain. This of course does not mean that I always help others
in need, but my acknowledgement of this belief shows in the fact that in cases

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[6] The ethical devastation for a life that follows from carelessness or simply inability to take care of a
baby is a recurrent theme in movies such as the British film *Trainspotting* (1996) and the Danish film
*Submarino* (2010).
[7] See Goodman, 1987 and Christensen, 2004 for similar attempts to extend the investigations of *On
Certainty* to ethical questions.

where I do not manage to or actively refrain from doing so, I feel guilty, try to provide excuses for my negligence etc. If we draw on the comparison with the certainties of Wittgenstein *Weltbild*, the reason why we are unable to provide justification for such beliefs would now appear to be that they are not the outcome of ethical reasoning, instead they collectively provide the necessary background for reasoning about ethical questions. If this is so, then the belief that we should help others in need is not an ethical judgement (at least not in most cases), but a prerequisite for such judgements, a belief that shapes ethical thinking. In a particular case justification for a specific action could refer to this certainty, for example in the discussion imagined above.

Thirdly, the characterising of an ethical *Weltbild* as consisting of ethical certainties may help us to understand the difference between two forms of ethical disagreement. If an ethical *Weltbild* is made up of the statements and ways of acting that we acknowledge as the necessary framework for ethical thinking, argumentation and action – similar to the way a *Weltbild* works in an epistemic context – then the sentences and ways of acting that comprise it take the form of ethical rules. The existence of such a *Weltbild* would thus establish a difference between substantial ethical disagreement where two parties both refer to and draw on a (relatively) shared understanding of *Weltbild*, and disagreement where one party challenges or questions a certain belief that is part of the *Weltbild* of the other. In the second case, for example if someone would question whether murder really is wrong or whether we really have any reason for helping people in need, we would not meet this challenge with arguments, but we could try to imagine what kind of life the other person is suggesting. Moreover, this may be a life that we could understand or it may not. In the first case, what would happen is that an ethical certainty, for example the belief that you have special responsibilities towards your parents, would stop serving as a norm and come to be regarded as an assertive sentence. It would thus become the subject of critical discussion. In the latter case, where the suggested change of life seems intelligible to us we would meet the suggestion with reactions such as incomprehension, severe moral indignation, or refusal to treat the other part as a competent or serious moral thinker. We would consider her insincere or even mentally disturbed. The existence of an ethical *Weltbild* thus shows that there are ways of reasoning and acting that we decline even to consider. Imagine that your spouse, in a discussion about whether you could afford a new car, suddenly said, "Well, we could kill your parents or mine, the inheritance would easily cover the cost". In such a case, one would have to assume

that the comment was ironic or one would have to become very, very worried.[8] In any case, we cannot judge the role of ethical statements by looking at the form they take, and we can never assume that the role they play is stable from one context to another.

The comparison between the role of the *Weltbild* in the epistemological and the ethical cases thus finally points to the fact that our ethical *Weltbild* is not primary revealed by our explicit ethical commitments, in what we say of them or our ability to provide such commitments with adequate justification. Our ethical *Weltbild* rather shows in the reasons we offer and accept in ethics, in what we see the point of discussing and in what we take for granted and in what we do.

## 6. Relativism *versus* Transcendentalism

So far, the idea of an ethical *Weltbild* is developed entirely from the view of the individual. However, if we try to expand the perspective and include the social sphere it may now appear crucial to determine how much agreement we can expect with regard to different world-pictures; how many, if any, of our ethical certainties can be described as the "hard rock" of Wittgenstein's river-bed.

Asking this question seems to lead us straight to the question of whether we, by introducing a Wittgensteinian picture of *Weltbild*, at the same time endorse an ethical relativism. This is the view of Michael Kober, who also attempts to transfer insights of *On Certainty* to the ethical domain. Kober (1997, p. 373) takes a starting point more bold than the one taken here, namely that some ethical certainties «are constitutive moral norms: they constitute the very possibility of acting morally or talking about moral issues». Moreover, Kober insists that to enter ethical discourse, one has to be initiated into the language games constituted by these certainties, something which happens via initiation in a specific linguistic community. The fundamental certainties of the *Weltbild* of the community thus draw out the limits of one's possibilities of ethical reasoning. This means not just that there is «no culturally "neutral"

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[8] Note however that it is of course not in any strict sense impossible that someone should challenge the certainty that "Murder is wrong", as is shown by the fact that some people actually do kill their parent for the sake of the inheritance. Similarly in the epistemological case, we can imagine someone giving up the certainty that "The world has existed for a long time", as Wittgenstein does in OC §262. The point is that for many giving up these certainties would not leave them with any intelligible understanding of their particular life.

point of view» (Kober, 1997, p. 375) with regard to moral norms, but also that «moral norms or certainties have almost no effect on intercultural affairs» (p. 379).

According to Kober, relativism is thus an unavoidable consequence of introducing a Wittgensteinian view of a *Weltbild* into ethical thinking. We find a similar conclusion drawn from Wittgenstein's in the thinking of a number of other interpreters of his work, for example that of Richard Rorty,[9] Ernest Gellner[10] and N.C. Nyíri, all of whom argues that the unfounded nature of the certainties and the variety of culturally shaped life forms[11] makes it impossible to offer rational criticism of other cultures. Nyíri nicely sum up the basic relativist argument (one could exchange his use of tradition with *Weltbild*): «All criticism presupposes a form of life, a language, that is, a tradition of agreements; every judgment is necessarily embedded in traditions. That is why traditions cannot be judged» (Nyíri, 1981, pp. 58–59).

In stark contrast to this, we find interpreters who develop insights from Wittgenstein's later thinking in the opposite direction and argue that any *Weltbild* is anchored in a common life form. One representative of this reading is Newton Garver, who insists that «there is no warrant for the view that Wittgenstein implies or suggests a plurality of human *Lebensformen*, [...] first and foremost Wittgenstein's forms of life are those of natural history: bovine, piscine, canine» (Garver, 1994a, p. 240). A life form, and the regular ways of acting it embraces, is common to all human beings and thus constitutes an implicit, but shared, necessary and even transcendental background for rationality, knowledge and language. According to Garver (1994b, pp. 47–48), «Grammar (whose objects are the possible employments of language) and *Lebensformen* (which are possibilities of actual behaviour) seem Wittgenstein's analogue of Kant's objects of transcendental knowledge, such as space, time, and causality». The fact that we may experience serious breakdowns in understanding between human beings is not a counterargument to this, Garver

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[9] Rorty, 1989. Hilmy, 1987 presents a relativist reading of Wittgenstein in line with Rorty's. For a critique of Rorty on this point see Hill, 1997.

[10] Gellner is rather less enthusiastic about this apparent consequence of Wittgenstein's writings, calling it «one of the most bizarre and extreme forms of irrationalism of our times» (1992, pp. 120-121). For an admirable overview of different readings of the consequences of Wittgenstein's philosophy for value pluralism, see Moore, 2010.

[11] The plural reading of "life forms" is vital for the relativist readings, often referring to Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 192.

claims, because such breakdowns «result from not having learned the practices rather than from not having the capacity to learn them. Therefore they do not connote any difference in form of life» (1994a, p. 248).[12]

This very brief sketch of possible interpretations of Wittgenstein's view of *Weltbild* reveals a diverse, but also clearly segregated, landscape. If we attempt to evaluate it in light of Wittgenstein's own writings, some of the interpretative moves of both camps come to stand out as misdirected. This is especially the case for the idea emphasised in the relativist reading, that life forms and corresponding *Weltbilder* are not held in place by anything outside incompatible traditions; a stark contrast to Wittgenstein's steady and widespread mention of the natural history of human beings as providing an almost invisible, but stable and shared background for any culturally shaped life form. However, the transcendentalism of Garver seems also misdirected by reshaping Wittgenstein's modest objectivity into transcendental necessity. Wittgenstein indeed pictures the "hard rock" of some of the certainties as securing the possibility of non-absolute objectivity of our judgements, but this arises not because certain basic ways of acting and reacting are necessarily or transcendentally "given", but from the fact that some ways of acting are important to a human life – so important that we in fact cannot imagining to give them up.

## 7. Developing a *Weltbild* – Changing Concerns

The investigation of the relativist and transcendental readings of Wittgenstein seems to lead us into an impasse. This should urge us to consider whether placing the investigation about the status of the concept of a *Weltbild* in the tension between relativism and transcendentalism is leading us to ask the wrong questions, because of their mutual insistence that the vital question is to establish whether a *Weltbild* is developed from cultural, "sandy" or natural, "stony" ways of acting. Help might be found in an unexpected place, namely in the writings of Peter Winch. He represents an interesting case in this context. On the one hand, Winch is often grouped along relativist reading of Wittgenstein, because he famously argues that any standards of intelligibility and rationality are established within culturally shaped life forms, which means that they can be «apparently quite at odds with our own» (Winch, 1964, p. 315). On the

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[12] See also Lear, 1987.

other hand, Winch also argues, that «the very conception of human life involves certain fundamental notions [...] which indeed in a sense determine the "ethical space", within which the possibilities of good and evil in human life can be exercised [...]: birth, death, sexual relations». These notions are involved in the life of all known human societies, and even if the «specific forms which these concepts take, [...] vary very considerably from one society to another», they provide us with «a clue where to look, if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions» (1964, p. 322); a starting point of an understanding of the life of another culture.

Winch's «fundamental notions» thus take a role similar to the role of the human life form in Garver's transcendental reading. However, these notions are not transcendental certainties according to Winch. Instead, he points beyond the relativist-transcendentalist debate by insisting that they are «deep objects of human concern» (*ibid.*). Humans are beings that need to order such concerns in a conception of life, and this

> changes the very sense which the word "life" has, when applied to men. It is no longer equivalent to "animate existence". When we are speaking of the life of man, we can ask questions about what is the right way to live, what things are most important in life, whether life has any significance, and if so what. (Winch, 1964, p. 322).

This is, even if Winch is no transcendentalist, his idea of «the right way to live» also puts him in stark contrast to a relativist such as Kober.

What we should learn from Winch is that what matters for an understanding of a *Weltbild* are the *concerns* that shape it. And what is common to human beings is not just that they behave uniformly, but that they have very similar concerns, even if these concerns may take very different forms, sometimes making it almost impossible to recognise the shape they take in the life or culture of others. In one of his discussions of our inability to imagine different concepts, Wittgenstein also emphasises the importance of the concerns shaping our certainties and thereby our *Weltbild*.

> No doubt arises about all of this. But that is not enough. In a certain class of cases we don't know what consequences doubt would have, how it could be removed, and therefore what meaning it has.
> What then does this belief that our concepts are they only reasonable ones consist in? That it doesn't occur to us that others are *concerned* with completely different things and that our concepts are connected with what interests us, with what matters to us. But in addition, our interest is connected

with particular facts in the other world. (Wittgenstein, 1992, p. 46)

It is impossible for us to doubt our certainties, not because we are bound to them by (common or transcendental) ways of acting, but because the certainties arise from fundamental interests (what Winch calls concerns) involved in our understanding the world. Moreover, Wittgenstein notes, our inability to understand others arise not just because their concerns take an alien form (as Winch emphasises), but because they may have concerns or interests that differ fundamentally from ours. Several forms of blindness are involved here. First, we are blind to the fact that our own certainties are shaped by our interests. Secondly, because we are blind to the fact that our interests play this role, we are also blind to the fact that we could have and that others actually do have different ones.

This further means that the possibility of changing a *Weltbild* is determined by considering whether we can (come to want to) change or give up the concerns connected to or the point of acknowledging specific certainties. I do not see a point in questioning the certainty that the world has existed for billions of years not just because it connects to a host of other things that I believe, but because it forms a necessary part of a life that I value. However, confronted with a person believing that the world was created about 4000 years ago, I can acknowledge the possibility of valuing a life shaped by the belief in God and an understanding of the Bible as a revelation from God – even if I myself see no point in living this way. In contrast, when confronted with someone who was leading a life not shaped by the belief that the world has existed for a long time or that murder is wrong, I simply to reject the possibility that this could be a valuable form of life.[13]

The certainties that comprise our *Weltbild* are shaped by the concerns we have; they have a *point* for us because without these we should have to live differently. What we do not question is what is of fundamental interest for us, and the objectivity invoked by Wittgenstein is thus an ethical one, that of responsibility, rather than a reference to an independent standard, for example in the form of shared actions and reactions. Naomi Scheman elegantly summed up this aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy. «Not to be negligent is to be responsible», she writes emphasising that Wittgenstein is concerned to redefine what that mean in contrast to a tradition, where «responsibility has meant confor-

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[13] Even this possibility is explored, however, for example in the TV series *Dexter* (2006).

mity to standards of thought and behaviour that are given independently of that thought and behaviour». However, Wittgenstein suggest «that if we define responsibility this way, we will end up committed to chasing a chimera and failing to attend responsibly to what we are actually doing» (Scheman, 1993, p. 122). The freedom from absolute ground of our practices is freedom to be responsible for our concerns and what we reveal as valuable in what we say and what we do.

What would lead us actually to question a certainty? It would require a growing and deep felt dissatisfaction not with the certainty itself but with the life one leads, an understanding of one's life as unsatisfactory or wrong. The possibility for criticism and change arises from an interest in living differently, in doing something else. In that case, we would have to take responsibility for calling for or working towards such a change. I will end by looking at an example of this.

In *On Certainty* §79, Wittgenstein gives a striking example of a personal certainty: «If I were to say that I was a woman and then tried to explain the error by saying that I hadn't checked the statement, the explanation would not be accepted» (OC §79). Winch (1964, p. 323) suggests a possible reading of this by saying that «the masculinity or the femininity are not just components in the life, they are its mode. [...] I might say that my masculinity is not an experience in the world, but my way of experiencing the world». Linda Zerelli discusses this way of picturing the fact of "being a women". With explicit reference to Wittgenstein, Zerelli claims that «the relation one has to one's sex – like that which one has to one's hands – is not a matter of knowledge (and least of all on a correspondence theory of truth) but of (subjective) certainty» (Zerelli, 2003, p. 139). Zerelli is interested in what it would mean to raise doubt about or question this relation. It is not possible, she claims, by revealing how «the relation one has to one's sex» is a groundless belief as many feminist try to, because that does not shake the certainty of this belief. It is indeed groundless. Instead, to question it is to ask whether this certainty is one that should concern me, whether it establishes a *Weltbild* that I have any interest in. «Inherited, yes», Zerelli admits and asks: «But also something I take up as my inheritance?». This, according to Zerelli, is «the sort of question that Wittgenstein provokes» (Zerelli, 2003, p. 142). The question is not whether the view of oneself as a man or woman is well founded, whether it is founded in tradition or natural history, but whether it allows us to live in ways, we find valuable.

The investigation of Wittgenstein's *Weltbild* thus enables us to view feminism as explicating the certainties of masculinity and femininity in a way that allows us to question and challenge them. Moreover, one point of doing this is to make it possible for us to imagine a *Weltbild* that does not involve these certainties and thus offers us an alternative way of living. The point here has not been to investigate the possibility or value of such an alternative, but to show how reflection on Wittgenstein's concept of a *Weltbild* calls us to strive for a clear view of the certainties that structure our lives and allows us to consider whether any of them needs changing.

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# Günther Anders:
## *Weltbilder*, "Models of Enticement", and the Question of Praxis

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ABSTRACT

This paper questions if it is possible to identify a specific meaning of *Weltbild* in Günther Anders, an author who considered "worldlessness" a main feature of the human condition and believed that images have become unable to reveal the world in our contemporary times. Through an analysis of Anders' idea of worldlessness and of his reflections on the ambiguous statute of images in the age of technology, this paper shows the practical function attributed to world pictures by Anders, highlighting his efforts to promote a world-*revealing* world picture against what he considered mere *Weltanschauungen*, i.e. the "models of enticement" of his age.

Half a century ago, Anders worried that, quite possibly, his contemporaries were busy building a world from which they would find no exit, and a world no longer within their power to comprehend, imagine, and emotionally absorb. It is now possible that what half a century ago could be treated as an inordinately, and probably also excessively, dark premonition, has since acquired the rank of a statement of fact and commands ever wider, if not universal, support. (Bauman, 2008, p. 115)

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## 1. *Weltbild*

What can *Weltbild* mean for Günther Anders,[1] i.e. for an author who entitled one of his best books *Mensch ohne Welt* [*Human Being Without World*]?

At first sight, it might seem odd to think that we should have a *Bild* (an image, or an *Anschauung*, a "view") of something we are deprived of. According to Anders, there are a number of reasons (anthropological, socio-economical, political, technological) why we can say to be worldless. Yet, a certain degree of "worldlessness" or "unworldliness" is a necessary condition for imagining the world: if the world were a total presence for us – if we were totally immersed in it, well synchronized with it, perfectly adjusted to it – then there would be no room for making images of it. Nevertheless, our images, our "views" are unconceivable without a real relation with their "object", under penalty of becoming mere phantoms or hallucinations.

As we know, Anders' lifelong obsession – periodically justified by history – was not our lack or loss of a world (a *Mensch ohne Welt*), but eventually that of a world without human beings (a *Welt ohne Mensch*), thanks to the technological power of destruction we have built (first of all, the atomic bomb and the nuclear plants). The second volume of his main work, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* [*The Antiquatedness of the Human Being*], has the telling subtitle *On the destruction of life in the age of the third industrial revolution* (Anders 1980). How could we have a world – as a shared space of meaningful public relations – if life itself – as a precondition of a human world – is being destroyed? It seems, thus, that either we have a *Bild* of what we don't have, or we are forced to hypothesize a *Welt* of which we cannot have a *Bild*.

Things don't get better if we try to answer the editors' first question ("How each one of the selected authors conceived the idea of *Weltbild*") starting with the second term which composes the word *Weltbild*, i.e. *Bild* ("image"). Im-

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[1] With the exception of his correspondence with Claude Eatherly (Anders & Eatherly, 1961), of his Parisian conference *Pathologie de la liberté* (Anders, 1936-37), and of his articles originally published in English in «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research» (Anders, 1948, 1949, 1950), none of the works by Anders is available in English (besides in the original German, his works can be read – as far as I know – mostly in French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, but also in Japanese, Russian, etc.). However, there is a good introduction to Anders translated into English from Dutch (Van Dijk, 2000), which I recommend to the English speaking reader who is not familiar with Anders' thought. All Anders' quotations in this article – if not otherwise indicated – were translated from German into English by the author.

ages, for Anders, are in fact ambiguous: *on the one hand*, they constitute one of the reasons why we have lost our world. According to Anders, images have become, in the course of the twentieth century, unable to represent or reveal the world. They rather obscure or cover it, they dissolve and absorb it into themselves. We don't have access to the world because we have only images of it: we don't have a *Weltbild* but only images of images, phantoms, simulacra. *On the other hand*, Anders' philosophical efforts are mainly directed to enlarge the capacity of our imagination, to stretch the boundaries of our fantasy or faculty of representation in order to build an adequate view or image of our present world. Our epistemological, moral, political, and aesthetic duty would be to bridge the gap between our capacity to produce [*herstellen*] – which appears to be unlimited – and our finite capacity to imagine [*vorstellen*] what we keep on producing. We are unable to apprehend, comprehend, represent, understand, feel, and therefore be responsible for, what we nevertheless produce. This *discrepancy* (which Anders considers the key of his thought), this *asynchronous* relationship between our capacities (which is the reason why human being is *antiquated* in respect to his products), is what Anders thinks that should be overcome. Again, we seem to face a paradox: we have (too many) images which obscure our view of the world, yet we are unable to form sufficiently adequate images of the world we have produced (images included).

This paradox looses part of its sharpness if we make a distinction Anders does not explicitly make: a distinction between *material* images ("pictures" of all sorts) and the *internal* images[2] of them and of the world. In this way, we could reformulate Anders' thesis about the discrepancy among our faculties and say that we produce more images-pictures than we can (internally) imagine. Yet, even if we lend this distinction to Anders, I think that his work itself allows to question his main thesis: are we sure that every picture we produce (whatever its medium) is destined to obscure the world? Has not Anders himself proposed illuminating readings of "pictures" which are rather world-revealing? Furthermore, are we sure that our being *not* synchronous with our time, our "antiquatedness" or "outdatedness", cannot hide unforeseen potentialities?[3]

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[2] See Garroni, 2005.
[3] Anders himself seems sometimes to encourage a research along these lines. See Anders, 1956, Ch. 12 of the Second Part: *TV image and its object* [*Bild und Abgebildetes*] *are synchronous. Synchrony is the form of atrophisation of our time.*

First of all, though, we should try to understand better in what sense we are supposed to be, according to Anders, "without a world".

## 2. Worldlessness

In 1930, when Günther Anders (at that time still Günther Stern) and Hannah Arendt were a young married couple, they wrote together an essay on Rilke (Anders & Arendt, 1930). There, commenting on the *Duineser Elegien*, they dwell on the theme of *Weltfremdheit des Menschen*, the world-estrangement of human being who – in contrast to the other animals – «is not one with the world», is not «in agreement with it». In a certain measure, the human being is «not in the world» because it is not bound to specific responses to the stimuli of the world. What strikes me most in this essay (where it is not difficult to hear an echo of their common teacher Heidegger) is an expression used by Rilke (*IX El.*, p. 57), in which life becomes a *Tun ohne Bild*, an activity without an image, which is the reason why we don't recognize ourselves in what we do and make. The analysis of this expression is not much elaborated in their essay, yet it is possible to hear this expression resonating in Arendt's later reflections on the Eichmann case – in the incapacity of «thinking in examples» and of judging – and in Anders' idea of the discrepancy between our faculties of «producing» and «imagining».

In the same years (1929–30), Anders delivered two lectures at the Kant Society in Hamburg and Frankfurt, where he presented his «negative anthropology» (Anders, 1929). His main thesis was that what we call our freedom and our historicity stem from our not being cut out for the world, from our being both in the world and loose from it. We build a culture, an "artificial life", out of lack of a naturally determined way of life.

Different versions of this negative anthropology were being developed around the same years by diverse authors (Simmel, Mannheim, Horkheimer, Scheler, Plessner, Gehlen, and later Sartre). I am not so much interested here in assessing the contribution by Anders in the elaboration of this common and widespread anthropological paradigm, as in stressing that this paradigm is a condition of possibility of a *Weltbild*: only because we don't possess fixed ways of responding to the world, we are forced, and able, to make an image of it; if no distance, no detachment, no absence characterized our relation to the world, we would not need, and would not be able, to imagine it. We have im-

ages of the world as long as we are open to its contingency. According to Anders,

> *Abstraction* – the freedom in front of the world, the fact of being made for generality and indeterminacy, the detachment from the world, the practice and the transformation of this world – is the fundamental anthropological category, which reveals both the metaphysical condition of the human being, and its *logos*, its productivity, its interiority, its free will, and its historicity. (Anders, 1936-37, pp. 35-36)

More than fifty years later, in 1984, Anders considers this «exclusively philosophical-anthropological» sense of «being without a world» definitely outdated (Anders, 1984, p. xiv). In the class condition of the proletariat he acknowledges a more concrete sense of being without a world. Not only the proletarians don't possess the means of production through which they produce and reproduce the world of the dominant class, but they are also not "in" the world as the latter is. They can find themselves *within* the same world, but not at home in it (1984, p. xii). A still more concrete and extreme sense of being without a world is identified by Anders in the condition of the unemployed: they «not only could or should not break their chains, but were not even allowed to carry them». Anders considers them «along with the technological equipment, the key-figures of our age» (1984, pp. xiii–xiv). Their motto is: *non laboro, ergo non sum*.[4] The unemployed are denied even their condition of non-freedom. But this double negation does not transform itself in an affirmation. It rather backfires on those who have a job, transforming their «free time» in a temporary predicament of unemployment, which everyone would try to fill co-laborating – as consumer – with the industry of entertainment (Anders, 1956, pp. 135ff).

This retrospective analysis of some figures of the worldlessness could be punctually put in correspondence with a number of essays Anders had been writing in the 1930s and 1940s: his Californian lecture on Rodin (*Homeless Sculpture*, 1943, where he proposes an analogy between the worldlessness of human beings and the homelessness of works of art) or, still better, with his great essay (1931) on Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. The con-

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[4] Were Anders still alive, he could have perhaps updated this motto to fit the greatest shame of our years, the condition of immigrants, of refugees, or of so called "clandestines": *Laboro, sed non sum*. I am not a citizen, ergo, what I am (not) – no matter what I do – makes me an outlaw.

tingency of the world, its too complex simultaneity, makes the relation between the main character of the novel – Biberkopf – and the world «disproportionate». Biberkopf is unable to put himself at the same level of the metropolis he lives in. Being out of the world, he is non-human and *therefore* «merely human» and *therefore* describable only in «zoological terms». This novel embodies the way Biberkopf lives in his town. His «chant resonates only in those who, like himself, are nowhere, but who have all along learned their utopian position: the Jews» (Anders, 1984, p. 4). The disproportion the novel refers to is embodied in the form of the novel itself. The "image of the world" is not conveyed through a synthesis or unity of vision, but through the technique of montage: the world is narrated – in a «surreal» composition – through lists of things and events, only adjacent or juxtaposed to each other, superimposed on each other. If according to his negative anthropology we are without a world because deprived of any "natural" orientation in rapport to the infinite contingency of it, then our inevitable task would be to build (artificially, culturally) an *experience*. But the progressive disintegration of experience is one of the great topic of post-World War I European philosophy and sociology (from Simmel to Benjamin up to Koselleck). Not every age allows its inhabitants to "build a world" on their own, to fulfil their potentialities. There are times when experience cannot be built or accumulated: the great traumas of modernity make individuals poorer, unable to elaborate and narrate what they have gone through, incapable of making sense of what they have lived.

It is important to notice that – at least up to the first volume of *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (1956) – Anders is looking for a remedy that would allow regardless to "build a world". If Biberkopf's attempts to belong to a world and to understand it are hopeless, Döblin is anyway able to offer revealing and penetrating images of that world through his montage:

> The novel does not present frames or portions of the world, but only the world as a whole. On this basis, Döblin makes a montage – with no limits in space and time – of the visible with the invisible. Yet it is not a fantasy-composition. Montage does not *make up* things, but *discovers* them: it does not build a fictive world, no matter how convincing in itself, but reveals through the montage of the most distant things their true *juxtaposition* [my emphasis], which without composition would not be perceivable, because the whole of the world cannot be seen simultaneously. In this sense the composition is surreal: it is the composition which confers the world its true reality [...]. (Anders, 1984, pp. 27-28)

The term «juxtaposition» [*das Nebeneinander*] reappears fifty years later to stigmatize another form of worldlessness, that of «internalized pluralism». With this expression Anders means our participation in cultures only as consumers, under the sign of a misunderstood «tolerance», where values, tastes, norms, religions, beliefs, styles of life, behaviours are side by side or juxtaposed [*nebeneinander*] as in a supermarket shelf. What were once the elements of different "worlds" inhabited by their respective citizens, become now articles on sale for mere clients. In this non-world, human beings are all equals, but only as consumers. It seems that Anders thinks that in our societies – he is writing this text in the triumphantly neoliberal 1980s – the distinctions among things that money can buy (material commodities, social status, etc.) and things that money can't buy (sense of identity, political life, community, love, faith, beliefs, etc.) has faded away. What worries Anders is that the juxtaposition of a plurality of worlds is the symptom of a lack of any determinate world.

Nevertheless, for someone who doesn't feel to be rooted in any orthodoxy and who is grown with «Lessing's parable of the ring» (Anders, 1984, p. xxv) this position is very problematic, as Anders himself doesn't fail to notice. Here I just want to point out that the aversion to this "alexandrine" availability of determinate worldviews [*Weltanschauungen*] – which, in their abundance and juxtaposition, seem to prevent any possible formation of a unitary, meaningful, and active world image [*Weltbild*] – is analogous to the aversion to images, as if Anders had forgotten their revealing power. It would be easy to bring more examples of images, which, as shown by Anders' essays, do not cover the world, but rather make it visible by *discovering* features of it that would remain invisible without them. I am thinking on his essays on Kafka, on Grosz, on Heartfield, on Beckett. Yet, at a certain point, the revealing and discovering power of images disappear from Anders' writings, along with the possibility of a "world image". With the emergence of the new media (radio – which Anders experienced first of all as the perfect tool for Nazi and Fascist propaganda – and then TV and the concomitant explosion of commercials), the only images Anders considers are those which cover the world, not those which may discover it. In 1958, Anders considers the new media

> crucial for today's concepts of world and object. [...] Radio and television produce rather a *second world*: that image of the world in which today's humanity presumes to live [...] and also a third world, the world of entertainment. In short: everything. [...] And it is crucial that all that does not take the form of object or propriety, but it is fluid [...] This pre-objectual

> deliverance must be taken very seriously, because it is extremely indicative of contemporary "comfortable unfreedom", which reigns in today's world of conformism. (Anders, 1980, p. 54)

After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then, *his Weltbild* takes this paradoxical shape: we are all overfed with pre-digested pictures-images and fragments of juxtaposed worldviews [*Weltanschauungen*], which we produce and consume voraciously, cannibalizing each other; at the same time, we have become unable to form a world image on our own, both because of the widespread «iconomania», and overall because of the *discrepancy* between our unlimited capacity of producing (images, technological equipments, weapons of mass destruction), and our limited capacity of (internally) imagining (comprehending, feeling, being responsible for) our products and their consequences.

The humanistic adagio – according to which we would be fully able to comprehend our history and culture because we made it, while nature could not be grasped with the same confidence because we didn't make it – is turned upside down. On the background of this reversal, we find the Kantian model of the sublime, where the imagination experiences its failure to comprehend in one single "view" the overwhelming bigness or power of certain phenomena. While in Kant, though, this failure of our sensible faculty represents only the first step toward a new awareness of our moral reason, in Anders such second step is not acknowledged (at least in this context).[5] Anders chooses to take another way, trying to identify different techniques which would allow to expand the limits of imagination: first, as we have quickly seen, the «surreal composition» and the technique of «montage», then (in the final chapter of the first volume of *Die Antiquiertheit*) the «exercises in moral stretching» through the expansion of our capacity to feel and imagine.

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[5] Anders broaches explicitly the *Analytic of the Sublime* by Kant in his book *Besuch im Hades. Auschwitz und Breslau 1966. Nach "Holocaust" 1979* (Anders, 1979) and in an "akademische Einfügung" of 1949. Yet, the reasons he brings in order to explain why his sublime does not allow – as in Kant – the re-awakening of moral reason are surprisingly weak and out of focus. It would seem obvious to remark, for instance, that while the Kantian sublime can be experienced only if we are in a safe condition, the movement of the sublime is now "blocked" by the fact that we are not safe, being under the atomic threat. As for morality, Anders will always maintain – as we will see – «that the necessity of a morality of the world and of the human being cannot find in turn a moral basis» (Anders, 1956, p. 323).

## 3. «Helpless Slaves»?

We have seen that, in 1930, six years before divorcing, Hannah Arendt and Günther Anders wrote together an essay on Rilke's *Duineser Elegien*, where the (contemporary) human estrangement from the world was partially explained by resorting to the Rilkian *Tun ohne Bild*, an activity deprived of any orienting image. Such an activity cannot produce effects in which the subjects can recognize themselves. In 1956 Anders publishes the first volume of *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, where he claims that the hallmark of our times is the discrepancy between our faculties. Two years later Arendt publishes *The Human Condition*. Right on the *Prologue* of this book we read:

> But it could be that we, who are earth-bound creatures and have begun to act as though we were dwellers of the universe, will forever be unable to understand, that is, to think and speak about the things which nevertheless we are able to do [...] If it should turn out to be true that knowledge (in the modern sense of know-how) and thought have parted company for good, then we would indeed become the helpless slaves, not so much of our machines as of our know-how, thoughtless creatures at the mercy of every gadget which is technically possible, no matter how murderous it is (Arendt, 1958, p. 3, my emphasis).

I don't know whether is it possible to speak of a "dialogue at distance" between Arendt and Anders, nor I will try here a comparison between the two. Yet I think that this passage by Arendt can help understand, by contrast, Anders' position. Arendt *fears that it might happen* what Anders think *it has already happened*: the divorce between know-how and thought, or, in Anders' words, the irremediable discrepancy between producing and imagining. Arendt is aware of this risk, but she thinks that there is still room for politics, and that scientific-technological questions (artificial life, atomic weapons, space explorations, etc.) are «political» questions «of the first order» (Arendt, 1958, p. 3). In an essay written between 1958 and 1961, entitled *The Human World*, Anders maintains that the dimensions of «making» [*das Machen*] and «acting» [*das Handeln*] don't exist anymore: what has «monopolized our praxis» is «serving» [*das Bedienen*].

> For instance, the assertion that Hiroshima pilot, when pushed the button, "acted", doesn't make sense [...] And since the mushroom of smoke he perceived did not correspond to the image of people burnt alive, he didn't see the effect of his "doing" either. (Anders, 1980, pp. 67-68)

Since we serve the technological apparatus – even when we believe of making something or acting spontaneously – Anders can conclude that

> It is naïve to think that this [technological] totalitarianism could be slowed down or defeated with "pure political means". For eventually its root lies in a technical fact, i.e. that "making" and "acting" will be superseded by "serving'; no, that they *have already been* superseded. (Anders, 1980, p. 71)

Arendt will dedicate much of her work to identify the appropriate room for politics, plurality, judgment, initiative. In Anders there is no more room left for that: if «technology is the subject of history», as he thinks, what is left to philosophy is, at most, the exercise of «prognostic interpretations», as an unwarranted or paradoxical moral duty:

> Since our destiny and the future aspect [*das Aussehen*] of humanity depend on our capacity of recognizing in today's technological equipments the humanity they shape, we ought to develop this capacity. Today, interpreting is not the specialty of "human scientists"; it has rather become the moral duty of all. (Anders, 1980, p. 428)

If these are the explicit conclusions of Anders' thought itinerary,[6] we should try to understand how did he reach them.

There is a number of ways to construe Anders' itinerary: the most obvious would be to start from his *Kehre*, his "turn", represented by the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which has been his lifelong obsession. Here I will try a different path, which has to do with the dimension of visibility, a dimension strictly connected with the notion of *Weltbild* or of *Weltanschauung*:

Let's refer once more to a central thesis of Arendt's political thought, where «the space of appearance», or *Erscheinungsraum*,[7] is one of the keywords of the political dimension of the world. «For us – writes Arendt – appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality» (Arendt, 1958, p. 50). After the two biggest traumas of modern history – Auschwitz and Hiroshima – Anders will consider what

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[6] Not to mention his late and much discussed call for a violent «counter-terrorism» against the technocrats «who terrorise us»; see Anders, 1987.

[7] «Appearance» is the word Arendt uses in the original American edition of *The Human condition* (1958), while in the German translation (1960) – which was revised by Arendt and which seems to be richer and clearer than the original – we find the expression *Erscheinungsraum*.

*appears*, the dimension of visibility – the man-made world of products, images, and actions – untrustworthy. The issue of the «antiquatedness of the appearance» [*die Antiquiertheit des Aussehens*] both opens and closes the second volume of *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, where it represents a sort of blindness *a parte obiecti*: «If we are blind in our capacity of imagining, *the technological equipments are mute*; which means that *their appearance does not reveal anymore their real potentialities*» (Anders, 1980, p. 34). The examples Anders makes refer, first of all, to Auschwitz and Hiroshima:

> The containers of Zyklon B – which were used to exterminate millions of people – look like jars of jam – I saw them for the first time during my visit to Auschwitz [...] Nuclear plants [...] *don't show any particular aspect*; they look like mosques with a chimney, and don't reveal at all what effects they can cause and must produce [...] In sum, our world of equipments, made of real monsters, is either insignificant or inconspicuous. (Anders, 1980, p. 423-424)

The world is expressionless, caught between our blindness and the misleading (un)appearance of our products. If we followed Arendt's characterization of reality (as a shared appearance), we would have to conclude that for Anders reality is lost. And with it, we lose ourselves as active beings, as beings capable of «making sense» of what we do, able to feel and to express ourselves adequately.

According to Anders, most images coming from the diverse media seem to have become accomplices of the new invisibility. For with «image» Anders means

> any representation of the world or of pieces of the world, no matter if they consist in photographic pictures, posters, TV broadcasts or films [...] Once there were *images in the world*; today there is "*the world in image*", or better: the world *as* image, like a wall of images which relentlessly captures our look, relentlessly possesses it, relentlessly *covers* the world. (Anders, 1980, p. 250)

Our subjectivity is caught between what reaches us «subliminally» (overall images of the world as transmitted by the new media and commercials[8]) and what

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[8] Anders makes the «subliminal»(the entire world of products, technological equipments, and technological social forms) a sort of «transcendental condition» of our existence: «*What is continuously experienced (in the sense of what affects us) cannot be experienced (in the sense of being "apperceived")*. The conditions of experience are not objects of experience» (Anders, 1980, p. 200). This *conformatio continua* makes us irremediably conformists.

remains «superliminal» for our capacities. Typical, in this latter sense, it is the tragic and simple exclamation of the Hiroshima pilot Eatherly (who will end his life in a lunatic asylum): «I still don't get it.»

## 4. We, the «Mass Hermits»

If we adopted Arendt's criterion for reality (as shared appearances), one could presume that our reality would be enriched by the new media. For Anders, though – who had to do mostly with radio and TV – the deleterious and impoverishing effects of the media are so overwhelming that he overlooks entirely his previous appreciations of certain images as world-discovering. Television and radio supply the world at home, like gas or water. Families and single viewers become a miniaturized public, a public of «mass hermits». As such, we have the illusion to participate in all the events of the world, yet we are unable to select them, to reply or intervene or pose questions, so that our reduction to passive spectators impoverishes our languages and therefore our feelings («because human beings are as much articulated as they can articulate their language»; Anders, 1956, p. 110).

> It is certain that we cannot imagine an atomic explosion. But it is as much certain that the impotent imagination – or the desperation for its impotency – gets closer to the event than the seeming condition of eye witnesses in which we are put by the TV image, which, by offering us a total view, counterfeits the incommensurable and, while it informs us, deludes us. (Anders, 1956, p. 154)

All these factors transform us in passive world-consumers: the world disappears because it becomes raw material to be consumed, but at the same time is there on the screen, half absent and half present: it is a «phantom» which we can evoke at our will, but with whom we, reduced to *voyeurs*, cannot talk. Yet, what is most important, is that the infinite contingency and richness of the world – which could be otherwise experienced, explored, elaborated, imagined, interpreted – is preventively reduced to a format apt for its reproduction: the «real» event must become the «matrix» of its reproductions so that the «phantoms» end up becoming the matrices of world itself: «Reality consists in the reproduction of its own reproductions [...] *The real – the supposed model – must be moulded in view of its possible reproductions*» (Anders, 1956, pp. 204ff), in view of their format and orientation of sense, no matter whether the event in question is a match of soccer, an atomic explosion, or a judiciary trial.

> The artificial "world" models, whose reproductions reach us in the form of broadcasts, don't mould only us and our world image [*Weltbild*], but the world itself, the real world; [...] this moulding has a boomerang effect; [...] Lies, thanks to their repetitions, become truth [...] *reality becomes the reproduction [Abbild] of its own images [seiner Bilder]*. (Anders, 1956, p. 179)

In addition, since the images we are exposed to have the delusionary appearance of being «ante-predicative», being in fact highly mediated, they tend to blur the difference between "thing" and news:

> What we consume [...] is not the scene, but its staging, not the supposed thing S, but its predicate p. In short: a prejudice appearing in form of image [...] which doesn't allow the consumers to judge on their own. (Anders, 1956, p. 159ff)

The premise for the atrophisation of judgment is the atrophisation of imagination.

We are prey of a continuous thirst of consumption, prey of a *horror vacui*, of a fear to articulate for ourselves the room of our «freedom», our residue of «free time», so that «we occupy simultaneously every organ» – sight with images, taste with food and chewing gum and drinks, hearing with music, etc. To this thirst corresponds a peculiar lack of appetite «because the daily, relentless hyper-nutrition with phantoms [...] does not allow us to feel hunger for interpretation, for personal interpretation; and because the more we are overfed with an arranged world, the more we forget this hunger» (Anders, 1956, p. 196). The consequences of this bulimia are devastating:

> 1. *We are deprived of experience and of our capacity to take a position* [...] 2. *We are deprived of our capacity to distinguish between appearance and reality* [...] 3. *We form our world on the basis of world images [Weltbilder]: "inverted imitation"* [...] 4. *We are made passive* [...] 5. [...] We are even deprived of our freedom to perceive the loss of our freedom [...] 6. *We are "ideologized"* [...] 7. *We are "machinely infantilized"* [...]. (Anders, 1980, pp. 251ff)

Already in 1961, Anders understood very well that the privatization of the public world implied a double movement, which is the root of the end of the distinction between private and public:

> As the outer world is supplied directly at home through the media, the household mentality is conversely brought outside in the world [...] The public sphere [...] is often understood as the continuation of the private one [... Hence] the loss of feelings for the external world, i.e. the *elephantiasis of the*

*private sphere.* (Anders, 1980, p. 86)

If this is our condition in «the age of the third industrial revolution», we should feel a sort of claustrophobia. Anders would have probably denied that we do, being immersed – as we are – in the subliminal conformistic conditions of possibility of our (non)experience. Leaving aside the obvious objection – which is perhaps not irresistible – of a "performative contradiction" (if we really are in this predicament, how can we say so? Is Anders himself the only exception? From what vantage point can he see what he says we are unable to see?), it seems that our affluent societies leave room only for consumption. If we are always overfed with everything, and scared to death to face an accidental moment of detachment, of emptiness, of absence, of "disinterested" reflection, then it seems that we are not in the condition of building any *Weltbild* anymore, since we are lacking in the fantasy to create it.

> The suppliers of products, especially of "phantom-products" promoted by the mass media, don't recognize that through their supplies they make us deprived and unable of experience [...] Supplies make it superfluous to impose orders and prohibitions *as* orders and prohibitions; supplies, like a camouflage, make possible the invisibility of norms and prohibitions. The camouflage is called: "world", with which I mean the universe of products, i.e. the universe-equipment. This universe encloses in itself everything we at present "ought" to do. *The offer* [*die Gabe*] *contains in itself already all the duties* [*die Aufgaben*]. [...] Overall, the products form a cohesive seamless system, with no lacunae, no windows; a system so *complete* that we have the right to call it a "*world*" or a "*universe*". [...] It "clogs up" forever, since the beginning, all the fissures of the walls through which we, perhaps, could have a glimpse of other variants of existence and of the world. *Superabundance is the mother of lack of fantasy.* (Anders, 1980, pp. 196-197).

## 5. Models of Enticement

Sometimes, in ordinary language, the terms *Weltbild* or *Weltanschauung* are used to indicate an arbitrary, global, and closed "view" of some armchair philosopher, as opposed to a live reflection by someone who tries to understand a number of phenomena with justified and specific arguments. If used in that sense, the terms "world image" or "worldview" are justly discredited; but it is undeniable that even the most empirical oriented researchers must rely on indeterminate ideas of totalities – usually kept in the background of their research – which remain non-articulated, but nevertheless influent. For instance,

a determinate experience is always already inscribed in an idea of "experience in general" (the totality of all possible experiences) that, *as such*, nobody can ever *know* or articulate in a determinate manner; a linguistic expression can be uttered and studied on the background of "language in general", which remains an indeterminate expression of the totality of linguistic phenomena and competencies; an event can take place and be recognized on the background of a "world" in its totality, which nobody is able to describe as such; etc. Although these overall images of the world "work" in the background of our daily activities, it seems that in our daily lives we don't need to bring them in the foreground. Sometimes, though, we try to give them a form, which is necessarily inadequate, but which might be exemplary: it is what can happen with artworks (visual arts, music, novels, drama…) or – in a different way – with philosophy.

If this simplified description is plausible, then Anders' thought presents an interesting paradox: through his "occasional philosophy" (a kind of philosophy that tackles always determinate occasions, single events and phenomena, in order to expose their roots and to transform a fact in an exemplary case), he tries to articulate a sort of *Weltbild* which denies the possibility of worldviews:

> The peculiar structures conceived at the end of the 19$^{th}$ century and at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$, called "worldviews" [*Weltanschauungen*], were only harmless and shy preliminary forms of today's "models of enticement" [*Reizmodelle*]. No "worldview" which was a mere "view" could have survived. Only those could survive, which could affirm themselves as models of enticement. (Anders, 1956, p. 339, note 164)

These «models of enticement» constitute a «pragmatic world image» [*ein pragmatisches Weltbild*], which is not only a «subjective worldview» [*eine subjective Weltanschauung*] – i.e. a worldview made by the producers of images, which could even be individually true, but partial, and therefore false as a whole [*als Ganzes*]. It also «represents a practical tool, a training aimed at forming our way of acting and being affected, our behaviour, our omissions, our taste, i.e. all our praxis» (Anders, 1956, p. 164). Marx's prophecy, according to which philosophy would have become superfluous in the society of the future, has become true as negative parody of itself: «The truth of ideology […] is false praxis».

Regardless of what we think "our" opinions are (in a conformistic society where authentic opinions cannot be formed or recognized), it is our praxis which testifies to our being caught in world images as models of enticement:

the victims of these models (ourselves) «believe that they want, or have wanted, what they have to do against their own interest» (Anders, 1980, p. 191).

In this context, Anders thinks that even if his analyses and warnings were true and vitally important, they would go unheard, and could circulate at most as innocuous «cultural values» (Anders, 1980, p. 190). Hence, perhaps, his exasperation of his latest production, with the desperate and merely reactive invocation of violence against the «powerful of the world», who terrorize us with the production of nuclear plants and nuclear weapons (Anders, 1987). This violent "solution" in name of a fundamentalist view of morality (a kind of morality which doesn't accept any dialogue with law and politics), would be not only immoral and very little "practical" (Whom should one strike? With whom? With what foreseeable results?), but would be merely reactive: a thoughtless reaction to a menace which, according to Anders himself, is the result of a net of causes. For him, our age «is and remains – no matter if it ends or if it continues – the last one», because our apparently unlimited power of production does not include the power not to do what we can technically do, nor to undo it. Anyway, I think that Anders' position is more convincing and realistic when it remains on the terrain of the «penultimate questions»:

> Moral truth lies halfway between "now" and infinity. As we are requested to limit our thought to what is punctually present, likewise it is superfluous to push our question about sense [*Sinn*] *ad infinitum*. Were we to recognize as ultimate sense of a product, to whose production we collaborate, the annihilation of humankind, then we would know what we ought to do, i.e. not to do. *The* further *question*, e.g. *what sense should it have the very existence or non-existence of humankind, might* make sense (though unanswerable) for the theoretical reason only, but it is *not interesting for the "practical reason"*. The moralist doesn't care. He takes care of the penultimate question. (Anders, 1980, p. 390)

Along these lines, I think that Anders' thought indicates towards a *decreasing of growth*, not only in terms of industrial production (as variously elaborated within the "degrowth" movement), but also towards the construction of some "empty space" within the iron cage of abundance, if, as Anders believes, «superabundance is the mother of lack of fantasy» (Anders, 1980, p. 197). Only through relentless efforts to patiently create a distance from the immediacy of consumption (of goods, of images, of energy, of other people) it would be possible to imagine *Weltbilder* which are not reduced to models of enticement and false praxis.

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# Hans Blumenberg in the Cave.
# Towards a "Sociological" Solution
# of an Absolute Metaphor *

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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns a particular image, namely the cave, whose various versions recur throughout the history of Western thought. Hans Blumenberg spent great effort analyzing this metaphor and its byways, drowning from it the endless meanings of an anthropological condition. Object of the present article is to deepen Blumenberg's approach, and to propose a "genealogy" of it, which it will help us to discover other caves and, perhaps, a kind of exit. Yet this exit is not an intellectual-individualistic escapism, but a practical-political *Stimmung*, that is attention.

## 1. The Cave of the World[1]

> Was ist dein Ziel in der Philosophie? – Der Fliege den Ausweg aus dem Fliegenglas zeigen. (L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen I*, § 309)

Various poets, philosophers, prophets, and freethinkers have tried to draw up their own versions of the tale of the cave, the Platonic one remaining a kind of

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[1] All German quotations (except for Elias, 2009) have been translated by the author from the original texts.

inexhaustible matrix.[2] But if we consider not just the structure of the tale itself, but the *image* of the cave, we can find that this synthesis of knowledge, together with its side-effects, precedes and follows Plato and the Platonism, and in some way it subsists in the very experience of human beings as an absolute form of conceptual assumption. In the following pages I shall try to indicate how the image of the cave (or, as we shall see, the jail, the lair, the oasis, the trap) is simultaneous with the production of fundamental concepts of social life, and how it contains the suited antidote to resolve the aporias to which itself drives.

The myth of the cave was nearly a constant factor in Hans Blumenberg's philosophy. He dedicated a large part of his work to this topic: a chapter of his *Paradigme zu einer Metaphorologie* (1960a); an article on Arnobius and «the third allegory of the cave» (Blumenberg, 1960b); and the last book he published during his lifetime, the immense *Höhlenausgänge* (*Ways Out of the Cave*, Blumenberg, 1989). Therefore it can be said that the image of the cave covers the whole arc of his fruitful life, setting aside his *Nachlass*, which is still largely unexplored.

In brief, his thought is wholly based on a seminal proposition, which is the definition of «absolute metaphor». Western thought, he says, which culminated in Descartes, ends up forgetting the metaphors as sources of knowledge, holding conceptual thinking to be dearest, the highest, almost sublime human skill, the only one able to explain the world. The positivistic drift of this attitude and the common sense of social organizations conspired to institutionalize this way of thinking about the world, life, and the lifeworld. Nevertheless, according to Blumenberg, if concepts alone, following this «Cartesian» logic, were able to throw light[3] on the true and the false (and therefore on good and evil), there would no longer be images, we would have just solved every paradox of knowledge and ethics for a long time, we would no longer need to trust

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[2] The allusion to the trilogy *The Matrix*, which has been proposed as a post-modern parable of the cave situation, is not accidental. See Irwin, 2002 on the philosophical implications of this movie.

[3] The light is another important metaphor in the wide Blumenberg's catalogue. On this topic, see Ch. 1 of *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, and the 2nd part of *Höhlenausgänge*. What's more, the light is an exemplary scientific and phenomenological subject (from the Enlightenment to the present-day neurosciences), often relocated by Blumenberg in the problem of the *visibility* [*Sichtbarkeit*]. Blumenberg made decisive contributions to this question, in particular on the 18th century optical experiments with people blind from birth (see Blumenberg 1989, pp. 491-508).

in the spheres of the imagination and fantasy to vent our passions, emotions, and feelings.

Blumenberg, instead, proposes to consider images not as waste products or precipitates of minor importance in comparison with concepts, but as an action of the mind [*poiesis*] of at least equal rank. So Blumenberg tries to analyze the most important metaphors in Western thought, which are the «absolute metaphors», the irreducible images, «untranslatable» into other words or into conceptual phrases.[4] The most famous example – among the mass of anecdotes, parenthetic discourses, stylistic obsessions and tics analyzed by Blumenberg – may be the «Copernican Revolution», made famous by Kant's first *Critique*, but also mark of the «Secularization controversy», in which he was engaged as soon as he published the first edition of his *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Blumenberg, 1966).[5]

The Copernican Revolution helps to show how the *image of the cave* is all-embracing, because it is a distinguishing mark of illusions, whose pre-eminence fixes the foundations of this world. However, *disenchantment* – inasmuch as it represents one of the most important goals of the philosophical practice involved in the cave's *paideia* – when turned to *this* world, presupposes the existence of *another*, higher, truer, better world. This is the metaphysical matrix of the cave situation. The "everyday" in which the Platonic troglodytes live, with their passionate pleasure in the *agon* of the shadows, reveals itself to the philosopher as an absurd and senseless game, insubstantial shadow-theatre passed off as reality, chains and ignorance instead of the vision of the sun-filled sky. From this starting point, Blumenberg infers the paradoxical situation of the philosopher: he knows the truth – or at least he knows that what everybody thinks is true, is really false – but nobody can understand or even *stand* him. He is really a tragic-comic figure, martyr and clown of mass

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[4] From the Seventies onwards, Blumenberg recognized the Wittgensteinian implications of this attitude, as we can see in the famous and disputed question in the *Notebooks*: «Kann man denn ein *Bild* verneinen? Nein. Und darin liegt der Unterschied zwischen Bild und Satz» (Wittgenstein 1961, 33.11). On the debate upon the "deniability" of the image, see Sini, 1989, pp. 215ff; Severi, 2004, pp. 296ff; Doni, 2009, pp. 263ff.

[5] On this debate, its origins and its outcomes, see McKnight, 1990; Maj, 2001; Leghissa, 2004. Blumenberg very seldom made his own feelings about this polemic clear, and when he did, it was only in his typical laconic way (see, for example Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2009, pp. 134-135). That the Copernican Revolution is one of the specific marks of religious controversies, is proved by its use as a metaphor for the Lutheran Reform in Taubes, 1947, pp. 108ff.

culture. The reactions of non-philosophers are lethal aggression («If they could, they would kill him», Blumenberg, 1989, p. 185; see Plato, *Republic* , VII, 517A) or laughter (Blumenberg, 1987). The sole prisoner who is able to recognize that the human kind is living in a prison, looks like a Don Quixote, «who through a fable denounces fables» (Nancy, 1978, p. 646).[6]

This is the Gnostic attitude too. The Western philosophical tradition often forgets to consider the deep implications of the metaphysical starting point represented by the cave allegory. It has been reduced into a mere schema of the metaphysical *anabasis* (from ignorance to the idea of Good), without underlining the paradox of the freed one who *returns in the cave*, only to be mocked and threatened. The core of the parable, in fact, is its practical-political inspiration: its subject is the life of humans, not just an intellectual trick. Courageous and rigorous attention is needed to write, as Peter Sloterdijk does, that

> the Western metaphysical traditions as well, at their height, were not creations of "theory" at all, in the modern sense of the term, but were [...] disciplines of the true life [...]. The kernel of the *bios theoretikos* was composed not of texts or propositional systems, but of the metamorphosis of the thinker in virtue of the analogy between the truth and the goodness of life (Sloterdijk, 1992).

Typically, Blumenberg applies his caustic irony to the philosophical propensity so as to exhibit a theoretical attitude as a «transformation», «conversion» or «change of conscience» (see Blumenberg, 1998, pp. 21–23). Nevertheless he is also aware that the stake in the allegory of the cave is higher than a research program. Gnosis – which was, according to Blumenberg, the last attempt made by the mythic imagination to hold out against the dismantling force of the Greek-Christian rationality (Blumenberg, 1971, 1979) – had grasped this «seriousness» and showed it through images of disquieting caves. Gnosis as a «pastime» to overcome the «great disappointment» of the missed Parousia; but also Gnosis as a tale of «anti-paideia», the tragic human condition, far from the Good, exiled from the genuine Homeland. Thus Blumenberg notices some affinities between the Platonic scenario and that of the *Apocryphon of John*, for instance, in which the Archons build the cave [*spelaion*] of the body and forge

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[6] Nancy (1986) insisted on falling into the ridiculous as a fundamental condition of the philosophical existence.

the chains of oblivion to prevent humanity from waking up and upsetting the lowest order of the shadows (Blumenberg, 1989, pp. 229ff).[7]

## 2. The World as a Prison

The metaphor of the cave is absolute insofar as it summarizes the human condition in the world. If the world is a cave, then to escape from the cave means to leave the world. Thus the world, *this* world of illusions and distance from the truth, was thought of as a prison. The Christian martyrs took a hint from the Hellenic tradition as well, to meditate on their situation as the "chosen" ones in the imperial jails. The allegory of the cave became a schema to reach the Paradise – this slant was only latent in the Platonic text: «The way out of the cave agrees with the giving up the earthly existence [*irdischen Dasein*], it means overcoming the threshold of transcendence through death» (Blumenberg, 1989, p. 208). For this task, Blumenberg has no doubts, the champion is Tertullian.

In 202, Tertullian wrote an epistle to the North-African Christian martyrs (*Ad martyres*), in which he shows the world as a huge penitentiary. Here emerges a version of the cave that Plato would have never been able to consider in an eschatological key involving the destruction of the "cave", as an extreme possible solution. Because it is a perverse outcome of the Sin, the world *must* end, and it is ending. The Tertullian apocalyptical emphasis doesn't know another way out of the cave. The wickedness and corruption of the world are features of an immense jail in which the just may only perish. Rather: the microcosm of the actual cells in which the martyrs are waiting to be justified in the arenas, are analogies of the macrocosm of the world-as-a-prison. Tertullian, as Blumenberg suggests, proposes a «contact of images» [*Bildberührung*]: between the prison and the desert. Starting a long-lived *topos*, Tertullian binds the imprisonment of the martyrs to the solitary existence of the prophets in

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[7] According to Gilles Quispel (1965, p. 74), the *Apocryphon of John* is a rare testimony to the teachings of the «double Wisdom»: the first Wisdom (Barbelo) is called «first idea», «a Stoic expression [...] understandable as a title of Wisdom»; the second, «who falls because of her lascivity», is called Sophia. I do not know whether Blumenberg knew Quispel's research on Gnostic spirituality and theology – he almost exclusively relied upon Hans Jonas – but in this double Sophia the Dutch scholar shows a typical Gnostic feature that concerned very much Blumenberg as well: the notion of «complication» [*Umständlichkeit*] as «formal character of the Gnostic system» (Blumenberg, 1989, p. 226). Here we can only hint at it.

their ascetic shelters: *Hoc praestat carcer Christiano, quod eremus prophetis* (see Blumenberg, 1989, p. 222). Here is involved a typical procedure of *inversion*, put together with a double metaphor: the negative image becomes positive. The inversion allows us to grasp the decisive difference between the Platonic cave and Tertullian's prison: whereas a *paideia*, a development, even an advance of knowledge is at stake in the first scenario, the second image offers no escapes: it doesn't prefigure the sweetness of freedom, everything is described starting from the repulsion for the world. Indeed the desert is the metaphorical counterpart of the prison not because it is a free zone, but because it is a place of retreat from the world and refusal of worldly things.

After all, if the world is the absolute prison, to be imprisoned could be the least of evils; in fact, it could become the best condition to avoid worldly and demonic (which amount to the same thing) temptations. The rhetorical background to this inversion hardly betrays the Montanistic tracks on Tertullian's rigor. However, what should capture our attention here is the fact that in Tertullian there is no actual exit, but a kind of abrupt collapse, only negatively addressed to the "outside". The focus is entirely turned to the "inside" of a dark, wicked, and foolish world, which deserves only to end in the wrath of God. Therefore the martyrs' virtue is to bring forward the inevitable Doomsday and to leave this prison more speedily than others. There is no place and no time for hope, nor for contemplating a *visio beatifica* in advance.

This apocalyptic atmosphere, typical of the early-Christian period, is imbued with messianic faith, which doesn't coincide with hope, nor with a consolatory note for the disappointment over the delay of Salvation. There is no happy ending. There is only the deep, resentful desire that finally the end will come (see Sloterdijk, 2006; Tomelleri, 2009). It seems to breathe an analogous kind of atmosphere every time we face the capital questions of limit and freedom, considered in their juridical and moral senses. The early Christian centuries are an example of these sparks; the passage from Middle Ages to the *Neuzeit* – on which Blumenberg focused a large part of his work – is another. But Western history is full of these turns, emerging from the changing processes of political and social life (Elias, 1939), and from the irreducible complexity of human nature (Morin, 1973). We can only expect that a witness and a protagonist of one of these challenges, perhaps falling into disrepute while trying to accept it, emerges with another version of the allegory of the cave. I mean Carl Schmitt, who was described as «an apocalyptic of the counter-revolution» (Taubes, 1987).

### 3.  From the Prison to the Oasis, and Back

There is no doubt that Blumenberg had a good knowledge of the booklet pub-
lished by Schmitt not long after the latter's troubled judicial experience, a true
painful *contrappasso* for the great jurist involved in the Nuremberg trials.
Schmitt himself sent a copy of his *Ex captivitate salus* to Blumenberg as an en-
closure with a letter full of quotations and signs of esteem (Blumenberg &
Schmitt, 2008, pp. 142–146). Moreover, in this letter, dated 9th December
1975, Schmitt quotes a line from one of his favourite poets, Theodor Däubler:
*Die Pflanzen leheren uns der Heiden sanftes Sterben* [«Plants teach us the
sweet heathen dying»].[8] Schmitt himself ascribes to this line a connective func-
tion between two of Blumenberg's works: an important article focused on
myth, published in *Terror und Spiel*, an issue of «Poetik und Hermeneutik»
1971 – destined to become a milestone of the "Mythosdebatte", as well as the
*Urzelle* of his decisive 1979 *Arbeit am Mythos* – and *Die Genesis der koperni-
kanischen Welt* (Blumenberg, 1975), of which Schmitt says that he is a «pre-
destined reader» (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2008, p. 143).

In his letter Schmitt confesses that he wanted send to Blumenberg a copy of
Däubler's book *Nordlicht* (1910), but feeling himself in «isolation», and there-
fore unable to reach libraries or antiquarian bookshops, he just forwards his
own book, with a dedication in it, in which he specifies – as he was wont to do –
the salient points to be consulted. In this missive, two particulars seemingly
unimportant are very interesting for us: the just mentioned dedication written
on the *Ex captivitate salus* frontispiece, and the odd conclusion of the letter, in
which Schmitt, beneath the date, instead of the usual «Plettenberg-Pasel»,
writes the following poetical topology: «Place: / from a humble oasis, / from
everywhere threatened, at the bottom of the large / but in its turn much
smaller, cosmic / Oasis "Earth"». Then another crypto-quotation: *Thou,
Earth, endure this night again* (cf. *Faust*, II, 1, p. 4681). As for the dedication,
it runs as follows:

> For Professor Hans Blumenberg, under the effect of his essay in *Terror und
> Spiel,* 1971, pp. 63–65, referring to p. 42 of this booklet sent by Carl Schmitt.
> Posted on Advent 1975, after a first reading of *Die Genesis der kopernikani-*

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[8] Theodor Däubler (1876–1934) and his epic poem *Nordlicht* (1910) were the subject of a treatise by
Schmitt 1916. In his letter Schmitt describes Däubler as 'a Lucretius of the 20th century'. Blumen-
berg could hardly resist to this hint.

*schen Welt.* Plettenberg-Pasel, 9.12.1975 C.S. (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2008, p. 144)

We need to arrange this constellation of fragmentary, cryptic, and esoteric cross-references, in order to grasp the capital role of this correspondence for the delineation of an absolute metaphor. Thus, we will be compelled to "complicate" the situation, making a thorough review of Blumenberg's answer to the letter. But before this, an explanation of Schmitt's intricate sentences is called for.

The short passage of poetry inserted by Schmitt at the end of his letter holds a sympathetic crypto-quotation, which is the expression: «cosmic oasis». Schmitt himself reveals his source, praising Blumenberg's last book, which he had received two months before. In it, we can read:

> The cosmic oasis, in which human beings live, this wonder of exception [*Wunder von Ausnahme*], the truly blue planet in the middle of the disappointing desert of the sky, is not just "another star", but rather the only one showing itself to deserve this name. (Blumenberg, 1975, p. 793)

Schmitt's expression sounds like an exchange of favours, given that Blumenberg in his turn seems to have quoted what perhaps is the most famous of Schmitt's initial definitions: *Souvrän ist, wer über den Aufnahmezustand entscheidet* («Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception», Schmitt 1922; see also Agamben, 2003, pp. 21-32). Schmitt borrows the image of the oasis as a way of repaying the loan of the notion of exception. As a courtesy, Schmitt is telling Blumenberg that his own condition is similar to that of those who discovered for the first time the «starryfication» [*Stellarisierung*] of Earth – as a countermove of the "earthlyfication" of the sky. In the Copernican turn, they both find a breeding-ground of images and metaphors (Monti, 2001). But in Schmitt's case an inversion is in play, which we cannot grasp without considering Blumenberg's mention of the «disappointing desert of the sky». Indeed an oasis presupposes a desert. And a desert, as we have just shown above, is a kind of astute ingredient to invert the cave metaphors.

In saying that he is living in an oasis-within-an-oasis, Schmitt replies to Tertullian's martyrs, who lived in a prison-within-a-prison. In both cases, the desert plays the hidden, crucial role of the clue to the metaphor (only to lead to another one). As in Tertullian it is useless (if not impious) to escape from the cell, because the world itself is an immense prison, so in Schmitt it is useless (if not lethal) to leave the oasis, because the world itself is a "cosmic" oasis. As in

Tertullian, the desert trains believers to hold out against the temptations of the world, without promising them anything but the end of the world itself, so in Schmitt the desert is both the feeling of isolation, or astronomic distance [*astronomische Entfernung*] from the worldly things (such as books and bookshops), and the inevitable fate that is impending over everyone would try to pass the cosmic frontiers of the world. This is Carl Schmitt's «apocalyptic tone».

Far from being an idyllic place, the oasis revels itself as effectively a prison, knowledge of which Schmitt declares to have learnt through the «wisdom of the cell» (Schmitt, 1950). The apocalyptic *Stimmung* of this situation is distant from the Epicurean detachment exercised (and theorized) by Blumenberg on the troubles of history and life. Rather, it may have been that in him resounded, what indeed he would have made explicit fourteen years later in his book on the caves, the Kierkegaard's concept of anguish, expressed by the image of the fox's hole:

> All the ways out of his fox's hole are vain. At the moment in which his anguished soul believes that it sees the filtering light of the sun, there is always another entrance, and thus, persecuted by desperation, he tries every time to find an exit, and every time he finds an entrance, through which he only may return in himself. (Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anguish*, quoted in Blumenberg, 1989, p. 595)[9]

It's exactly the same emotion, expressed through very similar images, that Blumenberg recognizes in its crossing European history as a fate, which he termed «absolutism of reality», and which he feels it to be his own philosophical duty to resist (Blumenberg, 1979).

[9] The reference to Kierkegaard represents another connection between Blumenberg' and Schmitt's uses of metaphors, if we recall that Kierkegaard himself is the unnamed source of the long quotation in the first pages of *Politische Theologie*, as an apology of the "exception". Moreover, these cross-references define the emotional tone as the apocalyptical feeling of the macro-and-microcosmic imprisoning: «The labyrinth of the world is the place of mistaking [*die Stätte der Irre*]. We don't simply mistake the way [*man geht nicht erst in die Irre*], but we always and only take the wrong way, because we always are involved in mistakes [*in die Irre*]»; Taubes, 1947, p. 5.

## 4. Masada and Warsaw

On page 42 of the copy of *Ex captivitate salus* that Schmitt sent to Blumenberg, there is an underscored expression – *hochphilosophische Sakrament* [high-philosophical sacrament] – and a gloss inserted by Schmitt himself: «This expression regarding Seneca and Stoicism [is] conditioned and influenced by the final chorus in *Hercules Oetatus*, a copy of which I enclose» (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2008, p. 146). Actually in the 12–9 letter, Schmitt quotes the final verses of Seneca's tragedy (*Numquam Stygias fertur ad umbras...*). This is another example of the continuous rebound of suggestions and quotations: Schmitt tries to control it through his own direct intervention. In spite of it, this kind of care permits us to catch the double register – exoteric and esoteric – in which the metaphors create their own field. Wherever Schmitt intended to lead his reader through his own notes, glosses, and references, there is in any case a hidden background which Blumenberg is free and able to read, grasp, and weigh up: that is the esoteric but substantial dimension. This two-level structure is revealed and astutely deconstructed by Blumenberg's answer on 27th April 1976 (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2008, pp. 147–150).

There is a little trap (we return to this metaphor in the next section) in Schmitt's self-references: in his letter and dedication he had pointed out where a link could be found between Däubler's poem and a particular text by Blumenberg, but in this place there is not only the mentioned poetic quotation, but also the Stoic allusion. So the reader hurries to page 42 believing that he will find one thing, and finds something else or something more. But Blumenberg wasn't disposed to be caught in this snare. His reaction is slow but careful, and it helps to extricate these knots. In the closing pages at Blumenberg 1971 (pp. 63–65) considered by Schmitt as his own source of inspiration, the key question is the reception of ancient mythology as a creative process of «reality concepts» [*Wirklichkeitsbegriffe*]. These pages deal specifically with the Epicurean criticism of the anthropomorphic Greek deities («a myth about the end of myth», Blumenberg, 1971, p. 65). If one wished to look for some hint of "vegetable life", heathen death, or at least some analogies to Däubler's line in these pages by Blumenberg, one would search in vain. Rather, there is something else: there is the unexpected underscoring by Schmitt that claims to be considered as the crucial question, namely the suicidal martyrdom: «high-philosophical sacrament». Däubler serves as decoy. Tertullian's ghost is lying in wait for Blumenberg. And Blumenberg is ready.

Four months later Hans Blumenberg answers with a thorough, terse letter. He writes that finally he found time and stillness to read Schmitt's booklet, for which he doesn't skimp on praise. He underlines its eschatological character, and he declares himself amazed to be able to answer the author of this «extreme» book. This is the first gibe. The second is the most important: Blumenberg skates over Däubler's poem, and hits the mark just when Schmitt was off his guard. He doesn't linger on literary questions, he faces the suicide problem directly: «We must remember not only Seneca, but also Masada and Warsaw» (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2008, p. 148). Anything but «high-philosophical sacrament» and «heathen sweet dying»! The martyrdom comes into play *leibhaftig*, in the flesh.

It is unusual for Hans Blumenberg, a *Halbjude* according to the racist Nuremberg laws, to appeal to Jewish history, especially given that his counterpart is Carl Schmitt. This is a kind of *hapax legomenon*. Masada and Warsaw are sacred symbols of Jewish resistance. Taking them as examples of suicidal martyrdom means that the term "martyr" is to be applied not only to pagan mentors or to the Christian elect, but also and above all to the persecuted masses of the Jews occurring throughout Western history (from the Roman siege of AD 74, up to 1943 Ghetto uprising). That Schmitt was wounded by this allusion emerges from unwillingness to be drawn in his subsequent letters. Masada and Warsaw remain in their mournful, irreducible place, which is the place of disenchantment practice. Did Schmitt wish to discuss the martyrs of history? He should have included among them the Jews, whom he once considered at least as "enemies" of the German people (and of humanity, in a wider sense).[10] Was he unwilling to make such an avowal? No other words needed to be wasted on this matter. Masada and Warsaw stand as a silent warning: one must to be able to face this kind of question, otherwise it's better to be silent.

Dying for the truth is a hidden theme in Blumenberg's work. Hidden, because Blumenberg's reticence forces him to put aside questions close to his own experience. Hidden, which is to say, too close. But through the martyrdom

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[10] On Schmitt's Nazi involvement, see Zarka, 2005. On the question of the Jewish "enemy", see Taubes, 1987. Taubes himself, in his famous Pauline Seminar, said that «exalting the protagonists of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance, while millions of people were led as sheep to the slaughter, according to the words of the Psalm, are despised for their not having behaved like heroes, fills me with sadness. I disapprove of this kind of exaltation of heroism widespread among us»; Taubes, 1993, p. 41. I don't think this is Blumenberg's case.

theme we can return to the image of the cave. The champion remains Søren Kierkegaard, who was the first capable of asking the philosophical question about what it is worth living or dying for (Blumenberg, 1960a; Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2008, p. 148). But there is at least a Jewish version of this heritage, indeed Blumenberg ends his *Höhlenausgänge* (1989, pp. 818–820) with a Talmudic passage (*Shabbat* II, 6) dealing with Rabbi Shimon and his son: they both had to shelter in a cave for having revealed Rome's impiety. The mere presence and the strategic position of this anecdote cannot be accidental.

## 5. Entrapments

Thus the cave reveals itself not as a *Weltmodell* [world-pattern], but as a *Weltbild* [world image]. "World" is not to be examined and defined by scientific instruments, because it constitutes the transcendental limit of human experiences (Blumenberg, 1961; see also Borsari, 1999).[11] A social dimension, not a mere intellectual problem, is here in question. The dimension of society is an indirectly pervasive subject in Hans Blumenberg's works: not only because of the several references to sociological themes such as money, life in metropolises, human fragility and exemption [*Entlastung*] (with Georg Simmel and Arnold Gehlen as standard-bearers), but also because of the pervasive force of the dimension itself. This is the reason why Blumenberg could never have written a sociological treatise. As soon as one tries to grasp and put the image of the social world within a conceptual catalogue, it is immediately ready to vanish from one's hand, showing itself as the horizon in virtue of which it is possible alone to grasp and to catalogue. Blumenberg's «metaphorology» is precisely the exposition of this state of affairs. The image of the cave is indeed the image of a peculiarly anthropological impossibility to overcome images. In a sense, it is the myth of the mythopoeia, thanks to which we are able to recognize and even criticize myths, but we will never be able to tell its own beginning, its own emergence from the boundaries of human experience – without telling *another* myth.

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[11] The limit imposed by the world image is actually both empirical and transcendental: it is empirical from the perspective of posterity, but it is transcendental from the view of those who live in it. This feature is the core of Michel Foucault's notion of «historical *a priori*», but, with regard to images, it is a crucial insight of Maurice Halbwachs' *cadres sociaux* as well; see Foucault, 1969; Halbwachs, 1925.

In this sense the metaphor of the cave is really a trap, in which we are going to fall as soon as we recognize it. Of course there are some alternatives. The first is not knowing that we live in a cave – this is the "animal", or "savage" alternative, that of the troglodytes in Plato's allegory, who *don't even know what a cave is* (Blumenberg, 1989, pp. 185–192), but it is also a kind of Romantic obsession, a projection onto the wild innocence of sinless existence, like the sheep of Giacomo Leopardi's shepherd. We have seen the second chance: the adoption of the apocalyptic tone in order to reject the cave and its inhabitants. The third alternative is living in the cave as in a less or more comfortable refuge – this is the Aristotelian version of the cave allegory, in which the anti-idealistic perspective leads us to consider *this* world as the only one available (see Blumenberg, 1989, pp. 189–206). In brief, these three alternatives are a) the evasion into the wild; b) the radical refusal of *this* world; c) the radical refusal of *other* worlds. More than one reason can be given in favour of each. But the trap remains. As a witness to this entrapment, Blumenberg recounts the painful case of Kaspar Hauser, the 19th century's German "wild boy" who experienced every possibility for avoiding the trap, without ever finding the exit. That of Kaspar Hauser is an extreme (and actual) case of the social configuration of the world as a mortal trap. We don't know who Kaspar really was, if he was the heir to the throne or simply an idiot; but we know what various people did, with good or evil intentions, to lead him out of the mysterious cave of his past, or to drive him back again into it. Kaspar Hauser becomes the «experimental subject» in the flesh, the guinea pig of anthropological inadequacy in the face of the dangers of social life (see Blumenberg, 1989, pp. 396–411).

This hint at the social dangers allows us to let another image emerge. This last example may indicate not so much an escape as a safe-conduct, and this aim takes us again to the primitive features of the metaphysical attitude we have just dealt with above. Blumenberg didn't set out this image, but Norbert Elias did, on analogous presuppositions. This is the *Maelström*.

Given that self-conservation [*Selbsterhaltung*] is the crucial problem *par excellance*, as well as the cultural mould in which the notion of inertia was conceived (Blumenberg 1970), it is possible to describe the human environment as a continuous threat for humans as such. Hence Blumenberg considers the trap as a primary form of conceptualization. The trap as a methical answer to the difficulties of life and supply; but the trap also as a figure of the technological estrangement of human kind (see Blumenberg, 2007, pp. 10ff). In the Up-

per Paleolithic, primitives experienced the former occasion to prefigure the object (the prey) before its actual presence. Thus the trap becomes the structure in which humans build their own means of communication and social behaviours: to make present the absent becomes the magic of languages, concepts, and beliefs. But just as every form of magic does, so the trap itself involves side-effects. First, the fact that the trap itself needs to be projected, i.e. prefigured: a "meta-trap" is needed, which is the primitive configuration of the Platonic paradox of the "third man". This conceptual figure represents the edge of human capability for self-preservation, what Giorgio Agamben (2002, pp. 38–43) defined as the «anthropological machine»: the «wonder of exception» represented by the distance between humans and animals, an artefact claiming human victims, as we shall shortly see. Indeed, who can decide what is really human, and what is not? Who is that "third man", the sacrificeable missing-link, the *Menschentier*, if not the eternal victim of the racist persecutions throughout the whole of human history?

This is the point: social life is dangerous nowadays, just as in the early ages the "natural" weakness of our ancestors was. Norbert Elias understood it very well, when he asserted that the immense insecurity to which our ancestors were exposed helped them to create a high level of imagination «which prevented them from thinking realistically about nature» (Elias, 2009, p. 106). This is exactly what Blumenberg meant when treating imagination as an «exemption from seriousness» produced by the cave "culture" (1989, pp. 29–38). Danger and fantasy go together, creating a «double bind» – Gregory Bateson's version of the anthropological trap. Elias continues:

> We have not yet posed the question of how human beings ever escaped from that double bind. As the lucky heirs we take for granted the high degree of adequacy of our thinking to non-human natural events [...]. We look down with a certain contempt on simpler peoples encumbered with magical-mythical thinking in their greater insecurity; we do not understand that thinking. But in reality our thinking is the problem. How did human beings ever extricate from the trap? (Elias, 2009, p. 106)

The real problem is our own thinking. We feel ourselves distant from the magical attitude of the *pensée sauvage*, as the freed one felt uneasy with the shadow-theatre staged by his fellows in the cave. But it is our attitude that is at stake, not theirs. We are called on to recognize the dangers of the world we live in, otherwise we immediately become victims of our own imaginations. "Ideologies" (Elias) or "myths" (Blumenberg) it is the same. The image of the *Mael-*

*ström*, based on a famous story by Edgar Allan Poe, the immense vortex used by Elias to illustrate the human condition in dangerous situations (2009, p. 105; see also Elias, 1983), allows us to visualize just the dangers in their actual blinding force. As the story tells, three fishermen in a boat were caught in a terrible whirlpool; two of them perished out of the fear, and only one could survive thanks to his capability to distance himself from the troubled situation and to look about him with «a certain curiosity» (Elias 2009, p. 105), which allowed him to grasp the dynamics of the whirlpool and to find an escape. Curiosity is a distinguishing mark of modernity (Blumenberg, 1966); it allows us to remain detached from the involving worldly things, such as dangers, preoccupations, fears, superstitions, catastrophes, etc.

Elias quoted the *Maelström* tale to show how to overcome an «old philosophical theory of knowledge», meaning the transcendental-individualistic approach: «We must include in our consideration the situation of the knower and the changing circumstances» (2009, p. 106). But maybe he didn't pay enough attention to the two fishermen who died in the vortex. We could say that they represent the price of detachment: for each one who is able to distance himself from the dangers, there are many who are not so ready to react. Just the same happens in the Platonic cave. Both the philosopher and the fisherman try to convince their deceived fellows to free themselves, but in vain.

Curiosity, the flip-side of detachment, marks an epochal change which claims human victims. Being able to consider them is one of the most urgent and fruitful tasks of the human sciences – as we can see in the recent subaltern and post-colonial studies. Giving the human and natural sciences the conceptual and methodological basis and parameters should be the "natural" philosophical *res*. Blumenberg is suggesting that we are passing through a new epochal change, and that there is not yet any philosophical principle in sight capable of teaching us how to recognize the victims, the persecutors, and the indifferent ones. The dangers – which we are getting used to call "crisis" – risk being just another myth and becoming an excuse to conceal new victims. We have been warned of the danger – the cave remains the eternal "advertisement" to be careful of.

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# On Anthropospheres and Aphrogrammes.
# Peter Sloterdijk's Thought Images of the Monstrous

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show that (and how) Peter Sloterdijk throughout his oeuvre develops a specific position on *Welt-Bild*, thanks to a steady contention with Martin Heidegger's position. Unlike Heidegger, Sloterdijk denies the possibility of a world-pictureless existence, trying to supplement Heidegger's ontology with an evolutionary anthropological perspective: an onto-anthropology which takes into account the metaphorical imagery and visual thinking that shape the contemporary human coming-into-the-world. Sloterdijk's spherology can thus be intended as an effort to produce thought images that can make us see and navigate within the "world images" of which the contemporary world itself is made.

## 1. Introduction

In an essay on the changing forms of the religious in the modern world, Peter Sloterdijk writes: «One can measure the rank of philosophers in the modernisation process by their role in the emergence of that monstrosity which is beginning to reveal itself to radical thought as the totally secularising world» (Sloterdijk, 1997, p. 22). In the present essay we will apply this standard to its author himself. To outline the anticipated outcome of our investigation: we intend to demonstrate that (and how) Peter Sloterdijk throughout his oeuvre, and especially in the *Spheres* [*Sphären*] trilogy, produces thought images [*Denkbilder*] of «that monstrosity» which reflect the world image [*Weltbild*] and world-shaping [*Welt-Bilden*] that mark the present

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stage of unfolding of the mind [*Geist*]. We also intend to show that, and how, these mental images distinguish their author as one of those obstetricians of the coming-into-the-world [*Zurweltkommen*] of the human being or – which amounts to the same thing – of the emergence of world [*Welt*], who deserve to be called "philosophers" in the eminent sense.

According to Sloterdijk, the world has become something monstrous after the "death of God" – which is to say something unbounded, unconstituted, something that can no longer be located. Among many other things, this event means the collapse of the traditional metaphysical threefold relationship between God, the soul and the world. This in turn means that the world, which used to be complemented, structured and held in a well-bounded form by the transcendent pole, has now been inflated into an immanent Absolute, into an «unconstituted whole with no outside», for which only one name is appropriate: the monstrous (Sloterdijk, 1997, p. 22). When looking for the right word to articulate the incommensurable and astonishing or even terrifying aspects of our cosmic sojourn as post-metaphysical beings, Sloterdijk also speaks in superlative terms of the «hypermonstrosity» that the world has become since the dawn of radical modernity (*ibid.*). Even if we cannot immediately oversee all the implications of this process – which, we might add, distinguishes modernity as a cosmological and spiritual event of the first order – it is clear that conventional world pictures [*Weltbilder*] of whatever hue are too innocuous to continue giving a face to the hypermonstrosity which is the world.

Assuming that philosophical thought does not wish to do without the "picture" (or "image" as we prefer to call it) as a medium of cognition also in the future – and as the works of Sloterdijk show, it can afford this less than ever before – then the aspects of visuality and imagination in the cognitive process, which have never quite been eliminated despite the sustained attempts at cognitive cleansing mounted by scientific purism, would need to be further developed into a quality of the thinking process that I have previously termed «hyperimagery» (Jongen, 2008). Although Peter Sloterdijk himself does not use this term – instead he speaks of morphological thinking and of spheres – his frequent use of the prefix *hyper-* suggests that the expression would be terminologically justified. We will try to prove the applicability of this term to his thinking as we proceed.

## 2. Back to Heidegger and Beyond: The World as Picture and Globe

If we take the term world-picture [*Welt-Bild*] at its word – and as everyone knows, according to Heidegger's philosophical thought is nothing but a kind of etymological contemplation – then it must of its own accord prompt the elementary question what it means to say that the "world" is "put in the picture", or to put it another way "shaped by enframing". For what historical and cognitive reasons is an operation of this kind performed, and what actually happens when it is? Could we do without it, or is it subject to necessity? Might it possibly lead to a situation in which the picture gradually *takes the place* of the world? What do we mean here by "world", what do we mean by "picture"? This is one reason for beginning our investigation by turning our thoughts to Martin Heidegger, because it was he who first subjected the term "world picture" [*Weltbild*] to a fundamental reflection of this kind, and in so doing set benchmarks for all further thinking on the matter (Heidegger, 2003a). The other reason is that Peter Sloterdijk develops his own position on the *Welt-Bild* – and beyond that on thinking in "images" [*Bilder*] – along the lines of Heidegger up to a certain point, before striking out in a direction of his own. In a nutshell, Sloterdijk transforms Heidegger's "Old European" way of thinking, which is contemplative and technophobic, and tends to be imagophobic, into a transclassical, technophilic and *eo ipso* imagophilic form [*Gestalt*] – though not without borrowing heavily from the phenomenological method.

To first of all understand how technology and the picture belong together indissolubly, we must recall Heidegger's famous essay *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* [*The age of the world picture*], published in 1938. In that essay, Heidegger attributes the emergence of technological civilisation – and its main deficiency: the «forgottenness of Being» – to the fatal tendency of modern man, who has become a "subject", to make a "picture" of the "world" for himself, and to connect with the world only by using this picture. On this view, the world picture [*Weltbild*] is a kind of intellectual prosthesis that the human being himself has implanted, and that in the course of history increasingly disguises and replaces his "original" Being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-Sein*]. For Heidegger the terms "world picture" [*Weltbild*] and "modern world picture" [*neuzeitliches Weltbild*] are synonymous, because it is only during modernity that this kind of re-presentational thinking arose that enabled the human being to picture the world *in toto*.

Peter Sloterdijk provided the necessary clarity on these processes in *Sphären II. Globen* [*Spheres II. Globes*] (1999). In these detailed studies of cultural history he draws attention to the huge importance of terrestrial and celestial globes in the dawn of so-called modernity. These globes, at once objects of scientific study, symbols of domination and navigation aids for sailors, can indeed be considered as embodying the quintessence of all that Heidegger meant by "world picture" [*Weltbild*]. Above all, their initial form of twin globes, in which the terrestrial globe was never shown without its celestial counterpart, made them depictions of the world in a literal sense – models of the entire world as it was then known. The fact that they are usually mounted on a wooden or metal frame makes them prototypically symbolic of the "enframing" [*Ge-stell*] – the Heideggerian term for "technology" that he distilled from a family of German words configured around the root *stellen* (meaning to place, to set, to position, to locate) and compounded with various prefixes to form *vor-stellen* (to re-present), *her-stellen* (to manu-facture), *nach-stellen* (to re-adjust), *fest-stellen* (to fix).

Thus the early globes provide a central link between depiction and technology, as described by Heidegger, at an elementary level. They also deliver evidence in support of his basic tenet that the depiction of the world – or the emergence of the world as picture – is the converse face of the emergence of the human being as subject. It is evidently no coincidence that the production of globes began in the age of discovery and world conquest in both the physical and intellectual senses, i.e. in an age of extremely "strong subjects". In Renaissance portraits, the hand of the ruler not infrequently rests on a model of the terrestrial globe, as can be seen in several illustrations in *Sphären II*. When Heidegger pointedly remarks «The fundamental event of modernity is the conquest of the world [*Welt*] as picture [*Bild*]» (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 94), he is, however, emphasising that it is not, as a trivial view might lead us to expect, primarily the picture (i.e. the globe) that makes the conquest of the world possible. According to Heidegger, what the physical conquest of the world actually aims to achieve is the transformation of the world [*Welt*] *as such* into the picture [*Bild*].

Without a doubt, the conquest of the world as picture by the re-presenting subject has made enormous advances since Heidegger's day. Not only have the cartographic technologies for depicting the planet made huge leaps forward in terms of detail and depth. With Google Earth, Google Streetview and similar virtual imaging services they have entered into a new stage of evolution in

which their impacts on everyday culture are immediately noticeable, and in which their progress can be felt in real time. That the world itself could become the picture, that the boundaries between territory and map could become increasingly blurred – in Heidegger's day still a bold philosophical hyperbole – is nowadays beginning to be realised through hard technology with the forms of pervasive gaming in which real and virtual space merge.

In accordance with Heidegger's understanding of the picture, which encompasses all forms of systematisation and modelling,[1] the emergence of the world as picture goes far beyond the aforementioned geo-graphical technologies. From the organisation of large companies, to the imaging methods of the natural sciences, to the logistical control of goods flows, there is no longer any segment of technological civilisation in which "systems", model calculations and the management thereof do not play a fundamentally important role. Back in the 1980s, these developments led Jean Baudrillard (1981) to conclude that good old reality had been dissolved in the hyper-reality of the «simulacra». If we believe Baudrillard and the postmodern thinkers, then even the subject, which still appears in Heidegger as the re-presenting, manu-facturing master of the world picture, is today just an image within worlds of images. So in this case too it once again proved true that the revolution (the world becoming picture) ate its children (the subjects).

Be that as it may, today we find ourselves in a world mediated by technological imagery in which the traditional European concepts of truth and reality are no longer applicable. In this situation it is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine what an original, "imageless" Being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-Sein*] would mean, what it would mean to do without the supporting artefacts of systems, models and mental concepts, and to embrace Being directly – pure and naked, as it were. In the more than ninety volumes of his complete works, Heidegger tried time and time again not so much to answer this question, but rather to develop it. We would therefore not be entitled to attempt an answer in passing here. Nonetheless, Heidegger's tree meditation in *What is called thinking?* [*Was heißt Denken?*, 1954] does provide us with a pointer as to what a world-pictureless existence or Being-there [*Dasein*] might

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[1] To the essence of the picture, according to Heidegger, belongs system: «When the world becomes picture, system achieves dominion – and not only in thought. Where system takes the lead, however, there always exists the possibility of its degeneration into the externality of a system that is merely fabricated and pieced together»; Heidegger, 2003a, p. 101.

require. In the said lecture he speaks of a «leap» out of science and even out of philosophy, which would have to first of all bring us down to the ground «on which we live and die, if we do not deceive ourselves» (Heidegger, 1992, p. 26). Only once we have as it were leapt into the «Clearing of Being» [*Lichtung des Seins*] – which is always and everywhere "there", and for that very reason so difficult to reach – do we really and truly come face to face with the «blooming tree», without betraying it to physics as a swarm of particles, or to neuroscience as a pattern of brain current.

This is reminiscent of the *satori* of Zen Buddhism, or the mystical «picturelessness» of Meister Eckhart, and makes clear how far removed a way of thinking and perceiving that is cleansed of all (*eo ipso* false) re-presentations and pictures is not only from the models of science, but also from the average consciousness of people in technological civilisation. Clearly, this need not mean that it is not true – one could even argue that it is precisely *because* of its "truth" that it is in conflict with today's world, in which, to quote Günther Anders, «the lie has lied itself true». Anyway, it has by now become clear what price would have to be paid for a world-pictureless existence. The disguising of the world through picture and system may be a violation of the "thing itself", of nature perceived by senses not upgraded – without it, though, there would be no formation of scientific models, no technological design, no discovery of the New World and no global civilisation. In short, without a "world picture" [*Welt-Bild*], humankind as a whole would, in Heidegger's words, have «remained in the province» (see Heidegger, 2002).

### 3. The Next House of Being: The Emergence of Hyperimage

Heidegger's world picture essay ends by noting that no matter how much we might (wish to) criticize technology-dominated modernity, it is not enough «merely to negate the age» (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 96). Anyone hoping to learn from Heidegger what the alternative might be, discovers that they will be dependent on a future humanity that must muster the «strength of genuine reflection». «Those of us here today» might «perhaps lay some foundations» for such reflection, but «never quite manage it just yet» (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 97). This deferral of what would actually be sorely needed is due to the aporia of Heidegger's thought, whose notion of truth is gauged by the (pre-Socratic) perception of the *physis*, in whose light new scientific truths and technological artefacts must appear as illegitimate ontological monsters. At the same time,

though, this same way of thinking must grant these results of «*lethe*-breaking procedures» (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 84) a pivotal role in the history of truth due to their massive facticity. If the late Heidegger failed in the face of the technological-cybernetic challenge, then he did so in the most productive way. For he went to the limit of the traditional European, indeed the traditional human contemplative mode of thinking, set an example by living through its passion to the end, and insofar pointed the way forward for his successors *ex negativo*. Anyone thinking «after Heidegger» (Sloterdijk, 2001a) – and therefore anyone thinking «after philosophy» in the traditional sense – at least knows quite certainly *how it can no longer be done*.

What we want to claim here is that the future invoked by Heidegger is right now, and Peter Sloterdijk is one of the (few) thinkers performing the "reflection" that Heidegger called for. In his major essay *The domestication of being. Clarifying the clearing*, Sloterdijk demonstrates in one of those bold twists characteristic of a "free spirit" how Heidegger's phenomenological fundamental ontology needs to be crossed with a second perspective, namely an evolutionary anthropological perspective, if the monstrous processes of human- and world-becoming (ultimately two sides of the same process) are to come into stereoscopic, three-dimensional focus. He expounds the view that positivist research is *per se* deficient because it already takes for granted the "human" that it intends to explain; it has «the ape come down from the trees [...], and then goes on to trace the evolution of the human from the ape that has descended» (Sloterdijk, 2001b, p. 155). The Heideggerian meditation on the "clearing" is vastly superior to that kind of scientific "non-thought"[2] in that it exposes itself to the miracle of human existence through contemplative *ekstasis*. Yet it refuses to explore how the opening up of the human and the pre-human to the world came to be in the first place. According to Sloterdijk, it is only once the Heideggerian clearing has been explained in terms of evolutionary theory and techo-anthropology that we have the whole truth.[3] This means that the meditative understanding of the expansion of souls in the human coming-into-the-world has to be combined with a reflection on the

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[2] See Heidegger's dictum «Science does not think».
[3] We need not even to remind ourselves of Heidegger's lunges at "anthropology", the emergence of which in the eighteenth century he saw as a direct consequence of thinking in terms of world picture and subject, to see that he would have found it impossible to accept Sloterdijk's proposal. See Heidegger, 2003a, p. 93.

material conditions of their emergence from a cultural science perspective, and thus the dual perspective of an «onto-anthropology» (Sloterdijk, 2001b, p. 156) has to be adopted.

This is not the place to reproduce in detail the way in which Sloterdijk derives the anthropospheres onto-anthropologically from the paradoxical condition of the world monstrosity as non-trivial spaces of human sojourn, immunisation and security.[4] In our context it is important that he is ultimately able – «thinking with Heidegger against Heidegger» (Sloterdijk, 2001b, p. 156) – to designate the human spaces termed «spheres» on the basis of their proto-technological genesis as «the good enframing» [*das gute Gestell*]. Held out into the monstrous, humans can only survive and thrive if they create for themselves a «technologically enclosed external uterus», in which they «enjoy the privileges of the unborn all their lives» (Sloterdijk, 2001b, p. 189), or in other words if they move into a «human greenhouse» fabricated through material and symbolic «anthropotechnologies», in which they nurture, protect and immunise themselves against the unliveable outside. The clearing that emerges as the world comes into being is *created by technology*. This is the crucial point: it is the result of a human «technology of self-domestication» (2001b, p. 197).

Heidegger responded to technology-infested world picture thinking [*Weltbild-Denken*], and its systems and models steeped in the forgottenness of Being, with a mode of thinking drawn entirely from language and its poietic, world-constructing force. Language, according to his famous dictum, is the «house of Being». Only as speaking beings – and as beings who compose and recite poems – do human beings come to be at home in the world. For only through language is the distant brought close, only through language is the strange translated into something familiar. However, if we go along with Sloterdijk and focus on the technological genesis and constitutedness of the housing [*Ge-Häuse*] of the anthropospheres, then language is downgraded to the mere «second home of Being» (Sloterdijk, 2001b, p. 197), to one of several cultural techniques and communication media in a world whose constitution is technoid throughout. In this world «the production of text

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[4] In *Domestikation des Seins* Sloterdijk enumerates four mechanisms whose interaction he sees as responsible for the emergence of the human: the insulation mechanism, the mechanism of disconnection of the body, the mechanism of pedomorphosis or neoteny, and the mechanism of transfer. See Sloterdijk, 2001b, pp. 175ff.

follows [increasingly] literal and ametaphorical paths. Language is – or was – the general medium for making friends with the world, to the extent that it is – or was – the medium for transferring the homely onto the non-homely» (2001b, p. 210).

Language may have played the dominant role in domesticating Being as a whole for an entire epoch, thus creating the impression that (linguistically constituted) thought and being converge at an innermost point. (In this sense there is an unbroken line of tradition stretching from Parmenides to Heidegger and Wittgenstein that can be identified *grosso modo* as being co-extensive with "Philosophy" and *the* Western World.) However, in the age of digital codes and genetic transcriptions, it is the case that: «The province of language is shrinking, the plaintext sector is growing» (Sloterdijk, 2001b, p. 213). It is becoming increasingly naive to continue ascribing to the *logos*, i.e. the word, the judgement and the conclusion, an ability to grasp what it is that holds the world together at its core. For at that core dimensions have long since arisen – genes in cells, neural impulses in the brain, and computer programmes in machines and social systems – that are entirely inaccessible to language-based understanding and language-induced operations.

According to Sloterdijk these spiritually and linguistically (which amounts to the same thing) unassimilable externalities and outside truths are «products of explication»[5], *lethe*-breaking, monstrous visitors from outside of language that have put down roots in the old world and turned it into an un-homely place. Whereas Heidegger in the face of these circumstances speaks with a holy shudder of «homelessness» [*Heimatlosigkeit*] as the modern «fate or destiny of the world» [*Weltschicksal*] (Heidegger, 1981, p. 30), Sloterdijk – working under the pressure generated by those circumstances – seeks to transform thinking into a new type of «medium for making friends with the world» – a medium for making friends with the monstrous. His writings are the trace of a heroic but jovial endeavour to transcend his own language-based condition, in favour of an extra- or hyper-linguistic one.

It is true that philosophy has always faced the problem of how to force the "golden tree of life" into the dry branches of concepts and terms – and the constant suspicion of thereby committing errors of gross reductionism. Yet after the end of the logocratic age, which is to say after grammar has been

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[5] On the notion of explication, see Sloterdijk, 2004, pp. 74–88.

debased to a kind of user interface of the mind, this situation has once again been fundamentally exacerbated. The post-logocratic philosopher, who must continue to make use of language *nolens volens*, assuming he wishes to avoid permanent literal self-contradiction, finds himself condemned to a permanent performative self-contradiction. He or she must find a way to use the means of language to go beyond it. And as the examples in Sloterdijk's thought and writings demonstrate, the "spheres" he or she then arrives at assume the nature of images – or as we prefer to say "hyperimages".

The hyperimage is situated at precisely the position within the history of truth at which thinking no longer works using the means provided by the old *logos*. In view of the non-linguistic technologies that are increasingly re-forming the world and creating new worlds, a "visual thinking" is called for that is "above" (*hyper*) discourse, emerges from it and in the course thereof takes on a figurative quality of a higher order. We are using the term "image" here not in the sense of "representation" that traditionally goes along with the "idea", but in the sense of an "image that means ideas", adapting Vilém Flusser's definition of what he calls the «techno-image» [*Technobild*] (Flusser, 1998, pp. 137ff). The natural and life sciences have long since felt compelled to give the opaque realms they have penetrated (and which possess barely any reality beyond their own models) a techno-image-induced-clarity by subjecting them to "imaging procedures". In the same way, the most advanced mode of thinking today must as it were make use of image-giving techniques, in order to illuminate the landscapes of ideas, discourse and data through which it navigates with a new kind of conscious formal seeing.

## 4. Making the Monstrous Explicit: From the One Sphere to the Foam Universe

Sloterdijk's rehabilitation of the mental image as a world-shaping [*weltbildender*] factor and as a medium of cognition – as opposed to Heidegger and as opposed to the imagophobic tradition of the *logos* as a whole – is already reflected in the title of his monumental three-volume work *Sphären*. And even more so in the subtitles of the three volumes: *Bubbles, Globes, Foam* [*Blasen, Globen, Schäume*] – all metaphors, thought images [*Denkbilder*] that claim to capture in foundational terms and in foundational *images* the real and surreal spaces in which people «live, weave and have their being», i.e. the spaces that constitute their "world". At this point, to avoid going down the wrong track we should bear in mind that we can only speak of

the «imagery» of the spheres in a transferred, in a morphological sense.[6] Sloterdijk highlights the distinctiveness of his own morphological view when he refers to Oswald Spengler's «so-called morphology of world history», which he considers to be a «brilliant», though ultimately failed theoretical precursor of spherology. According to Sloterdijk, Spengler conducted a forced «coup» by declaring cultures as a whole to be «living beings of the first order», self-contained «windowless units». In so doing he did a disservice to their historic «obstinacy» by «projecting» onto them an inappropriate morphological concept (Sloterdijk, 1998, p. 79).

Sloterdijk, on the other hand, is very much concerned to avoid the danger (which Heidegger emphasised) of mis-conceiving or dis-guising [*Ver-stellen*] the world by projecting any kind of pictorial or morphological concept onto it: «When we speak here of spheres as forms that realise themselves, we do so in the belief that we are not projecting any concepts. And if we were projecting any, then only as encouraged to do so by the referents themselves» (Sloterdijk, 1998, p. 79). In other words, the term "sphere" is intended to be as media-based, in-comprehensible and elusive as that to which it refers. In its triune form of the microspherical (bubbles), macrospherical (globes) and polyspherical (foam), it represents a morphological thought image [*Denkbild*] that claims to be largely free from the congenital defect of all previous world pictures incriminated by Heidegger as well as from the deficiency of the outdated attempts to construct a cultural morphology – i.e. free from the mis-conception and violation that results from the "projection" of alien constructs onto the "thing itself".

For this to succeed, the author must permanently think not only against the reifying tendency of language, but also against the entire history of European science, whose «approach and outcome were an enterprise designed to avoid addressing spherical *ekstasis*, given its orientation toward concrete representation» (Sloterdijk, 1998, p. 80). According to Sloterdijk, even the figure of speech of "gaining access" to the spherical would be misleading, because discovering the spherical is less a matter of accessibility «and more a matter of decelerated circumspection within the evident» (Sloterdijk, 1998, p. 80). In this sense the entire *Spheres* trilogy can be seen as a single para-

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[6] In his introduction to the trilogy Sloterdijk introduces the "sphere" as a morphological term. See Sloterdijk, 1998, pp. 78ff.

magical evocation, designed to transport the reader into the contemplative *ekstasis* of his or her own Being-in-spheres [*Dasein-in-Sphären*]. Readers who are not disposed to be enchanted by Sloterdijk's philosophical siren song – or not even willing to give it a try like an Odysseus shackled to the mast – are bound to miss the quintessence of his message.

It is the aforementioned onto-anthropological twin perspective, i.e. the inclusion of the technological production of «spherical ekstasis» that takes Sloterdijk's spherological vision beyond Heidegger's *ek-static* meditations and beyond phenomenology as a whole, and enables it to assume the specific nature of hyperimagery. Before we illustrate this by considering an example of morphological imagination in *Spheres III. Foam* [*Sphären III. Schäume*], we can at least identify a hint of how the morphological change in thought from Heidegger to Sloterdijk – from Old Europe to hypermodernity – takes place, by referring to a point in Heidegger's essay *What are poets for?* [*Wozu Dichter?*, 1946]. There, Heidegger comes within a hair's breadth of the spherical thought of hyperimagery by presenting pre-Socratic "Being" [*Sein*] as a hypersphere, before – as it were recoiling in the face of his own courage – passing the torch of imagination on to Sloterdijk:

> The spherical of the One and this itself possess the nature of the clearing, within which being-present [*Anwesendes*] can be present [*anwesen*]. This is why Parmenides (Frgm. VIII, 42) calls the *eón*, the presence [*Anwesen*] of the being-present [*Anwesendes*], the *eukyklos sphaíre*. We must think of this well-rounded sphere, as the Being [*Sein*] of the Be-ing [*das Seiende*] in the sense of the clearing One. (Heidegger 2003b, p. 301)

This throws the door wide open to the hyperimagination. The morphological imagination is invited to find free expression. Heidegger, meanwhile, continues:

> We must never imagine this sphere of Being and its spherical nature as an object. Should we imagine it as a non-object instead? No, that would be mere evasion into a figure of speech. We must think of the spherical from the essence [*Wesen*] of the initial Being [*Sein*] of the revealing presence [*Anwesen*].

What makes a promising start («never imagine...as an object») ends abruptly with a prohibition on the imagination and the nailing down of the idea to the word. But is «revealing presence» not a «figure of speech»? Mustn't this concept remain worryingly empty if we refrain from associating it with the

appropriate imagination? Sloterdijk will not shy away from piling figure of speech upon figure of speech over hundreds of pages. He will do this to re-evoke the traditional metaphysical world-picture [*Welt-Bild*] with its psycho-physical hybrid cosmology, whose logical nucleus Heidegger specified above, from the realm of the faded world pictures, as colourfully and multifariously as possible. His *Spheres* trilogy is thus – either despite or because of his comment that it is the working out of the «sub-theme of *Being and space* squeezed into *Being and time*» (Sloterdijk, 2001c, p. 403) – one long denial of Heidegger's claim that the world picture [*Weltbild*] is a purely modern phenomenon.

According to Sloterdijk, both Antiquity and the Middle Ages were downright obsessed with the sphere as a symbol of unity and wholeness. As such they were much more caught in the grip of a (morphological) "picture" than modernity, whose constitutive event was the very disintegration of the «well-rounded sphere of Being».[7] As the trigger of this event in the High Middle Ages, Sloterdijk identifies the following sentence from the hermetic *Book of 24 Philosophers*: «God is a sphere, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere» (Sloterdijk, 1999, pp. 538ff). This paradoxical wording challenges the reader to transfer the spherical form onto something entirely unseen, abstract and above all infinite. This infinitisation unhinged the closed monosphere of metaphysics, which then dissolved in the formless – the monstrous. The consequences of this were the "death of God" and the infinite universe. Our comment on this is that it was evidently the hermetic instruction to think in terms of the hyperimage, i.e. an impulse coming from within the very core of metaphysics, which led to the latter's collapse. Metaphysics imploded as a result of nothing other than the attempt to formulate its own foundational intuitions more appropriately, which is to say in a more "non-representational", non-concrete way.

As this very impulse to explicate the spherical hyperimage is also located at the generative pole of spherology, Sloterdijk is able to say:

> Once the mechanisms of appropriation through simplifying globes and imperial totalitarisation have been seen through, this does not provide us with the reason why we should do away with everything that was considered great,

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[7] See Chapter 5: "*Deus sive sphaera* oder: Das explodierende All-Eine", in Sloterdijk, 1999, pp. 465-581.

> inspiring and valuable. [...] Once the grand hyperbole has had its day, swarms of discrete uprisings emerge. (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 26)

The spherological quest for morphological concepts and mental images that make visible the monstrosity of the modern world is directly linked – albeit heterodoxically – to the tradition of metaphysical and even pre-metaphysical spherical creations.[8] Yet the psycho-physical laws of morphology that the metaphysical thinkers projected with such vigour onto the entire world, which they construed as a monosphere, are still at work even after its collapse. Today they are producing a «multifocal, multiperspectival and heterarchic» (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 23) variety of spheres – the «foam». «The One Sphere may have imploded, but the foam is living!» (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 26). This aphorism captures in a nutshell the shift from the metaphysical world picture to the post-metaphysical world image, according to Sloterdijk.

Foam and the bubbles that compose it are so to speak products of the decomposition of the metaphysical monosphere. They are the atmospheric and symbolic human spaces, manifesting themselves in material architectures, in which societies, cultures and sub-cultural units are linked: the scientific community, political pressure groups, associations, circles of friends and households, and more recently bloggers, gamers and flash mobs. They are linked through their various traditions, moods and world pictures [*Weltbilder*] in a conglomerate of larger and smaller psycho-mental soap bubbles on the basis of the co-isolation principle. They all form «breathable milieus» that are distinct from the monstrous space of the outside into which they are held out [*hineingehalten*]. Unlike in the metaphysical, the one and whole sphere of Being, in a foamy universe of this kind there is no longer any centre from which the "whole" – which is in fact no longer a whole – might be overseen and explained. Nor is there any longer a circumference that would give boundaries and clear contours to the foam in its entirety. What there is, is different perspectives and views that shift from one bubble in the foam to the next, and the possibility for the observer of changing places between the bubbles.

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[8] If we construe hermetics as the heterodoxy of metaphysics that attempted to think the hyperimage on the basic of metaphysical premises, then this makes Peter Sloterdijk a hermetic – the "25th philosopher" so to speak – with a contemporary level of reflection. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Jongen, 2009.

## 5. Aphrogrammes: A Spherological Fantasy

According to Sloterdijk, in a situation like this, searching for a panoramic overview, for a single grand theory, is a «nostalgic longing for a world picture» that will be «driven inevitably into resignation» (Sloterdijk, 1998, p. 77). Nonetheless, his spherology delivers nothing but a meta- or hyper-theory of theories and perspectives on the hypermonstrosity that is the world. Is this not self-contradictory? It is not self-contradictory – or is so at most in the good sense of the word hinted at above – if we recognise that spherology does not produce another world picture, but seeks – through hyperimages – to shape the perception of and navigation within those "world images" of which the world itself is made (at least as far as it extends beyond the mere *physis*). The fact that this trans-logical, morphological mode of seeing must be articulated in the same linear medium of writing as any ordinary worldview-philosophy, and must use the same alphabet and the same vocabulary, should not blind us to the yawning intellectual abyss that divides the two. We can rule out the possibility that eventually the most advanced thinking will seek new non-linear, post-alphabetic forms of notation.

In the chapter entitled *Neither contract nor organic growth* in *Spheres III* (Sloterdijk, 2004, pp. 261–308), Sloterdijk mobilises the foam metaphor in explicit opposition to both the traditional contractual and the organicistic, holistic theories of society. He considers both of these to be examples of the "projection" of false pictures and ideas onto the world, i.e. as "world pictures" in the pejorative sense of the term. In both cases, he believes, we are dealing with «hyperboles of pronounced constructivist recklessness that impress by renouncing everyday reality and replacing it with elaborations of an abstract metaphor» (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 287). The traces of this «abstract metaphor» can be followed right into the concept of "society" itself, which deceitfully suggests an association of its members established by contract or some other conscious means. For this reason, since *Spheres III* Sloterdijk barely ever writes the word "society" without placing it in inverted commas. What we should be doing instead, he believes, is «describing the togetherness, the communication and the cooperation of the multiplicities, who are held together under the stress of coexistence in their own space, but who are unfortunately still referred to as societies, on their own terms» (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 293).

So, entirely in the spirit of the phenomenological call to return "to the things themselves!", and similar to Heidegger's tree meditation mentioned at the outset, Sloterdijk would like to leave human togetherness in the spaces where it is present – and which are created through its presence in the first place. Unlike Heidegger, who remained in the idyllic province (of language), Sloterdijk cannot do without the means of metaphorical imagery, because he finds himself face to face not with a *physis* that is simply there with no awareness or conceptualisations, but with a thoroughly artificial reality generated by humans and their cultural technologies. This artificial reality has no ground onto which one might leap, and most certainly no "image-less" ground. When we leap into the bottomless, present, billowing world of foam, our only aim can be to replace the false pictures and «abstract metaphors» that we have projected onto it with the appropriate images and metaphors:

> Although "society" can only be understood on the basis of its original spatiality and multiplicity along with the syntagma that hold them together, the geometric spatial pictures of the land registries do not yet provide the valid image of togetherness between people and their architectural "containers"; no conceptualisation in terms of mere containers is suitable for articulating the self-willed tautness of animated forms in their aggregations. If such conceptualisations were available, we would have to operate with psycho-topological maps based as it were on infrared images of internal states in polyvalent hollow bodies. (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 302).

Here, and below, we quote at greater length, for at this point we can observe Sloterdijk gradually producing a hyperimage in the process of writing. Once he gets going with the image of «psycho-topological maps», he spins this spherological imaginative yarn further and envisions «aphrographs or foamy snapshots» (from the Greek *áphros*, meaning "foam"), which identify the foam as a whole and at the first glance as an always «unstable synthetic snapshot of a teeming agglomeration» (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 303).

> A high-resolution aphrogramme of a "society" would give us a clear image of the system of honeycombs and neighbourhoods within air-conditioned bubbles, thus enabling us to understand that "societies" are polyspherical air-conditioning systems, in the physical and the psychological sense. [...] From then on, the political realm would need to be studied using a theory of fluid dynamics for semantic loads or vectors of sense. (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 304)

What rationalistic critics would dismiss as one of Sloterdijk's typical bursts of semantic delirium without any specifiable scientific sense, on closer inspection

proves to be a product of "precise imagination" in Goethe's sense which, using its morphological "infrared vision", scans our present highly-complex "societal" reality for these forms, and translates them into linguistic metaphors that are suggested by the matter itself. Of course, this goes along with the end of the «traditional bright and clear alliance between eye and light» that Goethe appropriated in exemplary fashion and that Sloterdijk still ascribes to traditional phenomenology (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 81). Phenomenology, he writes,

> was a rescue service for phenomena in an age when most of them no longer fall of their own accord on the eye or the other senses; they are rather extracted, brought to the surface and rendered visible [...] by research, by invasive explication and by related measurements. (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 79)

If these «new visibilities» continue to be treated like shoes, jugs and blooming trees, this will disguise the fact that they have assumed the appearance of «phenomena» only thanks to technology-based methods of producing images. Conversely, this means that in the technology-based world, which has itself long since become an image, the «clarifying quality» of phenomenological cognition, which Heidegger wanted to protect against all «world pictures» and «systems», can paradoxically only be rescued by making the image a part of thought – or even better, by making thought a part of the image.

## 6. Conclusions

We can summarise as follows. Through his onto-anthropological twin perspectives, Sloterdijk responds to the "age of the world picture" in a way that is diametrically opposed to its discoverer Heidegger.

Unlike Heidegger, instead of sifting through archaic strata of thought in search of a "different beginning" located *before* the "world became picture", Sloterdijk accepts the latter as an inevitable fact. Then, in an avant-garde and at the same time homeopathic gesture, he proceeds to cure the errors and dire consequences of the modern way of thinking in terms of systems and models: not by reducing the importance of "picture" [*Bild*], but by increasing it, turning it into "image", which means moving away from purely pictorial re-presentation and toward metaphorical hyperimagery. The "world" [*Welt*], which was caught in the abstract system of schematic concepts developed by modern rationalism, and as a result has become opaque, can only be clarified and made transparent again by stepping forward toward a morphological mode

of thought based on the hyperimage. The fact that this mode of thought takes us even further away from Being [*Sein*], is something that we consciously accept. Contemporary Being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-Sein*] is not a question of finding ourselves amidst the original circumstances of nature, it is not a bivalent arrangement in which subjects stand face to face as more or less pure mirrors of given objects. Even less can we opt for the solution of logical monovalence: the melting of the subject into the world as a whole, into "Being" [*Sein*] *sans phrase*. We should rather recognise – by applying logically polyvalent onto-anthropology – that we ourselves have produced the world in which we are (which is to say the spheres) using anthropo-technological means. As the philosophical fantasy of the aphrogrammes demonstrates, spherological hyperimagery is the medium that makes our highly artificial, highly abstract world accessible to a no less artificial contemplation. In turn, this makes the world once again comprehensible and "homely". (As we can see, in post-metaphysical times too, "like for like" remains the valid guiding principle for cognition.)

In this context we should draw attention to a tension within Sloterdijk's thinking that his writings elegantly smooth over. Once we bring the appropriate intellectual energy to bear upon this tension, it will inevitably put things to the acid test, yet might lead to productive overlaps with Sloterdijk's thinking as it stands. This tension is basically due to the fact that Sloterdijk, as we already mentioned, radicalises the Heideggerian history of truth as a gradual *unconcealing* of Being [*Sein*] (see the Greek *aletheia*, meaning "unconcealedness") toward a history of *explication*. In so doing he removes the ontological ground from beneath the feet of phenomenology – a method from which he himself borrows heavily. He concedes that the phenomenology of the twentieth century was a major part of modernity's movement of cognitive explication, because it articulated clearly and systematised for the first time things that human beings had always known and experienced. However, in the face of its epistemological optimism he raises the question:

> But how, if we can demonstrate that as the implicit becomes explicit, something entirely wayward, strange, different, something never meant, never anticipated and never assimilable, occasionally infiltrates thought? [...] If there is something new, which evades the symmetry of the implicit and the explicit, and penetrates the orders of knowledge as something that remains ultimately alien, external, monstrous? (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 78)

The fact that spherology assumes *a priori* a primacy of the exterior – «we are in an exterior that supports interior worlds» (Sloterdijk, 1998, p. 28) – means that it is clearly situated *after* the ruptured symmetry of interior and exterior that marks the beginning of hypermodernity. However, Sloterdijk's method of investigating how the monstrous exterior truths make themselves felt in the spherical interior worlds remains, as we have seen, heavily tinged by phenomenology. Whether and how, as a result of the continued intrusion of unassimilable exteriority into the human spheres – and their involuntary re-shaping as a result – will force the most advanced thinking to remove more of its phenomenological apparel, and force hyperimagery to become increasingly technoid, would have to the made the subject of a separate study.

Sloterdijk's aforementioned aphrogramme mediation is illustrated on the opposite page of the book with a satellite image taken by NASA over North and South America on a cloudless night, which shows the urban agglomerations brightly illuminated (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 305). A «hellish machine for the eye»[9] delivers from a stratospheric height an image designed to prise open the nature of our psycho-spatial interior spaces and their cohesion. (This is a splendid illustration of the juxtaposition and intertwining generated by a radical interior perspective and a no less radical exterior perspective that is typical of Sloterdijk.) We should note that the photograph is not itself an aphrogramme – that would mean a trivialisation of the hyperimage. In itself it is just a picture, or rather an image, a metaphor thereof. Like all illustrations in Sloterdijk's books, it is not merely an illustration of the ideas developed in the text. These illustrations are designed to plant in the reader's mind an awareness of the figurative, encouraging them to "see" or to "imagine" what is written. In Sloterdijk's works both elements, text and image, can be interpreted as the two halves (each of which is incomplete in itself) of a mode of thought based on the hyperimage for which no system of notation as such has yet been found. Should this one day be the case, future historians of ideas will pick up *Spheres* and look at it as one of the earliest documents in which the new medium of the monstrous clearly strove to find expression.

*Translated from the German by John Cochrane*

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[9] Sloterdijk uses this phrase in the context of the emergence of microscopes and telescopes in the 17th century. Cf. Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 81.

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Book Review
# L'albero del *Tractatus*
Luciano Bazzocchi
Mimesis, Milano, 2010

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Unexpected consequences can be drawn by taking seriously Wittgenstein's own instructions on how to read the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, that he carefully added as the only footnote to the text, but that often have not been adequately stressed by critics. The structure of the book, with its decimal figures, becomes the key to its correct reading, and its correct reading becomes the key to our correct vision of the world. On these bases, Luciano Bazzocchi offers a well-grounded new reading of Wittgenstein's masterpiece.

*L'albero del Tractatus* is divided into two parts: in the first part Bazzocchi, starting from the footnote in which Wittgenstein invites us to consider the decimal figures as showing the «logical importance» of his propositions, puts forward the metaphor of the tree as the only possible guide to the text. In the second part, he examines the MS (manuscript) 104, from which it was derived the so-called *Prototractatus*, and finds in it an important confirmation: the tree metaphor is not only the correct guide, but also the real method of the composition of the *Tractatus*.

One of the most interesting point in Bazzocchi's work is the analysis of the relations among the propositions of the *Tractatus*. Placing side by side propositions of the same decimal level inside the same "bough" of the tree, we can often notice meaningful syntactical and terminological resemblances. More generally, since Wittgenstein underlines the importance of the decimal numbers, it is pointless to read the book sequentially, as if each proposition were a consequence or a comment of the immediate previous proposition. On the contrary, each proposition has a position determined by its decimal number, and therefore refers either to the upper proposition (i.e. proposition

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2.172 is a comment of 2.17), or to the same level previous proposition (i.e. 2.172 refers to 2.171). This simple indication is often forgotten by critics. The best example is to be found in last page of the *Tractatus*, namely, where we come to see the general sense of the entire work. Proposition 7, «Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent», does not refer to 6.54, «My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed upon it). He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly». Instead, it refers to proposition 6, in which Wittgenstein gives the general form of the truth function and says: «This is the general form of proposition». The meaning is clear. Either the proposition has the form of the truth function, or it is not a proposition; either it describes facts that can happen in the world of facts, or it is not a part of language. Proposition 7 – says Bazzocchi – is nothing but a principle of modal logic: «What cannot be said, must not be said». Silence, as is recommended in 7, has no connection with «seeing the world rightly», the ending of 6.54. This is confirmed by the genesis of these sections of the *Tractatus*, documented in Bazzocchi's work on MS104, which shows that proposition 7 follows some remarks about the general form of propositions and about being all propositions of the same value. Instead, 6.54, together with its predecessor 6.53, are subsequent in Wittgenstein's elaboration. Also, 6.54 had originally another ending: after transcending the propositions, the reader – as we can see under the corrections of MS104 – «gets, on the right level, to what can be said».

What does this reading mean for the image of the world that the *Tractatus* suggests? Bazzocchi's aim seems to be to contrast two well-established interpretations. On the one hand, the resolute interpretation given by the New Wittgenstein current, that affirms basically that the *Tractatus* gives no image of the world, but only shows itself, and every other similar attempt, to be nonsensical. Indeed, if we understand that proposition 7 is not a comment or a consequence of 6.54, the impression of nonsense – says Bazzocchi – dissolves. On the other hand, by insisting on the connection between propositions 6 and 7, he contrasts the mystical interpretations of the *Tractatus*, that emphasize silence as the only correct approach to the existence of the world. What is most interesting to notice, is that Wittgenstein's deep attention to the structure of his work is a substantial part of his picture theory of language. The only way to read the *Tractatus* rightly, is by paying attention to the relations among

propositions. And, in the same way, the only way to see the world rightly, is to see that it is «all that is the case», it is made of facts and relations among facts. Language has the same logical structure of the world: every fact can be depicted in language, but language can't depict anything else than facts. Whether this vision eliminates the mystic sense of reality, or even more clearly lets it emerge, is a question that Bazzocchi doesn't ask; but that, in conclusion, may be worth asking.

Book Review

# Politics and the Imagination
Raymond Geuss
Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010

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This volume collects twelve essays written by Raymond Geuss, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, between 2004 and 2008. Most of the essays presented here have already appeared in print, but the author adds to this publication a *Preface* which is supposed to let the overlapping topics between the articles emerge and to stress the common inspiration of the whole volume. Indeed, the *Preface* contains the most explicit statements on the subject the title itself refers to, whereas the essays, which are announced to approach it from different angles, often fail to stick to the point. While the essays range from the war in Iraq to Celan's poetry, it is in the *Preface* that the most interesting theoretical insights are to be found.

The liaison between politics and the imagination is a long-disputed topic for philosophy. Still, imagination (along with its related terms: image, imaginative, and the like) is an extremely wide concept, which covers different meanings and allows different uses. This complexity, which easily turns into ambiguity, seems to be the main concern of Geuss. As far as I read the book, its most remarkable effort is to shed light on the concept of imagination by distinguishing between three acceptations of it. No politics would be possible in the absence of this human faculty, but Guess argues that different forms of politics employ different forms of the imagination.

Most of the political reflection on the imagination has viewed it as the necessary condition for social criticism. In the 20th century, authors such as Günther Anders and Hannah Arendt have emphasized the political relevance of the imagination as the faculty involved in criticizing social reality and projecting an alternative one. Although Geuss challenges «romantic

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equivalence of human imagination and absolute liberty» (p. 67), this is the kind of imagination which puts the politician at a *distance* from which it is possible to evaluate the existing society and to try to construct a better one.

Yet, from Geuss' standpoint the role of the imagination does not identify utopian politics. Against the reigning dogma in the field, even the most conservative *Realpolitik* has to rely on the imagination to be effective. In this case, by the concept of imagination Geuss makes reference to the ability to face up to and to some extent to envisage the future. This kind of imagination is needed when it is a question of taking into account all the conditions which may affect political plans and to foresee their possible outcomes. As far as this meaning is concerned, Geuss admits that September 11 terrorists were apparently exceptionally imaginative (p. 15). This also shows that, unlike the former, this latter type of imagination is utterly devoid of any ethical nuance.

However, there is a third form of the imagination which does not perform such important tasks. Geuss labels the products of this faculty as *illusions*, but in fact their definition perfectly matches to what other authors would call *world images*: the whole set of «beliefs, attitudes, desires and values» (p. x) shared by a society. Geuss regards this as a heteronymous view of reality, which people should abandon in order to look at the society they live in «from outside», making criticism possible. According to this position, «social imagination» — that is, the faculty which develops the world view shared by a civilization — is always a conservative force, from which people are supposed to become emancipated so to start employing their own imagination.

In my perspective, there are two grounds to subject this stance to criticism. Firstly, by considering world images a in the *status quo* embedded view of reality, Geuss disregards the fact that social criticism and political changes can but arise within a collective representation of reality. Namely, only collective world images, not private imagination, can make several people pursue the same aim and follow the same strategy in order to achieve it. Moreover, to claim for a «realistic, or at least more realistic world view» (p. x) than the one we used to adhere to, seems to elevate the former as the *true* representation of reality, while refuting the latter as a *false*, ideological (in a Marxist fashion) view of the world. Needless to say, the opposition between true and false world views is, in a sense, pure metaphysics. From a post-metaphysical perspective, we only have different "screens" which mediate our approach to reality, but there is no such thing as a perfectly transparent window through which we are allowed to look at the world as it really is.

In conclusion, the contents of the essays are too heterogeneous to allow an overall view. On the contrary, in the *Preface* Geuss formulates some precious remarks in order to clarify a much-disputed subject of political philosophy. His final comment can hardly be questioned: such a research also have a dramatic practical urgency. In the face of the severe environmental challenges that lie ahead of us, the duty of imagination might be the only way to have any future at all.

Commentary

# *Weltbilder* and Theology
### *Das Weltbild der Zukunft*
### Karl Heim

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In summer 1904, 30-year-old Karl Heim wrote within a few weeks only a book which caused ambivalent reactions: *Das Weltbild der Zukunft* (*The World Picture of the Future*).[1] Whereas the inflated claim of the title irritated the academic world, students in Leipzig and Marburg formed circles in which the book was discussed vividly. Highly abstract lines of thought alternate with overflowing, vivid images. The whole opus is pervaded by an unequalled passion.

That time was the period of the battle for worldviews [*Weltanschauungen*], as many book titles around 1900 phrased it (Beuttler, 2006, pp. 36–51). It was the sharp confrontation, the irreconcilable contrast between science and theology, but also between science and philosophy, which did not seem to leave any room for constructive dialogue. *Das Weltbild der Zukunft* is the bold attempt of young Heim to constructively synthesize the «discussion between philosophy, science and theology» to obtain «the draft of a uniform world picture [*Weltbild*]» (W, p. 6), a demand hardly to be met. It is the attempt of a great synthesis to re-establish something like a uniform picture or image of the world after the collapse of the idealistic systems.[2] Heim attempts to bring together four central tendencies of modern thinking.

*Firstly* he takes up the effort of the Neo-Kantians A. Riehl and P. Natorp «to cleanse the lasting fundamental ideas of the Kantian system more and more thoroughly from all scholastic elements» – which means the abandonment of the assumption of the "thing in itself"; then *secondly*, the «disintegration of the Myth of the Ego», i.e. the dissolution of the concept of a substantial ego, by R. Avenarius' and E. Mach's empirio-criticism; *thirdly*, the breakup of atomistic

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[1] Heim, 1980[2], quoted hereafter as W.
[2] A detailed interpretation is given in Beuttler, 2006, pp. 52–104.

physics by W. Ostwald's energetics, and *finally*, the – despite all differences yet common – efforts of F.H.R. Frank, A. Ritschl, W. Herrmann or M. Kähler in their «search for a position of faith resting in itself only and independent of all metaphysics and of all philosophic arguments» (W, p. 6). Despite his criticism, Heim's basic concern is in agreement with theirs.

In terms of epistemology, the *first* tendency means not to approach reality metaphysically-speculatively but based on experience, as it is done both in everyday and in scientific realism. The *second* tendency causes Heim to abandon the notion of a substantial ego or object in favour of a relational ontology. For Heim, the principle of relativity is, ontologically and based on epistemology, the «world formula» which, *thirdly*, is confirmed by the tendency of modern physics. The *fourth* tendency, finally, leads to the conclusion that every relative relation is constituted by decisions which in themselves have an absolute, non-relative momentum – Heim calls it «will» – and which places faith as a non-relative decision in formal analogy to any world relations. The four tendencies foreshadows the line of thoughts of the book. After a critical disintegration of modern epistemology by empirio-critical epistemology, a relational epistemology and natural philosophy are built upon the principle of relativity. Time, space and matter have an analogical relational and «will-type» structure which is also characteristic for faith, whose certainty becomes imaginable on the basis of the formal analogy between the act of volition, space-time relations and religion.

Heim tries to achieve the synthesis of science, philosophy and religion by means of some kind of common denominator which he calls the «world formula» [*Weltformel*] or also, «as simple a formulation of the world's secret as possible» (W, p. 5). The «world formula» is not a mathematic formula for the natural powers such as have been searched for by the 20th century elementary particle physics. «World formula» rather stands for a kind of basic principle of reality. It replies to the question: What is reality and how can it be comprehended uniformly, i.e. on basis of an ultimate principle? For Heim, the ultimate principle for comprehension of the world is relation. In line with Neo-Kantian philosophy and energetic physics, Heim understands reality as non-substantial, but as relational.

Heim develops a logic of relations, which he also calls «relational logic», and in which he differentiates between various types of relations. The most important ones are the basic relation [*Grundverhältnis*] and the exchange relation [*Umtauschverhältnis*] (W, pp. 32–46). The exchange relation refers to the

interchangeability of the poles in a relation. Right and left, top and bottom can be exchanged by simply turning round. Rest and motion only exist in relation to each other and can be exchanged by changing one's location. The mutual interchangeability of the elements in the exchange relation is an expression of the relativity of reality. For Heim, the concept of relativity is the «basic philosophic principle» of relational logic.

The basic relation is a bit more complicated. It is the base-laying relation, the relation within the relation. It means that every relation can be regarded as a unity, and every unity as an element in a relation. The basic relation is the short formula for the relational character of reality. Every unity can become a relation by being split into two or by being understood as the element of a higher relation, and vice versa, ever relation can be combined to a unity. The basic relation describes reality as a relational arrangement while at the same time structuring it hierarchically. A unity becomes a relation always on a lower level, and a relation becomes a unity always on a higher level. Thus an infinite net of relations of relative unities and unities of relations develops: «Our whole world, arranged as time flow and space pattern, is based on such a chain of primary decisions which branch out further and further like the successive generations in the genealogical tree of an age-old family» (W, p. 106).

Now, the point in Heim's relational logic is that a decision has to be made with regard to the alternatives possible in a relation, i.e. which side is to be defined as right or left, or what is to be defined as unity and what as relation. It is fundamental that only one of the two alternatives in an exchange relation can be realised, and a decision has to be made as to which one is realised. In the same way, a decision has to be made with regard to the alternatives offered by the basic relation. *In actu*, something can only be regarded as relation-unity or as the element of a relation. Reality is constituted such that always one of two alternatives has to be opted for. I can only stand either left or right of an object (decision in an exchange relation) etc., something can only be a relation or an element of another relation (decision in a basic relation). The either-or, which decides between the both-and alternatives, is the «world formula». As Heim phrases it:

> The exchange relation in which relation and relational element stand to each other in the basic relation is the world formula. In order to constitute any kind of reality, the alternative contained in the *basic relation* must be decided upon. [As well,] the alternative contained in the *exchange relation* must be decided upon. (W, p. 104)

The coming into being of reality is always a decision between the alternatives possible in the basic relation and in the exchange relation. Reality thus has the nature of will taking decisions about all alternatives possible. The transition from the multitude of possibilities to the one decision realised, that is what reality is. It can be discussed whether and to what extent the deciding nature of reality is adequately described by «will». In any case, when the nature of reality is regarded as a sequence of decisions, the result is a new, non-deterministic world picture. The basic components of the world are not atoms and things (i.e. the isolated entities) which are arranged secondarily but the decisions themselves so that reality appears as a permanently re-assembling, living-creative arrangement of relations. «Thus a new world picture has developed. The dead, rigid wasteland has disappeared [...] consciousness and decision, consciousness and will are the powers upon which all reality is based» (Kalweit, 1908, p. 88). The world has the nature of consciousness, will and decision rather than of dead matter.[3]

> The whole of reality is woven together from creative decisions, from the setting of relations, decisions with regard to the basic and the exchange relations contained in them. [...] Everything real is [...] a creator's footstep creating worlds out of nothing, the bold setting of the measure of all things, the decision on the world's centre. (W, pp. 105f.)

Among all the world's mysteries solved by the world formula – time, space, personality, will, natural law, matter[4] – will is the central one. «Will» is «the principle creating the world» (W, p. 116). With this expression, Heim has changed the world formula from an abstract logic into a dynamic logic of actual relations. Reality is not composed of ontologically isolated and separated entities but of a net of relations. Reality is not made up of final entities, separate in themselves. There are no final facts. There is nothing which could not be divided again. There is nothing differentiated that could not be split up again into sub-divisions or relations: «In the whole world, wherever we look, we only have to do with relations and never with final facts which could not be unfolded again into relations. All units we talk about are latent, possible relations» (W,

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[3] Cf. the motto of W «Soul only is the universe» (pp. 3, 207), which originates from the Upanishads and doesn't means the Platonic or Stoic soul of the universe, but the will-character of reality.
[4] The Chapters of W are: World Formula, Time, Space, Personality, Will, Natural Law, The Energetic World Picture.

p. 116). Consequently, when all unities can be divided into relations again, reality is made up of relations rather than of unities. Reality is a continuum throughout. We never reach final borders or final elements. According to Heim, the world is built on every level continuously but never of discrete components. «Pure experience» shows the «strange intertwinement of unity and relation, the dividability of all unities into relations and the convertibility of all relations into unities. [...] So now the logic of unities, from whose point of view relations are formed only by isolable unities, is replaced by a logic of relations for which all unities are exclusively formed by relations» (Heim, 1905, p. 229).

Philosophically, Heim's world formula is the final abandonment of substance metaphysics in favour of a relational, dynamic ontology of relations, an approach which was developed by A.N. Whitehead's process philosophy twenty years later only. But also a basic thought of the theory of relativity is considered, i.e. the principle of relativity. This was not invented by Einstein in 1905, but it can be traced back to Galilei and was already known in the Middle Ages. It means that there is no absolute motion. In addition, quantum physics, which was developed by Planck from 1900 on, can – at least in the field theoretical phrasing used since the 1930s – be considered a confirmation of the world formula. The final components of matter are not hard particles, the atoms are not undivisible, the elementary particles can and have to be described as waves, i.e. as extended, dynamically acting entities. Most of all, Heim sees this dynamic comprehension of matter confirmed by the so-called energetics.

As per its founder and primary representative Wilhelm Ostwald, energetics claims to overcome 19th century scientific materialism physically (Ostwald, 1904); the mechanistic world picture which ascribes all phenomena of living or inanimate nature to the mechanics of the atoms is untenable. Ostwald declares the failure of all attempts to explain non-mechanical occurrences such as warmth, radiation, electricity etc. even in principle as mechanical. In all cases Du Bois-Reymond's "ignoramus" is applicable, but it only is so due to its wrong, mechanistic basis of explanation. If the mechanistic *Weltbild* falls, the "ignorabimus" falls as well (Ostwald, 1904, p. 229). Ostwald's alternative to the mechanistic *Weltbild* is the energetic one. According to the energetic *Weltbild*, not matter is the source of energy but vice-versa: energy only is real, matter is a mental construct «in order to depict the permanent in the flow of occurrences» (Ostwald, 1904, p. 234). The real thing is that which has an ef-

fect on us, that which can be experienced and felt. Consequently, it is energy which constitutes reality.

As energy always is transferred in energy differences, i.e. in relations, energetics is the prototype of a science of relative relations. Energetics pictures the relational character of reality in the empiric-physical theory. So: nowhere are there any firm, absolute components, but relations of relations. Reality is not, it happens, says Heim along with the physician James Jeans, and Whitehead might express it similarly. Reality is a dynamic process of the formation of relations.

If applied to all relations, this dynamic concept of reality also has consequences for the faith because faith can also be described as a relation. Heim sees a «formal analogy» (W, p. 268) between the religious and the natural philosophic concept of relation. Faith as a relation with God is a multiple relation; structurally and formally it is in accordance with the world formula. Faith has the double relational structure of decisions of reality or will. It is decision in the exchange relation and decision in the basic relation because faith on the one hand is something that realises itself as a relation; faith is never real other than in a relation, and namely in one concrete relation (one out of various possible relations): a relation of a specified person to a god or a supreme being and viceversa. Faith, thus, is a «decision» in the exchange relation. It is also a decision in the basic relation. It is a relational element in a higher relation by integrating itself and resting in a higher, superior total will, the will of God. Faith is an element in the basic relation and at the same time an element in the exchange relation. Faith is the relation of two individual wills which can be described as a «personal trust relationship», and it finds its rest in a total will which is superordinate and which is basis for the world and basis for the faith.

In any case God is not a substantial entity that exists somehow for itself, but that exists in relation to us and we exist, in one way or the other, in relation to God. As Martin Luther says in his *Large Catechism*, upon which you set your heart is properly your god, belief or unbelief make a god. Just as one's relation is with God – either in a relation of faith or faithlessness, either of ignorance or devotion – such is his reality in relation to us. In one way or the other, this relation has to be decided about again and again. And to the believer, God is not only the object and vis-à-vis of faith, but also its subject, its author and foundation.

It is no longer possible to put God supra-naturalistically in a place in the other world, it is no longer possible, as Heim puts it pointedly, «to let God live

in the world's upper room or rear building» (W, p. 272). God is always in the world and related to us in the relations of the world. Neither is he simply transcendent nor simply immanent (Beuttler, 2010, pp. 512–550). Instead, the immanent transcendence of God is not a firm fact, it is no state, but it is the result of a decision, of a decision of will. This, again, does not mean a distant relationship, i.e. that man can somehow, in a pietistic sense, make a decision for God in his inner being, as isolated subject. No, this decision-making process is a relation of will powers in which man's will comes to an agreement with God's will, is quasi integrated in the higher will of God. The fact of being integrated excludes a neutral position. The meaning of God's transcendence and God's immanence, God's otherworldliness and this-worldliness, God's absence and presence, cannot be experienced theoretically from a spectator's point of view, but only in real life (Heim, 1931, p. 100).

The innovative potential of *Das Weltbild der Zukunft* can be abstracted and interpreted as follows: As all realms of reality – nature as well as logic and knowledge, and religion – are broken down into relational structures, there results a synthesis of natural science, philosophy and religion. It is the decisional and will character that characterises reality so that religion, in analogy to philosophy and natural sciences, is traced back to the world formula and the uniform world picture is built.

Belief and knowledge are united, even if it is formally and structurally only. It is not, as Walter Ruttenbeck interpreted, that «the antagonism of belief and knowledge has been fully bridged, [...] dissolved into a wonderful harmony» (Ruttenbeck, 1925, p. 10). But, from an epistemological point of view, faith is no longer in opposition to other ways of expression of the spirit. Faith is no longer an exception from other areas of life, neither culturally nor anthropologically. It is not located «in a province in one's mind» (F. Schleiermacher) but is implemented in one's whole life; it has no limited universe of discourse but refers to the whole of reality, and faith itself is something real, just like the world's happenings are real.

The formal similarity between religious life and natural processes can, of course, only be maintained under the assumption of a voluntaristic world picture, i.e. that the foundation of everything real is designed as acting, living and will-like. Neither in religious nor in other contexts is the human spirit thought of as an extramundane subjectivity, as a *res cogitans* isolated from the natural world, but as integrated into the happenings of the natural.

The philosophic consequence of the overall voluntaristic picture, which has its parallels with Schopenhauer, but most of all with the later F.W.J. Schelling and with the Swabian fathers F.C. Oetinger and M. Hahn, and also with J. Böhme, is that the rationalistic subject-object antagonism of reason and nature is undermined in its very beginning and is replaced by a theosophic world picture, if you like.

The issue is not a formal or even cultural imperialistic synthesis of philosophy, natural science and theology, but a synopsis of their particular fields of knowledge from the perspective of the unity of reality. Connecting with the Christian-speculative theosophy, Heim tries to create a «*Weltbild* of faith» which brings together man and nature, God and the world. It may seem quixotic and speculative to analyse according to relational logic and to insist on the will-character of all the world's processes. But it is the attempt of a «synopsis of the entire reality», which Heim himself justified as follows:

> Only as long as thinking dares to understand the whole of the world on the basis of a principle is it directly practical and leads to life-shaping deeds. [...] As soon as we definitively give up the Hegel's bold attempt and content ourselves with mere seeing rather than with understanding, in the true sense of the word, i.e. as soon as we only think in order to unfold the world picture pertaining to a certain "attitude" – besides which there exist other equal world pictures –, we have escaped the danger which the ancient wise men were highly exposed to, i.e. the danger of "speculation", of thinking "constructively", of violating the facts [...] But we have waived the royal right of a thinking spirit that understands the world and that dictates life its laws. We have withdrawn from the fight with reality and have retired to a contemplative way of life. (Heim, 1926, p. 16)

Reality can no longer be comprehended theoretically from a «spectator's point of view», but results from an «action» in which we time and again redefine our position.

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Commentary

# The Matryoshka-Concept
*On the Interpretation of "Weltanschauung"*
Karl Mannheim

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> What kind of task is a student of cultural and historical discipline [...] faced when he seeks to determine the global outlook [*Weltanschauung*] of an epoch or to trace partial manifestation back to this all-embracing entity? Is the entity designated by the concept of *Weltanschauung* given to us at all, and if so – how is it given? How does it givenness compare with that of other data in the cultural and historical disciplines? (Mannheim, 1952a, p. 33)

In other words: what are we talking about when we use the concept of *Weltanschauung*, what kind of entity are we describing with this word? Is it actually useful for philosophers, historians and social scientists, or it just perturbs the scientific clarity?

Karl Mannheim has tried to answer these questions in his essay *On the interpretation of "Weltanschauung"* (1952a), providing also some methodological coordinates in order to help a scientific recognition of the *Weltanschauung* of an epoch. Indeed, as David Naugle (2002, p. 223) points out correctly, Mannheim «is not so much concerned with providing a philosophical definition of "worldview" [...] but rather with the following methodological issues that could help social scientists and others in identifying a worldview underlying a particular epoch or culture». In the essay mentioned above, Mannheim's first concern is to find a way to describe a worldview in theoretical terms, and to outline and define how a *Weltanschauung* could become the object of scientific investigation. Rather than proposing for the umpteenth time a summary of Mannheim's methodological indications, in this short commentary I would like to extract from his works some clues about what a *Weltanschauung* is and what is its function and its significance in social and political life.

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The difficulty to manage this concept and its constitutive ambiguity is reflected even in the lexical confusion in its translation(s): "global outlook", "worldview", "world picture" are just a few options of the infinite possibilities. It is no coincidence that translators and scholars prefer often to utilise the German word as general concept. Also in Mannheim's works, although their systematic nature, I think we have to distinguish at least three different meanings of *Weltanschauung*, three different magnitudes and directions of this concept: it looks like a matryoshka-concept with three levels of depth. Actually, my thesis is that exactly this versatility – which is for sure one reason of its fascinating power – is particularly highlighted in Mannheim's thought, so that we can use his work to trace a taxonomy of the different features and senses of *Weltanschauung*.

At first sight – the biggest and most comprehensive matryoshka doll – *Weltanschauung* denotes the sphere of non-conceptual, or better the realm of pre-conceptual and pre-theoretical:

> The difficult and paradoxical nature of the concept of *Weltanschauung* stems from the fact that the entity it denotes lies outside the province of theory. Dilthey was one of the first to recognize this; c.f. his remark: "*Weltanschauungen* are not produced by thinking". (Mannheim, 1952a, p. 38)

According to this meaning, worldviews are the foundational entities which precede and foster every cultural objectification. Art, *mores*, religion, philosophy represent different ramifications starting from a least common denominator: they arises all from a *Weltanschauung*, understood «as a global unity [that] is something deeper, a still unformed and wholly germinal entity» (1952a, p. 41). Every cultural objectification is a fragment that can be and have to be reconsidered and re-interpreted from the particular angle of – using Mannheim's words – «the unity we sense in all works that belong to the same period» (1952a, p. 74).[1] So *Weltanschauungen* are the primary cultural layer of an epoch: this basic stratum remains normally unconscious to the people who live

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[1] In this essay – written for a yearbook of history of art – Mannheim distinguishes what is a-theoretical from what is completely irrational: the aesthetics, for example, is pre-theoretical, but nevertheless can be interpreted and analysed. Theory has to find the structural unity of these phenomena, analysing three types of meanings: the objective meaning, the expressive and the documentary ones. The documentary meaning denotes the *Weltanschauung* of the epoch.

in it, while philosophers and artists are more the "witnesses" of their worldview then its authors.[2]

Starting from this description of worldviews, at least three other questions emerge, which I would just mention: first of all, the fact that non-theoretical cultural objectifications (like art) are much closer to *Weltanschauung* then theories or philosophical systems. Who wants to study and define a worldview should look first to non-conceptual cultural products. Secondly, there is a problem of hermeneutic (vicious) circle: the unity and totality of a *Weltanschauung* can be distilled just from singular cultural objectifications, but these fragments can be properly understood just inside the worldview they testify.[3] Thirdly, every historical interpretation is also a self-interpretation, every analysis of the *Weltanschauung* of an epoch contains traces of our own worldview: «To understand the "spirit" of an age, we have to fall back on the "spirit" of our own − it is only substance which comprehends substance» (1952a, p. 61). A few pages after Mannheim is even clearer:

> The "spirit" or global outlook of an epoch is something the interpreting subject cannot grasp without falling back upon his own historic "substance", which is why the history of documentary interpretations [that is *Weltanschauungen*] of past ages is at the same time a history of the interpreting subjects themselves. (1952a, p. 63)

To sum up and to emphasize once again what I want to highlight in this paragraph – beyond Mannheim's methodological indications and problems – a first meaning of *Weltanschauung* indicates the broad *Zeitgeist* of an epoch, the (normally) unconscious and pre-theoretical least common denominator and form of thought of a specific historical period. Every single historical section has its own *Weltanschauung* which underlies and undergirds all differences between contemporaries. In this sense, for instance, Mannheim can say that historicism is «our *Weltanschauung*», which

not only organizes, like an invisible hand, the work of the cultural sciences

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[2] «Therefore, for Mannheim, worldviews are virtually unconscious phenomena, having arisen spontaneously and unintentionally. As deep, unformed, and germinal entities, they are taken for granted by those who embrace them, and yet they are the prime movers in thought and action. They are the silent, speechless assumptions undergirding social life and cultural artifacts» (Naugle, 2002, p. 225).

[3] «We understand the whole from the part and the part from the whole. We derive the "spirit of the epoch" from its individual documentary manifestations – and we interpret the individual documentary manifestations on the basis of what we know about the spirit of the epoch» (Mannheim, 1952a, p. 74).

[*Geisteswissenschaften*], but also permeates everyday thinking. Today it is impossible to take part in politics, even to understand a person [...] without treating all those realities which we have to deal with as having evolved and as developing dynamically. (1952b, p. 84)

So, historicism is nowadays «a worldview of the same universality as that of the religious worldview of the past» (1952b, p. 85).

Here we reach the second – smaller – matryoshka doll. We have just seen that Mannheim defined historicism as the *Weltanschauung* of his times, the prerequisite of every contemporary political stand; at the same time Mannheim was the one who pointed out and conceptualized the fact that contemporary political conflict is a struggle between different *Weltanschauungen.* This is the modern phenomenon called the «unmasking turn of mind», which «does not seek to refute, negate, or call in doubt certain ideas, but rather to *disintegrate* them, and that in such a way that the whole world outlook of a social stratum becomes disintegrated at the same time» (1952c, p. 140). The outcome of this process is that «from this point on, worlds confront worlds – it is no longer individual propositions pitted against individual propositions» (1952c, p. 144). So, these two sentences – historicism as comprehensive modern times' *Weltanschauung*, and political conflict as collision between *Weltanschauungen* – are not contradictory because they involve two different meanings of the word *Weltanschauung*. Or better: they denote two different fields of action of a worldview. In the first case – the biggest matryoshka doll – Mannheim was concerned about the *Weltanschauung* "of an epoch", in the second case his object of study is the worldview "of a social stratum". Every single historical unit, every period, is neither monolithic nor monochrome: there are different social forces and respectively different ideas in reciprocal relationship and competition. It would be misleading to section history only "horizontally", in time segments; the sociology of knowledge should be able to complete a horizontal analysis with a vertical one, tracing the social stratification of the cultural process. This is exactly one of the reasons why, according to Mannheim, we need to develop a sociology of knowledge.[4]

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[4] «The philosophy of history which mostly treats historical periods as units, overlooking their inner differentiation and stratification, must be supplemented by a socially differentiated view of the historic-social process as a whole, explicitly taking into account the distribution of social roles and its significance for the dynamics of the whole» (Mannheim, 1952b, p. 125).

Mannheim used this second meaning of *Weltanschauung* to describe the conflicting political worldviews; in this sense we can speak for example of a Marxist *Weltanschauung* or a conservative one. The emphasis on the concept of worldview in this context can be read also as a move against perspectivism: every social stratum develops a *global* picture of the world and tries to explain the whole world, not just a part of it (1952c, p. 147). It would be simplistic to believe that every group depict just a different section of reality, so that a simple addition is enough to make a synthesis. Every *Weltanschauung*, although inevitably partial and *standortgebunden*, reproduces the totality of reality; then political conflict can be very radical because it is based on objectively incompatible worldviews. The *Gebundenheit* of a class' worldview to the specific concrete situation does not mean that it enlightens just a particular side of reality; it means rather a peculiar point of view on the whole reality.

If this interpretation of Mannheim's thought is correct, we can schematize in this way the relationship between the two matryoshka dolls – these two different meanings of the concept "worldview": the *Weltanschauung* of an epoch (first meaning) depicts the *Stimmung* of that certain historical period, it delimits the broad area of the *Zeitgeist* and consists in the form of thought which is characteristic of an era. Worldviews, in this meaning, confine the horizon of what is "adequate" and believable, defining a relatively wide set of possibilities. Within this comprehensive area there is space for different *Weltanschauungen* (second meaning) linked to the diverse social strata. For instance, historicism is nowadays «the very basis on which we construct our observations of the socio-cultural reality» (1952b, p. 85), but there is a Marxist and progressive twisted historicism as well as a conservative and liberal one. So, historicism is «not something artificial contrived, something like a programme, but an organically developed basic pattern» (1952b, p. 85): inside this basic pattern it is possible to find different interpretations of reality, i.e. diverse *Weltanschauungen* in the second meaning of the term.

In turn, the dialectic among the *Weltanschauungen* of different social strata – using Mannheim's words «the whole contrapuntal pattern of all the voices» (1952b, p. 125) – can influence and modify the comprehensive worldview of an epoch. This is the third matryoshka doll, the last meaning of *Weltanschauung*: every historical period has its own centre of reality, a sphere of experience which is considered as the basic one and «express[es] the truth of the epoch concerned» (1952b, p. 117). It is important to identify «the point of reference, that ontological sphere of central importance in respect of which

thought can be considered as relative or dependent» (1952c, p. 142). The dynamic of the shifts and changes of these centres is particularly clear looking at the history of thought:

> One type of philosophical system does not destroy the preceding one, but neither does it complete it; rather it reorganizes itself from newer and newer centres. These new centres are, however, supra-philosophically, or rather, supra-theoretically; they are dependent on the new life situation. (1952b, p. 117)

So, the centres are not excogitated or invented, they are not the offshoots of arbitrary decisions, but rather they impose themselves in the concrete situation. Nevertheless, the rising classes have a privileged point of view on the historical process: it is easier for them to highlight the evolutionary trends of this process. For example, Mannheim wrote that the characteristic thing of his times is that the sense of reality became more and more concentrated upon the historic and social sphere, and that in this sphere the economic factor was felt to be the central one. Thus, theory in his time is not transcended in the direction of the religious or ecstatic experience; in particular, the rising classes experience the historic and social field as the most immediately real one (1952c, p. 142).

The fact that this conception is particularly suitable for the rising classes does not mean that it is their own exclusive possession: once «an idea becomes part and parcel of the global outlook of an epoch, then friends and foes, conservatives and progressives, relativists and absolutists will be bound to make use of it» (Kecskemeti, 1952, p. 16). In this sense I think we can affirm that the Marxist emphasis on the economic situation answered to the concrete reality of that time and "imposed" itself as centre of the *Weltanschauung* of the epoch.[5]

According to this short schema, it is no coincidence that Mannheim placed the different and conflicting political worldviews in the middle between other two levels. His wish for a synthesis is supported by his interpretation of the *Weltanschauungen*: although incompatible, the diverse political worldviews

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[5] «The discovery of certain facts (such as "class", "ideology") is connected with certain systematic and social commitments [...] What this suggests is that certain commitments, as it were, render us sensitive to certain realities of the past, present, or future. Nevertheless, once facts have become visible, they are also acknowledged by the other currents in the specific perspective in which they appear to them» (Mannheim, 1952c, p. 148).

share a common and dim background (the *Weltanschauung* of the epoch) and they already swap concepts mutually, defining themselves in relation to the others (third meaning).[6]

The synthesis seems to be the self-awareness of the constitutive partiality of our own conceptions and the acceptance of the fact that every partial knowledge has its meaning only in relation to the others. Reality and history are inherently dynamic, a continuous process; no one can think to represent − *alone* − the whole historical movement, nor its fulfilment. The end of history is an oxymoron.

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[6] «If we look at history as a stream divided into several branches [...] then we can easily be led to assume the extreme position that the history of ideas consists of completely isolated sequences of thoughts without the slightest intercommunication, so that, for example, conservative and progressive thinking would each have its self-contained independent tradition of world interpretation [...] it must be admitted that after one class has discovered some sociological or historical fact (which lay in its line of vision by virtue of its specific position), all other groups, no matter what *their* interests are, can equally take such fact into account – nay, *must* somehow incorporate such fact into their system of world interpretation» (Mannheim, 1952c, p. 147).

Commentary

# The Image-World
Susan Sontag

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Susan Sontag's essay *The Image-World*, originally published under the title of *Photography Unlimited*, first appeared on 23 June 1977 in «The New York Review of Books», to be later included, always in 1977, «in a slightly different form» as Sontag herself explains, in the successful volume *On Photography* (Sontag, 1977, p. 1). In my commentary on the above mentioned text, I will refer to this last edition.

In the beginning of the essay, the author underlines the fact that reality was originally interpreted by means of the significant effect of images. Starting from the Platonic philosophy, this dependence on images is questioned by the philosophical thought in favour of a rational model: a model that promises an understanding of the "reality" independently from its images. All of this, according to Sontag, lasted until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the profound infidelity of the rational model toward the real was recognized. And thus: «The credence that could no longer be given to realities understood *in the form of images* was now being given to realities understood *to be* images, illusions» (Sontag, 1977, p. 153). In support of this thesis, Ludwig Feuerbach was called upon, and particularly the Preface to the second edition (1843) of his *Das Wesen des Christentums*, where the German philosopher claims that in the modern epoch the image is preferred to the thing, the copy to the original, and the representation to reality. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Feuerbach's point of view becomes so evident and it is actually considered as a matter of fact that one is able to claim, just as Sontag does, that

> a society becomes "modern" when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images, when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality, and are themselves coveted substitutes for firsthand

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> experience, become indispensable to the health of the economy, the stability of
> the polity, and the pursuit of private happiness. (Sontag, 1977, p. 153)

Such reflections focus particularly on images produced by cameras because
they replace reality. A photograph, in fact, is not only an image, an interpreta-
tion of what exists (like, for instance, a painting), but it is an exegesis of the real
and, as Sontag claims, «a trace, something directly stenciled of the real, like a
footprint or a death mask». What is at the heart of the American writer's argu-
ment is essentially the question of realism, which in the era of technical repro-
ducibility – where photographic images have a fundamental role – can no
longer be merely thought by means of the traditional controversy between the
copy and the image, or by regarding the image just as an appearance, utterly
separated from the object. And here is the problem. Photography has caused a
crisis for the Platonic criticism of the image itself, which is both authentic –
inasmuch as it looks like something that is – and false, because it is nothing but
conformity to the thing. As Sonntag writes in a quite significant passage:

> What defines the originality of photography is that, at the very moment in the
> long, increasingly secular history of painting when secularism is entirely
> triumphant, it revives – in wholly secular terms – something like the primitive
> status of images. Our irrepressible feeling that the photographic process is
> something magical has a genuine basis. (Sontag, 1977, p. 155)

The photographic image is not a representation or a depiction of its content; it
is rather a constitutive part of it, an enhancement: «photography is acquisition
in several forms». One of the first forms of this acquisition is its owning a per-
son or a thing by substituting them, by rendering photography itself a unique
piece. The second is that images render us spectators-consumers of events
lived in first person or virtually. The third consists in the opportunity to learn
something from the real as knowledge and not as experience. The latter surely
represents photography's most accomplished form of acquisition. And here we
reach some of the central points of Sontag's reflections. In fact,

> through being photographed, something becomes part of a system of
> information, fitted into schemes of classification and storage which range from
> the crudely chronological order of snapshot sequences pasted in family albums
> to the dogged accumulations and meticulous filing needed for photography's
> uses in weather forecasting, astronomy, microbiology, geology, police work,
> medical training and diagnosis, military reconnaissance, and art history.
> (Sontag, 1977, p. 156)

Photographic images do not limit themselves to reformulate the ordinary experience's products, but also reformulate reality as such, as a material to analyze, as an object to control, offering thus an unprecedented possibility of control in comparison to, for instance, those related to writing.

The fundamental characteristic that turns photography into a new system of images is its not being dependent only on a creator-photographer. Its mechanical process is mainly optic-chemical and then electronic. This introduces an uncommon relation between image and reality, according to which, Sontag claims, if in the beginning images could be considered at most as endowed with the qualities of real objects, the ultimate propensity of the modern man – on the contrary – is to assign image qualities to real things. This leads to questioning the long accepted Platonic assumption that what is real is conserved statically and inalterably, while its images are the only things that change. As a consequence, the concepts of reality and image acquire certain complementariness. The order of factors has been particularly overturned. In our societies, Sontag says, it is reality that tends to resemble more and more what photography represents. We are always trying to be photographed in order to become real *through* images.

In her considerations, Sontag also highlights the way in which the world of images can be useful for the creation of a surrogate for the real world.

> Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still. Or they enlarge a reality that is felt to be shrunk, hollowed out, perishable, remote. One can't possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images – as, according to Proust, most ambitious of voluntary prisoners, one can't possess the present but one can possess the past [...]. To possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to re-experience the unreality and remoteness of the real. (Sontag, 1977, pp.163–164)

This re-proposes the complex theme of existence. Reality remains irresolute not only as concept but also as image. It appears inaccessible once again. In fact, photographic images diminish the real, just as paintings – Sonntag notes – change it, in turn, by adding too much. The main difference between painting and photography, in particular as regards portraiture, is that whereas paintings make everything emerge majestic and appear as judgmental, photographic images are testimonies of a biography and take their non-exclusivity for granted.

> But what photography supplies is not only a record of the past but a new way of dealing with the present, as the effects of the countless billions of

contemporary photograph-documents attest. While old photographs fill out our mental image of the past, the photographs being taken now transform what is present into a mental image, like the past. Cameras establish an inferential relation to the present (reality is known by its traces), provide an instantly retroactive view of experience. (Sontag, 1977, pp. 166-167)

Furthermore, the author also refers to cinema when, discussing photography as the instrument capable of depersonalizing the subject-world relationship, she claims that in the filmic experience any activity of spectatorship is barred. The camera sees on behalf of the spectator and the film condenses in a few minutes an event that demands much more time, presenting the events in a way to cause shock.

Dwelling on the Chinese reception of Michelangelo Antonioni's film-documentary *Chung Kuo, Cina* (1972), Sontag states that nothing manifests the meaning that photography has for us better than the venomous Chinese journalistic campaign waged against the director. If we read and see photographic images starting from the intrinsic discontinuity with which they communicate the message, in China, on the contrary, these images are interpreted following only the logic of continuity. The Chinese do not accept photography's decomposition of reality. Sontag notes:

> We have a modern notion of embellishment – beauty is not inherent in anything; it is to be found, by another way of seeing – as well as wider notion of meaning, which photography's many uses illustrate and powerfully reinforce. The more numerous the variations of something, the richer its possibilities of meaning: thus, more is said with photographs in the West than in China today [...]. The Chinese don't want photographs to mean very much or to be very interesting. They do not want to see the world from an unusual angle, to discover new subjects. Photographs are supposed to display what has already been described. Photography for us is a double-edged instrument for producing clichés (the French word that means both trite expression and photographic negative) and for serving up "fresh" views. For the Chinese authorities, there are only clichés – which they consider not to be clichés but "correct" views. (Sontag, 1977, pp. 172–173)

The limits imposed in China on photography are read by Sontag as a reflection of the character of the Chinese society, a society unified by an ideology that exacerbates the idea of conflict (against the West). On the contrary, Western society – a society shaped by the unlimited use of photographic images – is actually «unified by the denial of conflict»:

> Our very notion of the world – the capitalist twentieth century's "one world" –
> is like a photographic overview. The world is "one" not because it is united but
> because a tour of its diverse contents does not reveal conflict but only an even
> more astounding diversity. This spurious unity of the world is affected by
> translating its contents into images. Images are always compatible, or can be
> made compatible, even when the realities they depict are not. (Sontag, 1977, p.
> 174)

In conclusion, the liveliest point in Sontag's argument is perhaps in highlighting the way in which the photographic method has led to the "deplatonization" of our conception of reality, or rather, to lay bare our experience based on the ideal distinction between images and things, between copies and originals. The power of images is, indeed, in establishing real materials in themselves, capable of overturning "the real", transfiguring it into something that is barely a point of departure. It is therefore also inevitable that art has always sought to turn to photography, video, images of movement, just as – to say and see it with Jean-Luc Godard and his film *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1988-98) – to all the probable images and sounds gathered to offer a meaning to the moving pictures and the history of the 21st Century, which indissolubly belong to each other.

Interview
# Alain de Benoist

*Edited by Enrica Fabbri*

*1) Notre usage de la notion de "image du monde" s'oppose à la position exposée par Martin Heidegger dans son célèbre essai* Die Zeit des Weltbildes *(1938). En accord avec Max Weber, nous croyons que le rapport entre l'individu et le monde, dans son extraordinaire variété (de l'adaptation à l'extranéité, de la satiété au refus), est toujours un rapport par images, où le contenu des ces cadres ou horizons conceptuels n'est pas déterminé par des éléments anthropologiques, mais par des éléments plus ou moins contingents, matériaux et idéaux. L'image du monde nous semble donc une construction théorétique-pratique "éternelle", que les différentes cultures élaborent dans le cours de leur histoire pour répondre à la nécessité de s'orienter dans le monde, où la variété des cadres conceptuels est pensée comme une "variable" des éléments contingents qui caractérisent une réalité historique particulière. Heidegger, au contraire, affirme que l'image du monde n'est pas une construction intellectuelle "éternelle", commune à toutes les époques et à toutes les cultures (ça c'est la thèse implicite dans la sociologie de la religion de Weber); l'image du monde n'est pas donc une structure théorétique-pratique qui peut se configurer in plusieurs de façons, ainsi en individuant réponses radicalement différentes à la question concernant le positionnement de l'homme dans le monde. Au contraire, l'image du monde est le produit d'une attitude spécifique vers le monde, c'est la façon de penser le monde qui caractérise un spécifique "type humaine": l'individu moderne, c'est-à-dire le prométhéisme, le désir de réduire le monde à un produit de la capacité créative de l'individu. En connaissant votre intérêt pour la pensée de Heidegger, nous aimerions commencer cet entretien en demandant qu'est-ce que vous pensez à propos de sa position sur l'idée d'image du monde.*

Heidegger n'aborde pas le problème de la même façon que Max Weber. Il parle de la façon dont l'homme moderne réduit le monde à l'image qu'il s'en fait, ce qui est pour lui une manière de le dominer, de le soumettre à sa volonté

d'arraisonnement des choses. Mais en même temps, il s'en prend à une *Weltbild* particulière, celle précisément qui caractérise le "prométhéisme" moderne. Max Weber utilise la notion d'"image du monde" dans une acception plus générale, plus proche du langage courant. Je pense que ces deux positions ne sont pas inconciliables. Mais si l'on se situe dans la perspective wébérienne, on se trouve vite confronté à une question de vocabulaire. Le mot *Weltbild* a très souvent été employé comme synonyme de *Weltanschauung*, de *Weltsicht*, de *Weltansicht*, de "conception du monde" ou de conception générale de la vie. Il peut paraître proche de la notion d'"idéologie", au sens où toute époque, toute culture collective possède spontanément une façon de se représenter le monde, de s'en faire une *idée*, qui détermine de façon paradigmatique ses valeurs et ses agissements. Si l'on va encore plus loin, l'"idéologie" ainsi comprise voisine elle-même avec la notion de "mentalité", au sens collectif de ce mot. Tous ces termes ne sont en réalité pas synonymes mais, en première approche, il est difficile de définir exactement ce qui les distingue, précisément parce qu'ils ont été employés de manière interchangeable.

Il est par ailleurs important de souligner que la *Weltbild* que critique Heidegger comprend un élément normatif d'un type particulier. L'image du monde des Modernes ne décrit pas tant le monde tel qu'il est que le monde tel qu'il devrait être. La normativité implicitement contenue dans toute représentation du monde – ou dans toute "idéologie" – trouve ici une accentuation nouvelle à laquelle l'idéologie du progrès a pu contribuer. Au contraire des sociétés traditionnelles, dans lesquelles la référence au passé (la tradition, les ancêtres) joue un rôle fondamental, la société moderne conçoit le monde en référence à ce qu'il est supposé devoir devenir dans une perspective historiciste de type linéaire ou vectorielle. L'hétéronomie par le futur remplace l'hétéronomie par le passé : la clé du présent se trouve dans l'avenir. Du même coup, une tension s'établit entre le monde-tel-qu'il-est et le monde tel-qu'il-devrait-être ou qu'il est supposé devoir devenir. L'idée sous-jacente est que le monde n'est pas un donné qu'il nous faut accepter comme tel, ainsi que le croyaient les Anciens, pour lesquels le cosmos tout entier donnait un exemple d'harmonie, mais qu'il est au contraire "imparfait" ou "injuste". Le monde, dès lors, doit être corrigé. La *Weltbild* moderne, autrement dit, n'est pas orientée vers l'être, mais vers le devoir-être. C'est ce qui explique la position de Heidegger qui, bien sûr, en tient au contraire pour l'absolue vérité [*aléthèia*] de l'Etre.

Cependant, Heidegger soutient aussi que l'homme est formateur de mondes. C'est même l'un des thèmes les plus constants de ses écrits. «La pierre est sans monde, l'animal est pauvre en monde, l'homme est configurateur de monde», écrit-il par exemple dans son *Interprétation de la "Deuxième considération intempestive" de Nietzsche.* Ici, c'est sur le sens du mot "monde" qu'il faut s'interroger. Dès 1909, Jakob von Uexküll avait montré que chaque espèce animale est en relation avec un environnement spécifique par l'intermédiaire de sa physiologie (c'est de ce travail que s'est inspiré Heidegger pour son cours sur l'animal de 1929). Chaque espèce animale a donc son milieu ambiant [*Umwelt*]. Ce milieu ambiant est toujours un milieu limité: il détermine la limite du rapport de l'animal à l'espace, et détermine aussi les limites de ce qui est pour lui *signifiant.* Von Uexküll précise que les caractéristiques de ce milieu ont une signification pour les espèces qui y vivent, mais pas pour les autres, ce qui revient à dire que les différents environnements spécifiques des animaux ne sont pas transposables: chaque espèce est captive du sien. Les animaux n'ont une "conception" que de *leur* monde, c'est-à-dire de leur milieu naturel. Or, précisément, ce "monde" n'est pas *le* monde: il n'est que le milieu qui leur est propre, le monde vécu environnant qui est pour eux seul porteur de significations. L'animal est "sans monde" au sens où il n'a qu'un milieu particulier. L'homme au contraire peut s'adapter à tous les milieux. Il n'a pas de milieu spécifique. C'est ce qu'Arnold Gehlen a résumé d'une formule: l'"ouverture-au-monde" [*Weltoffenheit*]. Etant dépourvu d'un milieu spécifique, l'homme doit donner des significations au monde qui l'entoure. Il est donc tenu, de par sa propre nature, de *configurer* le monde pour lui donner un *sens.* L'homme n'a pas d'environnement, mais un "monde" [*Welt und nicht Umwelt*]. L'homme est "riche en monde" parce qu'il est le seul être-au-monde à être porteur de monde – le seul être capable de "présence engagée dans le monde" [*Befindlichkeit*]. On dira, en termes heideggériens, que l'étant humain est le seul qui *ek-siste* au monde – ne se contentant pas d'y *vivre* –, parce qu'il est cet unique étant pour qui la question de l'Etre constitue le fond même de son étantité. Or, cette "ek-sistence" humaine implique inévitablement un système de représentations qui ne me paraît pas différer fondamentalement de ce que Max Weber entend par "image du monde". Sans doute est-ce sous cet angle qu'on peut – à supposer qu'on en ressente la nécessité – "réconcilier" Weber et Heidegger.

*2) Selon nous, le concept de image du monde permet aussi de rendre la complexité de la relation entre l'imagination et la pratique, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'action politique. Dans le milieu philosophique français l'attention pour le thème de l'imagination s'est développée surtout à partir de la discussion sur la notion de "imaginaire". À cet égard c'est intéressant de noter que, par exemple, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, dans son livre* L'imaginaire *(2003), affirme que l'imaginaire présente aussi un «orientation pratique». L'imaginaire ne satisfait pas seulement les instances de la sensibilité esthétique-ludique et celles cognitives de la pensée, mais il réussit aussi à se réaliser in certains actions, en leur donnant des fondements, des motivations, des buts: «Car sans une enveloppe, une surcharge, un horizon d'imaginaire, la vie en société risquerait fort d'apparaître comme arbitraire et fragile. Ni l'autorité, ni la justice, ni le travail ne pourraient trouver leur place dans la société s'ils n'étaient à un degré ou un autre tissé dans l'imaginaire».*

*Selon vous, cette idée d'imaginaire peut être traduite dans le lexique des images du monde? Quel impact a eu le débat sur l'imaginaire dans la philosophie politique française?*

Je réponds tout de suite à votre dernière question: le débat sur l'imaginaire n'a eu qu'un impact très limité sur la philosophie politique française, car il a toujours été le fait, depuis Gaston Bachelard jusqu'à Gilbert Durand ou Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, d'un courant philosophique assez minoritaire. Ce que je trouve d'ailleurs dommage. Il ne faut toutefois pas sous-estimer l'importance de la notion d'imaginaire – plus précisément, d'imaginaire symbolique – chez Jacques Lacan. Pour Lacan, l'imaginaire humain, en tant que "fiction" de la totalité unifiée, est avant tout la résultante d'une appétence spécifiquement humaine au symbolique. Cornelius Castoriadis, de son côté, a fait grand usage de la notion d'"imaginaire social", à la fois comme concept philosophique et comme outil des sciences sociales, notamment lorsqu'il parle de l'*institution imaginaire de la société*. Michel Maffesoli, élève de Gilbert Durand, a enfin lui-même beaucoup insisté sur l'importance de l'imaginaire, comme instance fondatrice des nouvelles "spontanéités sociales".

Je suis par ailleurs tout à fait d'accord pour reconnaître que la notion de *Weltbild* a des conséquences dans la pratique, et aussi dans l'action politique. La raison fondamentale en est que toute image du monde contient en elle-même une sorte de dynamisme organisateur, y compris quand elle s'englobe elle-même jusqu'au point de perdre la claire conscience de ses propres

catégories. En même temps qu'il construit un imaginaire qui lui est propre, chaque groupe humain trouve dans cette construction des raisons d'agir – et surtout des raisons d'agir *dans une direction donnée*. De ce point de vue, l'image du monde est à rapprocher du *mythe* considéré dans sa portée proprement politique. Je pense ici surtout à l'usage que Georges Sorel a pu faire du mythe politique – par exemple le "mythe" de la grève générale ou le "mythe" de la violence prolétarienne – et aux commentaires que cet usage a suscité chez un auteur comme Carl Schmitt. Le *mythos*, par opposition au *logos*, est fondamentalement fondé sur des images. Il se présente lui-même, non comme "discours", mais comme image, et c'est la raison pour laquelle il peut être agissant. D'autant plus agissant, d'ailleurs, qu'il se situe par définition au-delà des "preuves" comme des réfutations.

*3) Dans un entretien donné à Naples dans le Juin 2006, à l'occasion de la parution de la traduction italienne de* Identité et communauté*, en exposant votre point de vue à propos de la décroissance vous évoquez plusieurs de fois l'appel de Serge Latouche à «décoloniser l'imaginaire social» pour sortir de le dogme idéologique du développement à tout prix. Vous soutenez justement que le dogme idéologique du développement à tout prix, qui représente l'idéologie du notre monde actuel, n'est pas avant tout une question psychologique, mais anthropologique. Votre point de départ est la mise en discussion de ce que vous appelez «l'anthropologie des Lumières», qui considère l'homme préalablement comme un individu, séparé des ses appartenances, de sa communauté, de sa hérédité spirituelle et identitaire. Donc, partagez-vous l'idée selon laquelle seulement à partir d'un différent* Weltbild *il y a des possibilités pour un changement concret du scénario social, économique et politique?*

L'idéologie dominante depuis les Lumières se fonde en effet, de toute évidence, sur une anthropologie implicite. Celle-ci ne se borne pas à considérer l'individu comme séparé de ses semblables, comme un atome tendanciellement autosuffisant, qui n'entrerait en société que par un acte de libre volonté rationnelle (le contrat social) – vision également fondatrice de l'individualisme méthodologique, selon lequel la société ne se comprend qu'à partir de l'individu, et non l'individu à partir de la société. Elle fait aussi de cet individu un être essentiellement orienté vers la satisfaction de ses intérêts personnels, qui vise sans cesse, le plus naturellement et le plus légitimement

du monde, à maximiser constamment son meilleur intérêt matériel. Un tel individu est avant tout producteur et consommateur. Il privilégie tout ce qui est calculable, tout ce qui est de l'ordre de la seule quantité. Il aspire à augmenter ses gains, et du même coup il conforte la logique du profit qui obéit au seul principe du "toujours plus" (le capitalisme en tant que système d'accumulation perpétuelle du capital correspond au *Gestell* décrit par Heidegger comme un système toujours plus poussé d'arraisonnement global du monde). Il en résulte, dans le domaine éthique, un total renversement de la perspective aristotélicienne qui, voyant dans l'homme un être fondamentalement politique et social, définissait la "vie bonne" comme une tension vers l'excellence et le dépassement de soi, en opposition radicale aux préoccupations limitées de la chrématistique. Ce renversement s'achève chez les théoriciens libéraux modernes qui, suivant Adam Smith et, surtout, Bernard de Mandeville (*La fable des abeilles*), font résulter l'optimum social de la seule addition des comportements égoïstes et des utilités individuelles.

Lorsque Serge Latouche parle de «décoloniser l'imaginaire social», c'est donc évidemment une mutation anthropologique qu'il appelle de ses vœux. Cette mutation anthropologique équivaut à un changement de paradigme au sens de Kuhn, c'est-à-dire à une transformation générale du modèle de pensée orientant la réflexion et l'action. Or, ce changement de paradigme implique à son tour un changement de *Weltbild*. Il s'agit, par exemple, de substituer au seul système de l'échange diverses procédures de don et de contre-don, de mettre en question l'idéal productiviste (et "progressiste') d'une croissance ou d'un "développement" infini qui relève clairement de ce que les Grecs appelaient *hybris*, la démesure, d'abandonner un monde où la valeur est constamment rabattue sur le prix – au point que tout a un prix, mais que rien n'a plus de valeur –, de privilégier la convivialité et les comportements coopératifs plutôt que de valoriser la concurrence de tous contre tous, qui entraîne l'érosion du lien social, etc.

*4) Souvent, la notion de* Weltbild *est indûment superposée à celle de "idéologie" dans son acception forte, c'est-à dire comme synonyme de "fausse conscience". Au contraire, dans* L'idéologie du profit *vous utilisez la notion d'idéologie dans un sens neutre, en l'assimilant à cela plus générale de "vision du monde". En effet, vous ne parlez pas seulement de «idéologie du profit», mais aussi de «idéologie de la donation et de la contre-donation», pour indiquer précisément la vision du monde des sociétés traditionnelles. Est-ce*

*que vous pourriez expliciter comment vous entendez le rapport entre l'idéologie, l'image du monde et la vision du monde* [Weltanschauung]*?*

J'ai en effet tendance à faire un usage assez "neutre" de la notion d'*idéologie*, qui ne me paraît pas comporter en soi de caractéristiques intrinsèques permettant de porter sur elle un jugement normatif. C'est une façon de faire que l'on retrouve fréquemment dans l'anthropologie culturelle (cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss). Mais je n'ignore pas que l'idéologie peut recevoir une définition d'emblée plus péjorative. Pour Marx, l'idéologie relève de la "fausse conscience": elle n'est que le reflet de l'aliénation qui légitime le pouvoir des classes dominantes et de l'exploitation du travail vivant qui en résulte. Elle ne relève donc pas de l'infrastructure, mais de la superstructure. De même, pour le positivisme scientiste, l'idéologie représente une déformation de la réalité, en même temps qu'elle recouvre tout ce qui s'ajoute inutilement aux constats empiriques que permet de dégager la recherche scientifique. Cela dit, vous avez raison de souligner qu'on ne saurait sans dommage superposer les notions de *Weltbild* et d'idéologie. Certes, l'une et l'autre présentent un ensemble de valeurs et d'interprétations du réel, explicites ou implicites, intellectuelles ou affectives, propres à structurer la conception du monde d'une communauté ou d'un peuple. En outre, il est bien entendu qu'une idée peut se traduire par des images, et qu'une image peut aussi engendrer des idées. Mais les deux mots ne sont pas synonymes. La différence entre ces deux termes est que le premier renvoie à l'*image*, le second à l'*idée*. C'est un point très important sur lequel, dans une perspective herméneutique et surtout phénoménologique, il faut s'arrêter.

Dans l'expression "image du monde", le mot le plus important est "image" [*Bild*]. On le retrouve implicitement dans des mots comme *Weltsicht* ou *Weltanschauung*: l'image est ce qui se donne à *voir*, ce qui relève fondamentalement de la "monstration" et non de la dé-monstration (contrairement à l'idéologie). «Avoir une *Weltanschauung*, c'est se former une image du monde et de soi-même», écrit Carl Gustav Jung (*L'âme et la vie*). Bachelard, de son côté, affirmait que «notre appartenance au monde des images est plus fort, plus constitutif de notre être, que notre appartenance au monde des idées». "Image" est évidemment aussi présent dans les mots "imaginaire" ou "imagination". L'imaginaire est avant tout une fabrique d'images, qui permet à l'individu ou au groupe de concevoir sa relation à altérité et au monde, mais aussi à lui-même. Il donne à cet individu ou à ce

groupe la capacité de se représenter le monde à l'aide d'un réseau d'associations d'images qui lui confèrent un sens.

Ne pouvant exercer ses effets qu'à la condition d'être vue, l'image implique bien sûr la capacité de voir. Mais une culture qui donne un rôle fondamental à l'image – au point de définir comme *Weltbild* son système de représentation du monde – est aussi une culture au sein de laquelle la vue prime en quelque sorte sur les autres sens. J'ai déjà dit que le mythe pouvait se définir, notamment, comme une association d'images. Les grands mythes constitutifs des religions de l'Antiquité européenne étaient très fondamentalement producteurs d'images et ils étaient eux-mêmes portés par ces images. L'une des caractéristiques des dieux était qu'en certaines occasions, il était possible de les voir. La statuaire, en tout cas, n'a cessé de les représenter sous des formes humaines aussi parfaites que possible. La croyance allait de pair avec la *figuration*. Or, la figuration est toujours une con-figuration de l'espace. Donner le primat à l'image sur le pur *logos*, c'est aussi donner le primat à l'espace par rapport à la simple temporalité. Il y a des civilisations de l'espace et des civilisations du temps. L'une des plus grandes innovations du monothéisme biblique a précisément été de rompre avec cette association spontanée, fondatrice de *Weltbild*, entre l'image et le divin. Le monothéisme hébreu interdit la représentation figurée: «Tu ne feras aucune image sculptée [*pessel temounah*]», lit-on à plusieurs reprises dans la Bible (*Deut.* 5,8; *Exode* 20,4, etc.). Les dieux de pierre et de marbre sont alors très logiquement décrits comme des "idoles" – étymologiquement, l'"idole" est en effet *éidolôn*, "ce qui se donne à voir". Les "idolâtres", dénoncés comme des ennemis de Dieu, sont avant tout des hommes qui accordent une place essentielle aux images.

Cette prescription iconoclaste est essentielle. Elle n'a pas seulement pour objet de proclamer la supériorité de l'invisible sur le visible, ni même la supériorité de l'imagination abstraite sur la représentation perceptive, de l'intellect sur la sensibilité. Elle dit très précisément que c'est le refus des images, et seulement lui, qui ouvre l'accès au règne de l'esprit, c'est-à-dire au monde des concepts. Elle va de pair avec l'affirmation de la supériorité du *logos* sur toute forme de *mythos*, et aussi avec l'affirmation du primat de l'ouïe sur la vue: désormais, on *écoutera* la parole de Dieu (*Deut.* 6,4), au lieu de rendre un culte aux images – car la parole de Dieu est unique (monothéisme), tandis que les images sont multiples (polythéistes). Les images sont directement liées à la réalité sensible, mais du point de vue monothéiste, cette

réalité n'est qu'une réalité seconde. Elle ne renvoie qu'à un monde qui n'est pas à lui-même sa propre fin, mais qui résulte du libre acte créateur de Dieu (distinction théologique classique de l'être créé et de l'être incréé). Le monde devient tributaire d'un "arrière-monde", comme disait Nietzsche. L'image est du même coup dévaluée, elle devient fausse ou mensongère. Dans le meilleur des cas, elle ne relève que du jeu des ombres qui se déploient dans la caverne de Platon. Cet iconoclasme se retrouve dans l'islam. Même au sein du christianisme, où il a donné lieu à des débats célèbres (sur le statut de l'icône, notamment), il a longtemps été présent: l'art chrétien, avec tout son luxe de représentations imagées, n'est apparu historiquement que de façon relativement tardive. Image interdite ou image exaltée: ce conflit a traversé les siècles, raison pour laquelle on a pu considérer certaines idéologies, notamment le positivisme et le rationalisme, comme des formes modernes d'iconoclasme. Tel est l'arrière-plan qu'il convient, à mon avis, de prendre en compte si l'on veut sérieusement comparer *Weltbild* et idéologie.

*5) Encore dans* L'idéologie du profit, *vous semblez affirmer aussi comment une nouvelle vision du monde (un image du monde où le "profit à tout prix" caractérise notre rapport global avec le monde) produit un nouvel type d'homme. Est-ce que la notion de* Weltbild *peut donc représenter un décisif outil conceptuel pour une* Zeitdiagnose, *capable de reconstruire les transformations de la subjectivité dans l'histoire de l'humanité? Selon cette perspective, phénomènes comme "l'indifférence postmoderne" et la parution d'une "moralité indolore" (la capacité d'agir moralement si et seulement il prévoit couts éthiques égal à zéro) nous semblent identifier une transformation de l'attitude global que les individus prennent vers leur réalité sociale; une transformation qui, selon nous, peut être reconstruite à partir de l'analyse des images du monde dominantes dans l'actuel contexte social et à partir des réponses que celles-ci offrent à la question concernant le positionnement de l'homme dans le monde. Selon vous, quelles sont les caractéristiques les plus remarquables de la subjectivité de la tarde-modernité?*

Je crois avoir en partie déjà répondu à cette question. Oui, bien sûr, la prise en compte de la *Weltbild* dominante peut contribuer à l'établissement d'une *Zeitdiagnose*. Elle est même absolument nécessaire, car c'est elle qui éclaire, en les reliant de façon "synchronique", des phénomènes qui, à première vue, peuvent paraître sans rapport les uns avec les autres. Je pense ici à la démarche

"physiognomique" adoptée par Oswald Spengler dans *Le déclin de l'Occident*: c'est à partir de la *Weltbild* dominante au sein de chacune des "grandes cultures" qu'il a choisi d'observer, que Spengler peut mettre en relation des domaines aussi différents que la littérature, la peinture, la vie économique ou les mathématiques. Concernant l'image du monde qui domine aujourd'hui en Occident, le fait que l'individu y occupe une place privilégiée, n'enlève rien à la réalité de cette image comme fait structurant de l'ensemble de la société globale. Mais il est bien vrai que, dans le contexte social actuel, on assiste à une véritable explosion de l'individualisme sous toutes ses formes – même si, en même temps, en constate aussi la résurgence de certaines formes communautaires et l'apparition de ce que Michel Maffesoli appelle les «nouvelles tribus».

   L'individualisme peut s'analyser sous l'angle politique (effondrement des grands projets collectifs), économique (transformation des désirs individuels en autant de besoins) ou juridique (passage de la notion de droits objectifs, indissociables d'un contexte donné, à celle de droits subjectifs considérés comme des propriétés de la nature individuelle), mais d'un point de vue philosophique il est évidemment relié à l'épanouissement de la subjectivité. Celle-ci a des racines très anciennes. L'accent que met Saint Augustin sur le "for intérieur" comme lieu privilégié de la rencontre avec Dieu relève déjà d'une valorisation de la subjectivité. Les choses s'accélèrent encore avec Descartes. Chez ce dernier, le moi est radicalement séparé du monde. L'homme est cet être qui se découvre lui-même immédiatement, comme esprit et comme âme, et non comme corps. Seul l'homme est esprit parce qu'il est le seul être pensant (*cogito*). D'où l'opposition cartésienne entre la *res extensa* (l'étendue) et la *res cogitans*. Désormais, la conscience autoréflexive prime sur toute autre modalité cognitive. La vérité, du même coup, est strictement internalisée: constituant le principe absolument premier de toute science de l'entendement, le *cogito* est seul garant des vérités premières. La nature elle-même est posée comme un objet inerte, totalement étrangère à la conscience qui se pose face à elle pour l'étudier: il y a antériorité épistémologique de la conscience par rapport à tout ce que celle-ci peut connaître. Le cosmos est alors totalement désacralisé. Avec la philosophie cartésienne apparaît en fait un nouveau régime de vérité. La vérité est rabattue sur la science expérimentale et devient synonyme de *certitude*: le *verum* est ramené au *certum*. «Est certain ce que je vois avec évidence», déclare Descartes. Une conséquence de la détermination de la vérité comme certitude est que l'obligation et la validité

universelles appartiennent désormais à la vérité à titre de prédicats nécessaires. Tel est le sens profond de la formule: *Cogito, ergo sum*. L'être de l'homme est maintenant déterminé par la certitude de soi, l'*ego* devient le sujet que l'on place au fondement de toutes choses. «Le subjectivisme est cette position de l'homme qui en fait le centre de référence déterminant pour tout étant et à partir duquel tout le reste est compris dans son être», écrit Heidegger. Ainsi se trouve posée la base de la métaphysique de la subjectivité dont les temps modernes on vu le déploiement.

*6) Du point de vue de l'histoire occidentale des images du monde, pour Weber la modernité aboutit à ce que, avec Hans Blumenberg, on peut appeler «absolutisme de la réalité» ou absolutisation du monde: un attitude de acceptation du monde tel qu'il est, qui a réduit à zéro l'espace de l'"imagination politique". C'est-à dire que la tarde modernité est caractérisée par une spécifique image du monde: une représentation du monde marqué par ce que Weber appelait «l'amour pour le monde», qui a produit une subjectivité repue – un type d'homme qui ne demande pas à la politique de améliorer le monde, mais de le faire vivre bien dans le monde tel qu'il est. Les gagnants et les gagnés de la société moderne partagent donc le même horizon de sens et un unique idéal de vie: se garantir une place dans la "serre du confort et du consume".*

*Est-ce que vous partagez cette diagnose? La pensée de la décroissance est peut-être un moyen de s'opposer à "l'amour pour le monde", à travers l'idée que c'est encore possible d'imaginer un autre monde?*

Je ne suis pas tout à fait d'accord avec cette formulation, que l'on retrouve en effet chez Blumenberg et d'autres auteurs. Je pense en effet, comme je l'ai déjà dit, que la *Weltbild* dominante est largement commandée par une vision du monde tel qu'il devrait être, et non tel qu'il est. L'idéologie du progrès pousse dans ce sens, l'idéologie des droits de l'homme également. Pourtant, en même temps, vous n'avez pas tort de parler d'effondrement de l'"imagination politique" et de souligner qu'aujourd'hui, gagnants et perdants ne cherchent pas tant à changer ou à améliorer le monde qu'à vivre le mieux possible dans la société existante. Ce paradoxe apparent cesse d'en être un si nous mettons en relation l'effondrement de l'"imagination politique" – et aussi la raréfaction de la pensée critique –, non pas avec l'idée qu'il préférable au sens philosophique d'accepter le monde tel qu'il est, mais plus simplement avec la montée du

réformisme. L'avènement des régimes totalitaires au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle a engendré de puissantes désillusions. L'idée s'est répandue dans l'opinion que, si désagréable que soit la société où nous vivons, toute tentative d'en sortir ne peut conduire qu'à l'échec ou à l'horreur. C'est le sens de la célèbre formule TINA (*There is no alternative*, il n'y a pas d'alternative). La diffusion de cette idée a été concomitante des puissantes transformations sociales intervenues à l'époque du compromis fordiste, qui a vu l'abandon progressif des revendications prolétariennes par des syndicats devenus de plus en plus réformistes en échange des bienfaits dispensés par l'Etat-Providence, ce qui a provoqué un gonflement sans précédent des classes moyennes. C'est elle, à mon avis, qui explique la crise généralisée des "grands récits" dont parlait Jean-François Lyotard, et le fait que nos contemporains vivent de plus en plus sous l'horizon de la fatalité. Dans le meilleur des cas, il ne croient plus qu'à la possibilité de réformes modestes, d'améliorations marginales. J'en déduis qu'il est plus que jamais nécessaire d'appeler l'avènement d'un nouveau paradigme – d'une nouvelle *Weltbild* – au sens dont j'ai parlé.

*Paris, le 29 Novembre 2010*

Report

# The World as Fiction and Representation.
## Convergences between Science and Art in the Realism Debate*

*Jacob Taubes*

I. Today the history of science is entering the current ideology of cultural critique, which is enjoying great popularity precisely as it assumes the refined tone of a "critique of science". Heidegger and the Frankfurt School have already expressed their unease [*Unbehagen*] with modern culture in the form of a critique of science, and the success of Paul Feyerabend (the apostate of the orthodox theory of science) testifies that this subject is by no means closed. Even though the current history of science usually gets on with its business while keeping out of cultural controversies, it nevertheless remains true that the history of science is not just an archivists' enterprise to keep the memory of science alive. Instead, the history of science is also the "epistemological laboratory" of science. In the epistemological laboratory, events concerning the scientific domain are not lined up chronologically, one after the other, like in a rosary; instead they are built as constellations.[1] The several constants of a history of science express (usually in an encoded form) a theory of the human spirit [*des menschlichen Geistes*]. As did Kant first of all.

In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), in a few sentences Kant explained the epistemological aspects of the

[1] [Here it seems that Taubes is implicitly referring to a passage in the eighteenth thesis on the philosophy of history by Walter Benjamin: «Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time»; W. Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in Id., *Illuminations*, Ed. by H. Arendt. New York: Schocken Books 1968, p. 263].

development of modern physics since Galileo Galilei's and Torricelli's experiments. Following those experiments, «a light broke upon all natural philosophers».[2] Since then, this light has lit the way of the sciences and should also brighten the dark path of philosophy. «They learned that reason only perceives that which it produces after its own designs; that it must not be content to follow, as it were, in the leading-strings of nature, but must proceed in advance with principles of judgement according to unvarying laws, and compel nature to reply to its questions».[3] Modern science approaches "nature", «with the view, indeed, of receiving information from it, not, however, in the character of a pupil, who listens to all that his master chooses to tell him, but in that of a judge, who compels the witnesses to reply to those questions which he himself thinks fit to propose». Through this reversal or "intellectual revolution" [*Revolution der Denkart*] the natural sciences – so believes Kant – were «at length conducted into the path of certain progress».[4]

Kant's second Preface is the programme of his critique of reason, and it also constitutes the foundation of that concept of "science" which is presented by Fichte in the several drafts and versions of his *Doctrine of Science*, and by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which he conceives as the introduction to his "system of science". A reference to Hegel's lapidary sentences in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can make us recognise those connections of the comprehension of science as the distinctive sign of the modern spirit: «That the True is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Spirit* – the most sublime Notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion. [...] The Spirit, so developed, knows itself as Spirit, is Science; Science is its actuality and the realm which it builds for itself in its own element».[5]

After the collapse of German Idealism, which takes place together with the development of the empirical sciences in the second half of the nineteenth century, Kant's programme influences the neo-Kantians' theory of science –

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[2] I. Kant, *Sämtliche Werke*, Hg. T. Valentiner. Leipzig: F. Meiner 1906, p. 26 [*Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. by J.M.D. Meiklejohn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1955, p. XXVII]
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hg. J. Hofmeister. Leipzig: F. Meiner 1949, p. 24 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon 1977, p. 14].

Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer from the Marburg School, and Heinrich Rickert and Emil Lask from the Heidelberg School. Also in this case, World War I represents a caesura. Indeed, starting from WWI, "idealistic" is deemed a "lie" in the moral ambit, and as an "illusion" in the fields of art and science. Idealism in all its versions has fallen into disrepute.

Here it is not possible to suitably deal with the question of the failure of idealism with regard to the theory of science and aesthetics. I would just like to give an outline of the problem, i.e. to ascertain the common denominator of the consent against idealism, and particularly against the "idealistic" construction of science and art. Starting from WWI the realistic turn wins evidence [*Evidenz*] beyond every single argumentation. This consent dominates the organised ideology of the Catholic church (neo-Thomism), as well as the organised ideology of communism (historical and dialectical materialism). The philosophies of life and existence orchestrate in every possible way the general topic of the "world", whose "resistance" becomes the index of its reality [*Wirklichkeit*] (Dilthey), while Heidegger raises the "world" to a self-evident presupposition, so that the mere problem [of its reality] becomes a "scandal". I suppose that the different versions of "realism" can be distinguished into worldview [*Weltanschauung*], politics and cognitive interest [*Erkenntnisinteresse*]. The representatives of the different realisms do not belong to any ideologically organised party, and yet a secret covenant exists, which is, however, hard to grasp. I venture to uphold the following thesis: all versions of realism are dominated by an anti-modern temper,[6] whether this be in the interpretation of modern science, or in the interpretation of modern art.

II. The element of cultural critique embedded in the reflection on the history of science is clearly brought into play by Heidegger's critique of modern metaphysics. Taking this critique as a guiding principle we can identify, in a sort of turnaround, those moments which constitute the modern self-comprehension [*Selbstverständnis*] of science and art, so that we can define the

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[6] [In the original German text, Taubes's phrase «von einem antimodernistischen Affekt» recalls – as a sort of indirect answer to it – the incipit of Carl Schmitt's famous essay on Catholicism («Es gibt einen anti-römischen Affekt», «Here is an anti-Roman temper»), in which Schmitt denounces the "modern hate" against the juridical form and the political might that characterise the Roman Church as an institution; see C. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, Transl. by G.L. Ulmen. Westport: Greenwood Press 1996, p. 3].

unease with modernity [*die Moderne*] as manifested in the different debates on realism.

In *The Age of the World Picture* (an essay that refers to a lecture held in 1938 entitled *The Foundation of the Modern World Picture through Metaphysics*) Heidegger poses the question on «the essence of modern science».[7] It is precisely when Heidegger tries to «come upon the metaphysical ground which provides the foundation of science as a modern phenomenon» that he encounters the problem: the world as a picture. At first the expression "modern world picture" does not seem to conceal any problem. The modern world picture stands out against the medieval and the ancient ones, but any view [of it] is conveyed through this distinction. But Heidegger rightly insists on the fact that "the modern world picture" is in itself a manifestation of modern self-consciousness [*Selbstbewußtsein*]. «The world picture does not change from an earlier medieval to a modern one; rather, that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of modernity».[8] In a strict sense, it is not possible to talk of a medieval "world picture" or an ancient "world picture", because the world was not represented or comprehended as a picture in either Antiquity or the Middle Ages. World picture [*Weltbild*] does not mean a copy [*Abbild*]; rather, here it betrays something of the idiom we use when saying that we are "in the picture" about something [*wir sind über etwas "im Bilde"*].[9] I am in the picture [*Ich bin im Bilde*] also means: I know some information. «"World picture" does not mean "picture of the world" but, rather, the world grasped as picture».[10] Only when the world appears as a picture can it be comprehended as a human «representation» [*Vorstellung*]. Schopenhauer's version of the world as representation takes too rapid a grip, and one should rather think the representation in a scenic meaning. To

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[7] M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, in Id., *Holzwege*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 1950, 69–104; p. 70 [*The Age of the World Picture*, in M. Heidegger, *Off The Beaten Track*, Ed. and Trans. by J. Young & K. Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, p. 58].

[8] *Ivi*, p. 83 [Eng. tr. p. 68].

[9] [The German expression (*über jdn, etw.*) *im Bilde sein* means: to be informed, to be acquainted, to get to the bottom (of a matter), to be a sly one; see also the explanation given by Heidegger himself: «To be "in the picture" resonates with: being well informed, being equipped and prepared. Where the world becomes picture, beings as a whole are set in place as that for which man is prepared; that which, therefore, he correspondingly intends to bring before him, have before him, and, thereby, in a decisive sense, place before him»; *The Age of the World Picture*, p. 67].

[10] *Ivi*, p. 82 [Eng. tr. p. 67].

represent means to stage. At this point in Heidegger's analysis, a binding connection becomes evident between the scientific and the artistic experience in modernity. Modern art and modern science are founded – in many different ways – on the project, on representation, on fiction, without any reference to something preset, without any relation to a fixed centre. Heidegger's analysis, phenomenologically oriented and [conducted] from a history of philosophy perspective, is expounded without reference to any work on the history of science, but is actually a philosophical commentary on the study conducted by Pierre Duhem, who provided an exposition of this historical connection in his ten-volume work *The System of the World: History of the Cosmological Doctrines from Plato to Copernicus.*[11]

Even Duhem's critics such as Alexandre Koyré and Annneliese Maier, who classified Galilei's precursors more accurately [than him], were not able to shake Duhem's fundamental thesis. What seems fundamental to me is Duhem's idea about the dialectical function of the Bishop of Paris's condemnation in 1277 of the Averroistic theses.[12] Although condemnations may have had highly repressive consequences on the development of medieval philosophy, for the development of the natural sciences the theses by the Bishop of Paris, Etienne Temper, represent a breakthrough towards a new understanding of the world. They prepare the ground for a fictionalist conception of theory, which is constitutive for the self-comprehension of modern science. Heidegger founds his philosophical thesis on Duhem's works on the history of science, without citing his source.

Therefore, it is not by chance that the whole critique against modernity, in its different tones of complaint, leads to [the idea of] the "loss of the centre"; that in modernity all countermovements related to aesthetics and the history of science flow into a pleading in favour of a "realistic" science and a "realistic" art. The examples are legion, but I shall restrict myself to mentioning just Hans Sedlmayr and Georg Lukács as the main authorities [*Kronzeugen*] of this pleading. The unreality [*Irrealis*] or the fictional character of the modern articulation, which brings back all substantiality to the subject, worries the established powers. So one can explain the fact that the two mutually

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[11] Pierre Duhem, *Le système du monde: histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic.* Paris: Hermann 1913-1959.
[12] The original Latin text is published in: Pierre Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIIIme siècle.* Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université 1908-1911, II, 125–191.

conflicting ideologies – Catholic neo-Thomism and communist historical and dialectical materialism – form a united front against every "modern" interpretation of reality as a construct [*ein Gewirktes*] and, albeit differently, they always sound the same trumpet anyway, in order to evoke an immemorial "being" against all versions of the primacy of the idea, the spirit, the conscience, the project.

Here I have neither the intention nor the possibility to exhaustively deal with the problem of the congruence among the different "realisms". I would just like to bring into play a point of view that as yet has not been introduced to the debates on "realisms", the only one that can contribute to determining the position of those established powers in the "hermeneutical" global war [*Weltbürger-Krieg*]. The established powers – the Catholic church and the communist sway – are in opposition, for understandable reasons, and protest against the unrestrained liberation of the productive forces and imaginative faculties in the modern world. What I have tried to show here, first of all, by localising some positions of the theory of science, can be applied without difficulty to the Catholic and socialist position in the aesthetic ambit. In the field of art and aesthetics, the political and cultural consequences of this opposition against modernity [*die Moderne*] are even clearer than in the scientific field. Indeed the competition with the modern (Western and "capitalistic") technologies gives the theory of science's archaisms less opportunity to intervene in the technological practice. So we arrive at a paradoxical observation: while the "idealistic" interpretation of the reality is set off course from the philosophical or the ideological point of view, in actual fact it has imposed itself anonymously. In fact, any interpretation that understands the world as a "product of positing" ["*Produkt des Setzens*"] (Fichte), or as a "representation" (Schopenhauer) can count as "idealistic", according to the broader meaning of the word. In other words: any interpretation that transforms the world into a possessive [*Possessivum*], without any support in a being that already exists beforehand. Therewith, however, one has exactly described the place where both technological and aesthetic imagination [*Phantasie*] is enhanced.

*Translated from the German by Renata Badii*

The concept of Weltbild *is fundamental when one wants to move from a pure normative ground, interested in the ethical foundations of politics, to a perspective that could be defined as "moral sociology": a perspective that does not question what should be done, but tries to understand what is plausible/realistic that the individuals consider as a duty, moving from their representation of the social reality.*

*The purpose of the present Volume of Humana.Mente is to analyse some of the various interpretations of the idea of* Weltbild *(and of its related concepts: Weltanschauung, Weltansicht, Weltauffassung) in the late 19th and in the 20th century philosophical scenario.*

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