ABSTRACT

Following a long process of the historicization of thought from Schiller and Hegel through nineteenth-century historicism, a critical point was reached in the 1920s in Germany: the status of history as such—its representability, its narrative structure, the way that it informs thought and experience—emerged as a pressing cultural problem. This study shows how a new concept of eschatology in the theological discourse of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Franz Rosenzweig, Rudolf Bultmann, and Martin Heidegger played a pivotal role in the crisis and reinvention of history in German modernism. These writers produced an array of new temporal and historical concepts—from *kairos*, to contemporaneity, to the eschatological now, to the reversal of beginning and end—that radically challenged the historicist understanding of history as a teleologically-driven process of linear development that forms a totality.

This theological intervention in the construction of history is a crucial moment in German modernism, one that stands in dialogue with secular cultural formations from historiography, to literature, to the arts. Uncovering the affinities of theological discourse with the art of Russian Constructivism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the theory of historiography of Karl Mannheim and Ernst Troeltsch, and the literary work of Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Bloch, and Georg Lukács, this study shows how German theology in the 1920s plays a key role in the modernist avant-garde that has yet to be recognized.

Drawing on modernist principles of spatial construction and non-objective modes of representation, Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger produced a modernist concept of eschatology that is fundamentally incommensurable with history and could no longer be secularized as the *telos* of world history or the “end of time.” Instead, eschatology was
understood as the “limit” of history that stands in dialectical tension to each moment, one that exposes the groundlessness of historical experience and its disjunction with itself. Such a negative theology called into question the continuity and developmental logic of history. Yet it also pointed to new possibilities for the construction of the present moment as a moment without history, a space for self-reflection cut loose from the narrative of history.
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INTRODUCTION

“Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.”
—Friedrich Schiller (1784)

“Die Geschichte ist erledigt, sie wird nicht fortgesetzt.”
—Karl Barth (1922)

Schiller’s dictum “Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht” stands at the beginning of a process of historicization that continued through the nineteenth-century and reached a critical point in the early 1920s. Along with Hegel’s philosophy of history, such historicism entailed a temporalization of the moment of divine judgment, bringing it within the contours of a history of development that forms a totality. In his work on the emergence of “history” as a central category of thought in the modern world, Reinhart Koselleck offers the following gloss on Schiller’s epigram: “Die Moral der Geschichte wurde verzeitlicht zur Geschichte als Prozeß. . . . Der Verzicht auf eine im Jenseits ausgleichende Gerechtigkeit führt zu deren Verzeitlichung. Die Geschichte hic et nunc gewinnt unentrinnbaren Charakter.”¹ The concept of history that began to circulate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thus depended on a temporalization of thought in which history emerged as a process of linear development and continuity. As the here and now of historical experience displaced its metaphysical forerunners, history finally came to stand in Hegel for the totality in which spirit comes to itself.

This process of historicization, according to the common narrative, succeeded in secularizing a formerly transcendent source of meaning whose unfolding now coincided with the

movement of history itself.\textsuperscript{2} Its success was visible not only in the rise of the historical sciences in the nineteenth-century, but also in the accounts of history produced by philosophy and theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher not only inaugurated a historically exact method for philological research, but also understood Christianity as a fundamentally historical formation. His concept of Christ as a historical impulse radiating outwardly from the historical figure Jesus neutralized and historicized the eschatological moment of judgment. According to Koselleck, the emergence of the notion of historical development in German Idealism depended upon the historicization of eschatology as “das Weltgericht”: “Damit war der Weg frei, im Gefolge der idealistischen Geschichtsphilosophen auch die christliche Eschatologie prozessual aufzulösen. . . . Das Jüngste Gericht—die Krisis—wird quasi auf \textit{die geschichtliche Entwicklungsreihe} ausgedehnt.”\textsuperscript{3} The negativity of the end was temporalized and pushed into the future as \textit{telos}. In Hegel’s philosophy of history, tension, conflict, and the negative can all be accounted for within an inner-historical dialectic that mediates a progressive and processual emergence of the ideal within the immanence of history.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the basic paradigm laid out by Hegel’s philosophy of history was modified, criticized, and transformed, but the basic thrust of its historicization remained intact. Marx focused on the concept of alienation as fundamental to the

\textsuperscript{2} In what has become the standard reading, Karl Löwith claims that the emergence of historical thought is intimately tied to a process of secularization, and hence does not begin suddenly in the eighteenth-century but has deeper roots. Just as for Carl Schmitt the theory of sovereignty is secularized theology, so too does \textit{Geschichtsphilosophie}, for Löwith, depend upon theological presuppositions: “Entgegen dieser allgemein verbreiteten Meinung möchte der folgende historische Grundriß unseres geschichtlichen Denkens zeigen, daß die moderne Geschichtsphilosophie dem biblischen Glauben an eine Erfüllung entspringt und daß sie mit der Säkularisierung ihres eschatologischen Vorbildes endet.” \textit{Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie}, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1953), 11–12.

\textsuperscript{3} Koselleck, “Eintrag zur ‘Geschichte’,” 685.
inner-historical dialectic and gave it a political and economic reading. His work introduced a moment of revolution that separates “pre-history” and “history proper,” yet the moment of crisis that precedes fulfillment was still considered within the confines of secular history. Nietzsche turned more dramatically against Hegel, questioning the value of history for life in the present and anticipating the crisis of history and presentist historiography that emerged in the 1920s. However, his approach was subjectivist and Dionysian, and he viewed history as a construction of the subject. For this reason, his thought too remains anchored within the movement of historicization. Finally, Dilthey applied a hermeneutic method in order to show how the construction of history is a recursive, self-reflexive process. As such, he anticipated the rhetoric and poetics of “Aufbau” that become prominent in the 1920s. However, his historiographical model, which is connected with his vision of the Geisteswissenschaften, still upheld the self-sufficiency and totality of history as inherited from Hegel and thus remained under the sway of historicism.

Meanwhile, within the discipline of history itself, there was a blossoming of historicist research in the nineteenth century. Historians such as Leopold von Ranke, Johann Gustav Droysen, and Friedrich Meinecke produced comprehensive historiographies of past epochs, amassing and objectively evaluating historical data in order to produce a picture of the past “as it really was.” The writing of history, for these figures, was an end in itself. Their historiographies presupposed a universal history of human development of which individual cultures, peoples, and nations are inextricably a part. The aim of their work was to reconstruct the historical causalities that account for the continuity of historical development from Antiquity to the
present. A belief in a gradual, progressive movement of history, undeterred by epochs of decline, was coupled with a desire to justify and give meaning to history through historiographical reconstruction. It is in this sense that Droysen could claim that “Die höchste Aufgabe unserer Wissenschaft ist ja die Theodicee.”

Koselleck is right to note the emergence of a discursive structure of historical thought as one of the most decisive transformations that took place beginning in the late eighteenth century. To some extent, the intellectual history of twentieth century is heir to this historicization of thought and culture. However, the complete historicization of thought that Schiller and Hegel set into motion began to tremble in the early twentieth century. Indeed, by the 1920s, in the midst of what has been called “classical modernism,” history itself—its constitution, its representability, the way that it determines the logic and grammar of thought, and its experience—emerged as a pressing cultural problem. The status of history as such became a general cultural problem in German modernism, and the concepts of history and temporality underwent a profound transformation within this intellectual historical formation. However, this

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4 Within theology itself, one can note the emergence of the discipline of the history of religion, which depends upon historicist commitments. Its most famous expression is the Leben-Jesu-Forschung that culminated in the work of Albert Schweitzer. Research on the life of the historical Jesus takes prominence over the moment of resurrection that exceeds historical representation. Jesus is considered in terms of his ethical teachings. This leads to an understanding of religion that merely supports and upholds “culture.” This results in the theological liberalism of Harnack, with whom Barth breaks.


6 Kierkegaard is an important figure that anticipates the crisis of history in the twentieth-century. His concept of an infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity is fundamental for the Karl Barth’s Römerbrief, as is his diagnosis of a sickness towards death. However, Kierkegaard does not account for the way in which eschatology is not just Endgeschichte but moreover Urgeschichte.

7 On the use of the term “classical modernism” to designate the field of cultural production in interwar Germany, see Detlev Peukert, Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987).
revaluation of history has not been fully understood, for while its manifestations in philosophy (Bergson, Heidegger) and secular historiography (Mannheim, Spengler) have been explored, a current of theological writing that stands in close dialogue with these secular cultural formations has been neglected.

This project tells the story of this dialogue and excavates the contributions made by Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Franz Rosenzweig, Rudolf Bultmann, and Martin Heidegger, showing how these figures reinvented the vocabulary and concept of historical understanding. These writers produced a wide array of temporal and historical concepts—*kairos*, contemporaneity, the eschatological now, a historical arc suspended between eternities, the reversal of beginning and end—that called into question the prevailing historicist understanding of history. This amounted to an unrelenting critique of a history of linear development, progress, and continuity, one that questioned the self-contained, self-sufficient, and teleological constitution of history. In a decisive reversal of the historicization of thought that began with Schiller and Hegel, theological discourse called into question the very idea of history as narrative, and thereby emerged as a central cultural formation in German modernism.

These theological interventions in the understanding of history did not take place in a vacuum, nor did they mark a resurgent orthodoxy that reacted against a movement of secularization that had gained traction since the Enlightenment. Rather, they can be understood as a formation of negative theology under the conditions of modernism, one in which history is determined by the absence and incommensurability of a transcendent ground. This project not only reconstructs the reinvention of history in theological discourse, but also shows how this discourse was embedded in a wider “crisis of historicism” whose effects were felt across disciplinary boundaries. The conceptual and poetic strategies that theology made recourse to are
closely related and intertwined with movements ranging from constructivism in historiography and the visual arts, to neo-realism in literature and the painting of the Neue Sachlichkeit. In this way, the reinvention of history in theological discourse was part and parcel of a wider cultural formation in the 1920s.

The key to the reinvention of history and challenge to historicism in theology is the *topos* of eschatology. It is by way of an attention to the potential of eschatology to enact of crisis of history that Karl Barth can claim, in stark opposition to the teleological model of infinite historical development, that “Die Geschichte ist erledigt, sie wird nicht fortgesetzt.” Yet the concept of eschatology that circulates in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany is radically different from its canonical and doctrinal version. Traditionally, eschatology has stood for the doctrine of the “last things,” and it is typically articulated as an apocalyptic narrative of ultimate catastrophe through which time and history come to an end in the moment of the last judgment. The writers considered in this study struggle against such a temporalization of eschatology, one in which the “end of history” is conceived as a terminal point that is deferred into a more or less imminent future. Whether such a temporal end is associated with utopian fulfillment or a catastrophic *Weltuntergang* is immaterial: the problem remains that eschatology is conceived as the climax of a temporal sequence, one that marks its final cessation. As Paul Tillich astutely observes, such a temporalization of eschatology contains an internal contradiction, for the notion of the end of history as its termination is only possible within a temporal framework: “Der Begriff eines Endes der Geschichte im zeitlichen Sinn ist unvollziehbar. Es wäre kein Ende, sondern ein Abbruch.

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8 Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)*, 17. ed., (1922; reprint, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005), 56.
Der Gedanke eines Abbruchs der Zeit aber ist selbst ein zeitbestimmter Gedanke und hebt sich
darum selbst auf.”

The new concept of eschatology that emerges in the 1920s, by contrast, is understood in
spatial terms as a limit phenomenon. Whether it is conceived as an eschatological moment, an
eschatological now, eschatological time, or simply as eternity, the decisive aspect of this
construct is that it defines a relation of spatial proximity to each moment of historical time, and
in particular to the present. Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger each attend to
the liminal relation of time and eternity, history and eschatology, in which history is related to its
outside, to its other, to that to which it is incommensurable. The non-temporal or extra-temporal
constitution of the eschatological moment, however, does not succeed history as its cessation, but
opens up a field of tension in relation to time at each moment. The relation of eschatology and
history is not only spatial and liminal, but finally negative: eschatology stands for that which is
inaccessible to historical understanding, that which exceeds history, and that which enacts a
crisis of history by revealing its groundlessness.

The new concept of eschatology resists the temporalization of that which stands at the
limit of history; it rejects the apocalyptic narrative of a deferred “end of history” along with the
teleological narrative of historical progress. It is a concept of eschatology that resists the
secularization of the moment of judgment as coterminous with history itself, one that withstands
the historicization of the “end” as the telos of historical development. The writers considered in
this study recover the potential of eschatology that was undercut by the process of historicization
initiated by Schiller and Hegel. The new concept of eschatology shakes the very foundation of
nineteenth-century philosophies of history and reinvents the concept of history. For the image of

9 Paul Tillich, “Eschatologie und Geschichte” (1927), Gesammelte Werke, vol. 6 (Stuttgart:
Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1963), 80.
the continuity of past, present, and future, it substitutes the eruptive, interruptive character of the time of the present as kairos. In place of the logic of historical causality it theorizes a contemporaneity of discontinuous, non-contemporaneous moments insofar as they each partake of a moment of all moments. The teleological trajectory towards a utopian future is displaced by the revelatory power of the eschatological moment as Urgeschichte. The objectivity of history is called into question in light of an event and temporal space that exceeds representation.

In all of these ways, eschatological discourse not only poses a challenge to the historicization of thought, but provides an alternative historiographical model, one that might be called a historiography of the present. Insofar as the present moment bears a potential relation to the “eschatological now,” it marks a juncture that is at once within and outside of history. Yet here the liminality of eschatology is essential: the attempt to overcome history necessarily takes place in a particular historical moment and can never fully dispense with its historical situation. The possibility and potential inherent in such theological discourse is counterbalanced by a sober recognition of the limitation of historical temporality and its infinite distance to the divine.

Given that eschatological discourse redefines historical understanding in the “classical modernism” of the 1920s and 1930s, the eschatology articulated by Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger can profitably be called “modernist eschatology.” My claim is that we need a concept of “modernist eschatology” to understand the way in which the reinvention of eschatological discourse both became necessary under the conditions of twentieth-century modernism and made a fundamental intervention in the understanding of history in such modernism. Yet the scholarship on eschatology has yet to recognize the emergence of a specifically “modernist” concept of eschatology, that is, one associated with what has been
called “classical modernism” in the early twentieth century in Germany. When there is discussion of “modern” eschatology, it typically refers to the post-Hegelian historicization of eschatology that became prominent in the nineteenth century and was politicized in Marxism—hence precisely the form of eschatology overcome in the twentieth century. This is eschatology under the conditions of “Neuzeit” and has been treated as part of a more general process of secularization, one in which eschatology has been folded into the process of historicization discussed above. This study, by contrast, looks at the concept of eschatology in what has been called “die Moderne,” an intellectual historical formation that begins to emerge at the beginning of the twentieth century and is often associated with the avant-garde in art, expressionism in literature, and with German culture in the Weimar Republic more generally.

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10 Christoph Schmidt’s *Die theopolitische Stunde: zwölf Perspektiven auf das eschatologische Problem der Moderne* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009) is the only work, to my knowledge, that explicitly places in the problem of eschatology in relation to modernity. However, Schmidt’s reading is devoted to the problem of political theology and treats the work of Carl Schmitt in relation to figures such as Leo Strauss, Erik Peterson, Martin Buber, Gerscom Scholem, and Jacob Taubes. My thesis is that the nexus of eschatology and modernism has implications for the problem of history, and that it cannot fully be understood without considering Karl Barth, Franz Rosenzweig, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Martin Heidegger. My subsequent remarks on political theology make clear that this line of interpretation misses a formation of eschatological discourse that resists politicization and historicization. For more on Schmidt’s recent book, see Gabriele Guerra, “Die theologische Säkularisierung des Deutsch-Jüdischen. ‘Die theopolitische Stunde’ von Christoph Schmidt. Eine Neuorientierung der politischen Theologie,” *Literaturkritik.de* 11.10 (2009): http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=13475.

11 This is the reading that one finds in Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg. Their work on the secularization of theological concepts in philosophies of history from the late eighteenth-century onward has explored how a previously transcendent eschatological moment of judgment and fulfillment was mapped onto history as an inner-historical telos. This explains how Schiller can grasp the “Weltgericht,” a formerly theological concept, as identical with the movement and development of “Weltgeschichte” itself. See Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgecehen*; and Hans Blumenberg, “Verweltlichung durch Eschatologie statt Verweltlichung der Eschatologie,” *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 46–63.

12 While writing in a very different context, John Bishop’s gloss on the figure “modernist eschatology” in relation to Joyce is a useful statement of its liminal possibilities: “By tunneling into this ‘mountain,’ Joyce not simply mined open the twentieth-century’s analytical fascination with sleep, dreams, and Unconscious, but developed as well a modernist eschatology (Gr.
A consideration of eschatological discourse as an integral part of twentieth-century modernism is all the more necessary since the prevailing view is that eschatology is incompatible with modernist understandings of time and history. According to Giorgio Agamben, Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg, two of the most important theorists of eschatology in the twentieth-century, “share a common presupposition, that of the irreconcilable antithesis between modernity and eschatology. For both, the Christian conception of time oriented toward eschatological salvation and, hence, toward a final end, was obsolete and ultimately antithetical to modernity’s handling of its own conception of its history and time.”

Löwith and Blumenberg can claim that eschatology is incompatible with a modernist understanding of history because they are primarily concerned with political eschatology, one that remains under the influence of Hegelian and Marxist concepts of teleological development as the secularization of eschatology. This project, by contrast, uncovers a fundamentally different sense of eschatology that itself arises under the conditions of modernism, one that makes a crucial contribution to the reconfiguration of historical understanding in modernism.

It is not so much eschatology itself that embodies a modernist understanding of time, but rather the relation of eschatology to history, as its limit case, that produces new concepts of temporality and history. Under the conditions of modernism, eschatology is no longer oriented towards a final end, but stands for a crisis of history in each moment. It is therefore a crucial

element in the break with nineteenth-century philosophies of history and their historicization of thought. It is through a negative theology, insofar as eschatology becomes irreducible and incommensurable to history, that eschatological discourse opens up possibilities for new historical understanding in modernism. The current research on “Religion und Moderne” in the German context, which has attended to Jewish writers such as Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem and literary figures from Franz Kafka to Stefan George, is therefore incomplete. In order to understand the centrality of religion and theology in twentieth-century modernism, one needs to consider the Dialectical Theology of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann, the syncretist contribution of Franz Rosenzweig, and the early, theologically-inflected philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

Yet the reinvention of history is not only a theological and philosophical concern but had a broader resonance from the secular theory of historiography, to literature, to the arts. The redefinition of history is therefore central to the understanding of twentieth-century modernism writ large. Just as theology showed that history is determined by its relation to its eschatological other, secular historiographers produced new historiographical models that emphasized the contingency and constructedness of history. A general “crisis of historicism” in the 1920s defined an understanding of history in which the ideology of progress was no longer tenable. The construction of history in modernism proceeded from the vantage point of the present, yet the products of the historiographical imagination could no longer claim universality. Instead, the discontinuous structure of history, one replete with interruptions, caesuras, and non-linear

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14 In her treatment of Walter Benjamin’s concept of messianism, for example, Sigrid Weigel notes that the tension between messianic redemption and the unredeemed world of history reflects a “strukturelles Dilemma jüdischer Philosophie in der Moderne,” thus placing Benjamin and Scholem’s writing on religion within the context of “modernism.” Entstellte Ähnlichkeit: Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise, (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1997), 72.
correspondences, took center stage and informed a form of self-reflection on the historical moment distinctive of “classical modernism.”

The redefinition of history that this project reconstructs has implications, moreover, for the way that cultural products in literature and the arts articulated themselves in German modernism. The collapse of continuity and narrative forms of temporality was evident in literary forms that emphasized discrete series of images rather than narratives of development. In place of teleological structure of the Bildungsroman, Rainer Maria Rilke’s Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge\textsuperscript{15} and Walter Benjamin’s Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert\textsuperscript{16} produced images of the historical subject that stand in disjunction to one another. They drew on literary strategies that emphasize the spatial relations of constellations of images rather than the temporal lineage of an embryonic moment that comes to fruition in the course of narrative. From the Bauhaus to Russian Constructivism, the primacy of geometric forms emerged as a specifically modernist aesthetic mode, one that has a formal corollary in the rhetoric and conceptual vocabulary of contemporary theological discourse. If one examines closely the play of forces within these geometric constructions in the work of El Lissitzky, it becomes apparent that there is no grounding moment or “fulcrum” that organizes and constrains the relation of the spatial elements among themselves. Similarly, the spatial dynamics that allow Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig to reconceive temporality and history are fundamentally de-centered. The relation of eschatology to history does not provide a transcendental ground through which history is fulfilled, but rather exposes the groundlessness of history, its fundamentally negative relation to its eschatological other. The disorientation that results from this crisis of temporal

\textsuperscript{15} Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge (1910; reprint: Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1963).

\textsuperscript{16} Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert (1938; reprint: Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).
categories makes these theological interventions thoroughly modernist, both in their effects and in the way that they articulate themselves.

This sense of rupture makes the mediation of historical knowledge impossible, yet it also works against the illusion of the immediacy of subjective experience. The redefinition of history in theological discourses thus had implications for the concept of “reality” in modernism. Reality could neither be taken as “given” in an objective form, nor as a mere construct of the subject. Rather, in terms of a neo-realist poetics that charts a course between these extremes, reality was articulated as possibility, as a dialectic of revelation and concealment. The result is an understanding of immanence that is radically different than the “immanentization of the eschaton” that took place through a process of historicization and secularization. The “end” of all things is not immanent to history as its telos, but rather proximate to every present in the mode of negation and absence. The revelation of the liminal relation of the present to the “eschatological

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17 Modernist eschatology, in my reading, is thus not equivalent to what Eric Voegelin called the “immanentization of the eschaton.” The modernist concept of eschatology has implications for the world of immanence, but it can never be identified with this world; it remains the limit of the this-worldly; it structures it through its absence, through negativity. I therefore dispute Brian G. Mattson’s characterization of “modernist eschatology” in a recent article, in which he writes that “just as Voegelin would note exactly a half-century later, modernist eschatology (invariably Hegelian and, therefore on Voegelin’s terms, “gnostic”) is necessarily a this-worldly, immanent re-creation of the world by way of Nietzsche’s Wille zur Macht.” “Bavinck’s ‘Revelation and the Future’: A Centennial Retrospective,” The Kuyper Center Review 2 (2011), 144–145. The immanentization of the eschaton at stake here is co-terminous with the historicization and secularization of the eschatology. As Mattson notes, it is a Hegelian notion that finds its most extreme, subjectivist expression in Nietzsche. However, it is precisely such a Hegelian philosophy of history that “modernism”—of the sort that emerges in interwar Germany—turns against. On Voegelin’s phrase “to immanentize the eschaton” as a description of the secularization of gnostic thought, see Stanley Corngold, “Kafka (with Nietzsche) as Neo-Gnostic Thinkers,” in Franz Kafka: the Ghosts in the Machine, ed. Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 153. As Corngold points out in a note, Voegelin himself recognized the “immanentist hypostasis of the eschaton” as “theoretical fallacy” since “there is no eidos of history; . . . the eschatological supernature is not a nature in the philosophical, immanent sense” (248, citing Eric Voegelin, The New Science of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 110, 123).
“now” defines a poetics of immanence that does not depend upon the future inception of transcendent completion. Under the conditions of modernism, the withdrawal and absence of the divine defines the groundlessness of historical experience. The very categories of historical experience are unbound and submitted to a moment of crisis. It is out of this impasse that the avant-garde culture of classical modernism is able to emerge. Eschatological discourse in the 1920s is therefore modernist not only because of its historical context, but also because its poetic strategies stand in dialogue with a more general redefinition of history in modernist art and culture.

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This study considers the impact of eschatological discourse on the problem of history in German modernism from a number of related disciplinary perspectives, from Intellectual History, to Philosophy and Religion, to German Studies. Each of these research traditions has made a contribution to the problem at stake, but the limitations of each discipline have prevented the question from being posed as it is here. Intellectual historians have approached the question of religion and modernism primarily in terms of German-Jewish writers and have neglected the importance of Protestant Theology for the intellectual history of the twentieth-century.  

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18 Intellectual historians have drawn attention to the importance of theology for the rise of anti-historicism in the twentieth-century, yet this literature focuses disproportionately on German-Jewish writers such as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss, and Walter Benjamin. See David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005). This scholarship at times casts side-glances at Protestant figures from Ernst Troeltsch to the Dialectical Theology of Karl Barth,
Scholarship within the discipline of Theology, meanwhile, has recognized the importance of eschatology in the work of Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann, yet it has not considered the way that these figures interact with philosophy, Jewish thought, and the wider field of cultural production in the 1920s. The theological literature on eschatology has treated the problem as part of the history of theology but not in relation to the more general problem of history and historicization from the late eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. In German Studies, finally, there has not only been a focus on German-Jewish writers and a neglect of Protestant figures, but moreover a tendency to approach religion through the lens of political theology and the problem of secularization. This conjunction of research priorities has meant that a specifically modernist concept of eschatology, one that resists historicization, secularization, and politicization, has yet to be recognized as a key factor in the reinvention of history in twentieth-century modernism.

The aim of this project is to show the importance of Protestant figures from Barth to Tillich to Bultmann for a set of problems that has previously been the exclusive domain of Jewish Studies. Yet it also brings these Protestant figures, along with Franz Rosenzweig and Hermann Cohen, into dialogue with German culture more broadly conceived in the 1920s and 1930s.

The project is thus a contribution to the so-called “religious turn” in the Humanities that has generated significant interest in recent years, yet it takes this research in a different direction. This literature has focused its attention primarily on “political theology,” and this orientation has colored the existing accounts of the concept of eschatology. From Carl Schmitt’s *Politische*...
Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität to Jacob Taubes’ lectures on Die politische Theologie des Paulus, the focus has been on the political implications of theological concepts, insofar as they undergird the modern theory of politics in secularized form. In German Studies in particular, political theology has provided the lens through which theology and religion have been approached. There is much to be gleaned from this research, but more often than not it tells us more about politics and the theory of the state than it does about theology as such, which is treated instrumentally. This kind of approach becomes particularly problematic when it is applied to the concept of eschatology. For the politicization of eschatology inevitably blunts its dialectical potential. The attempt to conceive of an eschatological kingdom of God as a model for the theory of the state treats that which is incommensurable with history as a historical and political goal. This approach to eschatology pre-determines its intellectual historical significance within the historiography of the Weimar

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19 Carl Schmitt, Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität (München und Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1922); Jacob Taubes, Die politische Theologie des Paulus: Vorträge, gehalten an der Forschungsstätte der evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft in Heidelberg, 23.-27. Februar 1987, ed. Aleida und Jan Assmann (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993). Other works that stand in this tradition include Christoph Schmidt, Die Apokalypse des Subjekts: ästhetische Subjektivität und politische Theologie bei Hugo Ball (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003); and more recently: Christoph Schmidt, Die theopolitische Stunde: zwölf Perspektiven auf das eschatologische Problem der Moderne.

20 See, for example, the issue of New German Critique devoted to this topic. New German Critique 105, Vol. 35, No. 3, Fall 2008.

21 This is not to say that political eschatology did not exist in interwar Germany, along with all manner of chiliastic speculation about the coming of a Tausendjähriges Reich. Figures such as Georg Wünsch, Leonhard Ragaz, and Fritz Gerlich were proponents of a religious socialism that connected the eschatological tradition with Marxism. See Georg Wünsch, “Christliche und marxistische Eschatologie,” Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus (1932), 231–32; Leonhard Ragaz, Von Christus zu Marx, von Marx zu Christus: ein Beitrag (Wernigerode am Harz: H. Harder, 1929); and Fritz Gerlich, Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom tausendjährigen Reich (München, H. Bruckmann, 1920). Paul Tillich and Ernst Bloch also entertained a political reading of eschatology. See Paul Tillich, “Masse und Religion (1921),” Gesammelte Werke, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagwerk, 1962); Ernst Bloch, Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution (1921; reprint: Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962); Ernst Bloch, Geist der Utopie (München: Duncker & Humblot, 1918).
Republic that has been told time and again as a political history leading from the promise of a new beginning to a catastrophic end with the rise of National Socialism.\(^{22}\)

The political reading of eschatology is flawed, moreover, because it is driven by a teleological end in the sense of Zweck or Ziel. This reading depends upon the historicization of eschatology and hence misses the way in which eschatology marks a disjunction of history with itself. Political theology has treated eschatology as end-historical, placing it as the telos of a movement of prophetic fulfillment. Despite the fact that Barth, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger called into question this understanding of eschatology, it still remains operative in twentieth-century accounts of eschatology, such as Karl Löwith’s 1953 *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*, which presupposes a Marxist and Hegelian understanding of history. As Löwith writes:


Löwith’s understanding of the eschatological end as “finis” and “telos” and his inability to differentiate between Ziel and Ende shows the full extent to which his understanding of

\(^{22}\) In the worst-case scenario, eschatology is appropriated by the ideology of National Socialism and its self-understanding as the inauguration of a Tausendjähriges Reich. Or insofar as it supports a Marxist politics it remains politically ineffective. All of these attempts to bend eschatology to a political purpose fundamentally misrepresent its theological concept; worse, they fail to see eschatology’s far more important place in cultural and intellectual history. The political appropriation of eschatology is reductionist, while its philosophical, theological, and intellectual historical figurations interact with a more nuanced set of problems related to the constitution of history.

eschatology remains trapped in historicism and a Marxist-Hegelian philosophy of history. While his reading captures the significance of eschatology from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century, it fails to grasp the revolution in the understanding of eschatology that took place in the first half of the twentieth-century.

Other influential twentieth-century accounts of eschatology, such as Jacob Taubes’ 1947 *Abendländische Eschatologie*, likewise fail to recognize and systematically discount the revolution in the concept of eschatology that took place in early twentieth-century modernism. Taubes provides a comprehensive history of eschatology in western thought from the biblical prophets, through Paul, Augustine, the Middle Ages, and the Enlightenment, culminating in Marx and Kierkegaard. Although he is frequently concerned with the apocalyptic narrative and its rich imagery, Taubes lays important groundwork in recognizing how eschatology exceeds and disrupts the narrative of chronological history. Theological eschatology in the Middle Ages and philosophical eschatology in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, he argues, betray the revolutionary potential of the eschatological moment: they map out the stages of the eschatological arc onto chronological history, so that Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modernity (*Neuzeit*) are identified with the processual unfolding of God as the father, the son, and the holy spirit. According to Taubes, Marx and Kierkegaard recover the concept of “Entfremdung” as the *Urwort* of eschatological thinking. The notion of the alienation of history with itself, an alienation beyond all possibility of reconciliation, is indeed central for the trajectory of eschatological thought in the twentieth century, with Kierkegaard in particular becoming a central figure for Dialectical Theology. It is therefore all the more conspicuous that Barth,

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Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger remain marginal figures in Taubes’ work. He neglects the very generation of German theological writers whose work defined the years of his youth. The systematic neglect of Barth and Rosenzweig in particular continues throughout Taubes’ work; in Die politische Theologie des Paulus (1987), Barth is still present only as a marginal figure.26 One of the contributions of this project is therefore to fill in this curious omission by telling the as yet untold story of eschatology in the twentieth century and in particular in the context of German modernism in the interwar years.

Most recently, Giorgio Agamben has touched upon the complex of problems considered in this project in his 2005 book, The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans.27 Though without doubt an important interpretation of Paul, it takes its cues from Taubes and aims primarily to show how the work of Walter Benjamin draws in decisive ways on Paul. One effect of the influence of Taubes on Agamben’s work is the marginal role played by Karl Barth. A central moment early in Agamben’s text is the connection messianic time with Paul’s phrase ὁ νῦν καιρὸς. Agamben takes it as a mark of his philological attention to detail to

Selbstentfremdung, wie es in den Studien zur Apokalyptik und Gnosis gezeigt worden ist.” The difference between Taubes’ reading of Kierkegaard, which places him in the tradition of gnosticism, and my reading Barth is that for Barth the complete otherness of the divine is not a function of an expressionist subjectivity at odds with itself. In my reading, it is not an apocalypse of the subject that is at the heart of eschatology, as Christoph Schmidt might put it, but a revelation that comes from the outside, that stands not for the conflicted space of interiority, but the limit imposed by the otherness of an incommensurable exteriority.

26 See Die politische Theologie des Paulus, 86–97. Even the chapter entitled “Die Zeloten des Absoluten und der Entscheidung: Carl Schmitt und Karl Barth” is devoted primarily to Schmitt and gives a brief, one-sided account of Barth as a “zealot of the absolute.” See Dieter Schellong, “Jacob Taubes zu Karl Barth,” Abendländische Eschatologie: ad Jacob Taubes, ed. Richard Faber, Eveline Goodman-Thau, and Thomas H Macho (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 385ff. Schellong points out that Barth is only mentioned twice in Taubes’ Abendländische Eschatologie and that Der Römerbrief is strangely absent from the bibliography, despite the clear relevance of Barth’s work for the problem of eschatology.

translate this phrase as “the time of the now,” yet a reader of the second edition of Barth’s *Römerbrief* (1922) will already be familiar with Barth’s translation of this phrase, in contrast to Luther, as “die Zeit des Jetzt.” Agamben’s discovery of a Pauline origin for Walter Benjamin’s concept of “Jetztzeit” therefore elides the centrality of Barth’s work in twentieth-century intellectual history, a context that could not have escaped the notice of Benjamin.

On a deeper level, Agamben is predisposed against any recognition of the significance of eschatological discourse in the early twentieth century because he places it in strict opposition to the messianic tradition: “it is of utmost importance,” he writes, “that we rectify the frequent misunderstanding that occurs when messianic time is flatly identified with eschatological time,” drawing on a common opposition between Jewish and Christian understandings of redemption. Yet Agamben’s distinction between the *eschaton* as the “end of time” and the messianic as “the time of the end” was already undercut in German theology in the 1920s. The devaluation of eschatology vis-à-vis messianism in Agamben depends upon an apocalyptic, teleological understanding of eschatology that was no longer tenable in the early twentieth century. The confluence of messianic and eschatological, Jewish and Christian understandings of history in the 1920s already pointed to a more nuanced understanding of the “end.” So while Agamben’s work succeeds as a reading of messianic time in Paul, his characterization of messianic time as incompatible with eschatological time depends upon a misreading of German intellectual history in the twentieth century. As such, his “close-reading” of Paul fails to acknowledge the ways in which this reading itself is a specifically modernist reaction against nineteenth-century historicism and philosophies of history.

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28 I discuss Barth’s translation and interpretation of this phrase in the context of Romans 8:18ff in Chapter 1.
29 *The Time that Remains*, 62.
Finally, Walter Benjamin’s 1940 text *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* is without a doubt a key text for understanding the role of theology in the critique and reformulation of the philosophy of history in the twentieth-century. This text has not only generated an extensive research literature, but also opened up a field of problems and questions that demand further exploration and contextualization. Through the lineage of Scholem, Adorno, Taubes, and Agamben, Benjamin’s work has come to define the nexus of religion and the understanding of history. And indeed, Benjamin’s reflections on history speak to the new figurations of temporality explored in this project. His notion of history as a construction whose place is defined not by chronological time but by its relation to a “Jetztzeit,” for example, sums up in a nutshell the articulation of the relation of history and eschatology developed in the 1920s. The contribution of this project is to tell the pre-history of Benjamin’s text, to show that it did not arise in isolation, nor exclusively in the context of Jewish messianic thought. This project shows how the contestation of history was a general cultural problem in German modernism, one that was broached by both Protestant and Jewish writers, as well as secular writers, artists, and theorists of historiography. Benjamin’s *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* is thus part of a larger field of reflection on the status of history in German modernism.

To this end, an account of a modernist concept of eschatology decoupled from a teleological understanding of the end is needed. For such a rethinking of eschatology

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30 As Benjamin writes, “Die Geschichte ist Gegenstand einer Konstruktion, deren Ort nicht die homogene und leere Zeit sondern die von Jetztzeit erfüllte bildet.” See “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” *Gesammelte Schriften. Erster Band. Zweiter Teil*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 701. There are other fruitful resonances of Benjamin’s text with the work of Barth and Rosenzweig. For example, the concept of a constellation in which the present enters into direct relationship with previous epochs outside of the space of the historical continuum resonates with Barth’s “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.” See “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” 704. The Kraus aphorism “Ursprung ist das Ziel” that Benjamin cites speaks to Rosenzweig’s concept of the *Umkehrung* of beginning and end.
revolutionized not only the concept of eschatology but also the understanding of history more generally. The eschatological time of *kairos* is not only qualitatively different than chronological time, but moreover enacts a destabilization and crisis of such historical time. It does so not as the final fulfillment of a prophetic movement, but in direct relationship to each present. In order to understand what Benjamin and Agamben call messianic time, one needs a modernist concept of eschatology, for the perspective of the “end,” in its liminal character, is essential to grasp the disjuncture of history with itself that gives messianism its force. The production of new concepts of time and history depends upon a fundamental critique of history as such. As Barth put it: “Die sogenannte ‘Heilsgeschichte’ aber ist nur die fortlaufende Krisis aller Geschichte, nicht eine Geschichte in oder neben der Geschichte.”\(^{31}\) The crisis of history in eschatological discourse in the 1920s is the precondition of all alternative messianic temporalities.

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The aim of this project is to recover a moment of eschatological thought in German modernism that the major twentieth-century accounts of eschatology—Taubes, Löwith, Blumenberg, and Agamben—failed to recognize. My claim is that the “modernist eschatology” of Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger marks an important turn in eschatological discourse insofar as it overturns the historicization and secularization of eschatology characteristic of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At stake is a liminal concept of eschatology that cannot be mapped onto the discourse of political theology nor identified with narratives of apocalyptic decline. As the limit of history (Barth), as a moment

\(^{31}\) Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung)*, 35.
outside of time and history (Rosenzweig), the modernist concept of eschatology articulates a
dialectic of history and eschatology that produces a new understanding of history. Eschatological
discourse in the 1920s and 1930s therefore has implications that go beyond narrowly theological
questions and speak to the larger problem of the historicization of thought that reaches a critical
point in the early twentieth century.

Theology’s challenge to historicism and its presupposition of the totality of history
depends upon a figure of eschatology as that which exceeds and cannot be incorporated into the
narrative of history. Eschatology is reclaimed from its historicization as *telos* and comes to stand
for a non-temporal limit of historical time. It marks a negative space and unattainable boundary
that interrupts the linear continuity of historical time by standing in a negative relation to each
moment in time. Yet the very crisis of history enacted by eschatological discourse entails new
possibilities for the reinvention of history, ones that draw on a wide repertoire of temporal
concepts that emerge from the confrontation of time and eternity, history and eschatology. The
structural relations of past, present, and future come to be defined in terms of an “eschatological
moment” that stands in proximity to the present of historical time without ever being identical to
it. The reinvention of history therefore proceeds by way of a self-reflection on the historical
moment. The “historiographies of the present” that emerge reflect the impossibility of
representing history as a continuous totality.

All of this amounts to an explosion of Hegel’s inner-historical dialectic, for the concept
of eschatology operative in the 1920s brings history into dialectical relation to that which
exceeds history. At stake is a dialectic of history with its other than cannot be synthesized and re-
incorporated into it. The liminality of this discourse is a return to Kant, against Hegel’s
historicism. Just as Kant established the limits and bounds of cognition by submitting the
epistemological structures of consciousness to critique, so too did Dialectical Theology establish the limits and bounds of history by submitting it to critique from the perspective of eschatology. By extending the inner-historical dialectic to that which is outside of history, Dialectical Theology challenged the Hegel’s account of the totality and autonomy of history and restored the Kantian problematic of the limit. The figure of the divine in Barth’s work as totaliter aliter—“das ganz Andere”—re-inscribes the Kantian limit of cognition as a feature of historical experience insofar as the relation to God is fundamentally eschatological. All encounters with history thus become Grenzerfahrungen. History becomes the scene of an encounter with its own limits and conditions of possibility.

This is the long arc charted in this study, one that traces how theological discourse in the 1920s transformed the concept of history by criticizing the historicization of thought from Schiller and Hegel through the nineteenth century. Yet in order to understand how this happens, it is essential to grasp the ways in which Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger stood in dialogue with the secular cultural formations of their contemporaries and were embedded in larger trends in German culture in the 1920s and 1930s. The second major contribution of this project is therefore to show how Christian and Jewish theology were embedded in larger movements in the avant-garde of German modernism.

32 The importance of Kant’s work for the second edition of Barth’s Römerbrief is mediated not by the neo-Kantianism of the Marburg school (Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, Ernst Cassirer), but rather by the Ursprungphilosophie of Barth’s brother Heinrich Barth, whose influence Barth acknowledges in the preface to the 1922 edition. Bruce L. McCormack has discussed the Kantian elements in Barth’s Römerbrief in terms of their epistemological resonance, in particular in relation to the way in which the Kantian category of intuition (Anschauung) is at work in Barth’s definition of the divine as das Unanschauliche. See Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 223–226, 245–249. As McCormack writes, “Barth's theological epistemology in Romans II stands everywhere in the long shadow cast by Immanuel Kant” (245). My thesis is that the Kantian question of the limit not only has epistemological implications in Barth’s work but moreover implications for his concept of history and its relation to eschatology.
First, the project reconstructs a larger “crisis of historicism” in the 1920s in Germany, as articulated in secular theories of historiography in Karl Mannheim, Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Heussi, and C. H. Becker. The emergence of a “presentist theory of historiography,” in which history can only be written from the standpoint of the present, informs the “history of the present” that emerges in eschatological discourse. The recognition of the constructedness of history and the decline of the nineteenth-century faith in objective accounts of history in secular culture was therefore an essential intertext for theological discourse. At the same time, the crisis and critique of history across German culture opened up new possibilities for the construction of history. Whereas in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey the construction or “Aufbau” of history is a recursive process that reflects the way that each generation transforms and reworks the structures of thought that preceded it, in the 1920s the construction of history lacks the ground from which such development can take place. The construction of the eschatological moment in theology therefore takes cues from the poetic strategies of the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism. Eschatological discourse produces new formulations of temporality by turning to geometric metaphors—from Barth’s image of circle defined not by its center but by its liminal relation to a tangent, to Rosenzweig’s image of an arc spanned between infinities without a focal point—and thereby draws on specifically modernist forms of spatial construction that one finds in the visual arts. The de-centered principle of spatial construction in El Lissitzky finds its counterpart in a de-centered eschatological temporality, one whose negative ground in de-coupled from narrative forms. Spatial relations of proximity structured by relations of tension are at work not only in Russian Constructivism but also in the articulation of the relation of the eschatological now to the present moment.
Second, the project shows how eschatological discourse was connected with new forms of realism in literature and the arts in 1920s. The context for Heidegger and Bultmann’s insights into the way in which eschatology produces a “facticity” of lived experience can be found in a more general interrogation of realism from the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, to the debate about expressionism between Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács, to the production of reality in the work of Bertolt Brecht. The emergence of a new realism in German culture in the 1920s rejected both the subjectivism of expressionism and the mimetic naturalism of nineteenth-century realism. The return to the concrete facticity of life in its immanence in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* found a counterpart in Bultmann and Heidegger’s reflections on eschatology. In this way, eschatology no longer stands for transcendental completion, nor is it brought within the realm of immanence by being historicized and secularized. Rather, eschatology bears a relation to immanence through its absence, via negative theology. For Bultmann and Heidegger, the question is not “when” eschatological fulfillment will be actualized, but rather the way in which the relation to eschatology, in the mode of its communication as revelation, structures a relation to the facticity of lived experience. Eschatology is therefore neither an object of historical knowledge nor a construct of the expressionist imagination but a relation to historicity that must be activated anew at each moment. It is only present in the moment of its communication, through a poetics of revelation. In this way, eschatological discourse in Heidegger and Bultmann is related to a new realism for which reality is at heart possibility.

The chapters that follow can be divided into two main parts: First, Chapters One and Two explore the ways in which theological discourse in the 1920s in Germany used eschatology to produce a new concept of history. Both Karl Barth and Dialectical Theology (Chapter One) and Franz Rosenzweig (Chapter Two) rethink nineteenth-century understandings of history by
turning to eschatological discourse. Second, Chapters Three and Four take a closer look at the poetic strategies that theology taps into in order to reconfigure the understanding of history. Here it becomes clear that theology stood in dialogue with other cultural formations in interwar Germany, from secular historiography to constructivism in the visual arts, to realism in literature and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The poetic strategies with which theological discourse transformed the concept of history make its concept of eschatology specifically “modernist.” Eschatology is an extreme formulation of such modernist poetics, one that rightly places Barth, Rosenzweig, Tillich, Bultmann, and Heidegger in the modernist avant-garde.

Chapter One shows how the articulation of an “eschatological now” as a constitutive limit of history in Dialectical Theology suspends the notion of a history of linear development. The interruptive potential of a time of *kairos* disrupts the continuum of history and places the present in a potential relation to other times in the mode of the “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.” However, the crisis of historical understanding enacted by eschatology goes hand in hand with an attention to the historical moment and the historical specificity of the present.

The relation of history to eschatology is a negative relation, insofar as eschatology is incommensurable with time, yet there is also a structural analogy between the present and the “eschatological now” such that the present can potentially become a qualified moment and bear a metaphorical relation to eternity. The devaluation of history as linear development is therefore coupled with a new concept of history as a historiography of the present. Nevertheless, the absence of eschatological completion is determinative of this new concept of history. It in turn defines an ethical mode of waiting without expectation, one in which the eschatological promise

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33 By engaging in such self-reflection, the Dialectical theologian can be understood as an intellectual. See Dietz Bering, *Die Epoche der Intellektuellen 1898-2001: Geburt, Begriff, Grabmal* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2010).
is never actualized but remains in the mode of possibility. Eschatology serves therefore not as an end of politics, but as the axiom of an ethical self-relation.

Chapter Two shows that the eschatological re-invention of history took place not only in Protestant Theology but also in the work of Franz Rosenzweig and Hermann Cohen. Rosenzweig’s *Stern der Erlösung* stages a confrontation of history and eschatology that borrows both Jewish and Christian motifs in order to produce new concepts of temporality and history. Like the work of Barth and Dialectical Theology, it criticizes nineteenth-century historicism and Hegel’s philosophy of history, arguing that history does not contain infinity but is rather suspended and held in a relation of tension to eternity. Rosenzweig uses a series of images—from the calendar of eschatological time, to the “today” as a figure of a *nunc stans*, to a historical arc whose beginning and end exceed history—to approach the approximation of eternity in time. However, for Rosenzweig these temporal relations result in a form of life that is lifted “outside of history.” His figure of eschatological reversal, in which the beginning becomes the end and the end becomes the beginning, undercuts the linear structure of time and emphasizes the liminal relation of history to eschatology. Rosenzweig articulates a concept of eschatology that is neither otherworldly nor immanent to history, one that defines a new relation to history outside the logic of historical development.

Chapter Three goes on to place these topographies of temporality in the context a rethinking of history that took place in the 1920s and 1930s. It excavates a general “crisis of historicism” that called into question of the possibility of writing a linear history of development, and shows how both secular historiography and theology produced new constructions of history in the wake of this opening. This was related, on the one hand, to constructivism in the visual arts, especially the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism, and participated moreover, in the
rhetoric of “Aufbau” that Dilthey popularized. A dialectical movement can thus be described: the crisis of historicism deconstructed prevailing historical models, and a resurgent philosophy of history, drawing inspiration from the new concept of eschatology, worked out new constructions of history. Yet these new constructions were of a different kind than those of Hegel or Dilthey, since they viewed the construction not as an inner-historical development, in which each epoch builds upon and extends its pre-history, but as a series of relations between history and that which is outside of history. The liminality of the eschatological concept of history is de-centered and lacks the fulcrum upon which historical development might gain leverage. Any moment in time is equally near and equally far from the eschatological moment; this predicament defines the groundlessness upon which the “history of the present” stood.

Finally, Chapter Four shows how the eschatological account of history defines a factual relation to time and history that charts a course between subjectivist expressionism and mimetic naturalism. The modernist concept of eschatology entailed a realism that was characterized neither by a subjectivist account of utopian reality, as one finds in the writing of Ernst Bloch, nor by a representational realism in which reality has a objective form. Reality, instead, depends upon a poetics of revelation. Eschatology was understood by Bultmann and Heidegger as a non-objective “fact” that structures the temporal and historical relations in which humanity is entangled. The fact is “real” in its communication and in the possibility that this revelation opens up, even though it is never actualized as such. Eschatology therefore produces a poetics of immanence even as the “eschatological moment” itself is never present as such. The absence of transcendence connects this theological discourse with the fallen nature depicted by the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, while its dialectic of revelation and concealment places it in relation to the literary strategies of Bertolt Brecht.
The eschatological account of history in the 1920s and 1930s is not concerned with an “end of history” that stands between this world and otherworldly completion. Rather, Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger suggest that the eschatological determination of history does not depend on its cessation, nor to a future infinitely deferred, but on a relation of each present to the eschatological now as possibility. Every day, in this sense, stands at the “end of the days,” yet not by way of revolutionary political energies, not because of Marxist politics, but because of an original potential in each moment to become a moment of contemporaneity. The “end-historical” telos of Marxist eschatology is replaced by eschatology of the present, one that produces a new understanding of history and the constitution of reality. History no longer follows a developmental logic guided by the promise of future fulfillment, but stands in each moment in relation to the potential of eschatology, one that no longer depends on a historical manifestation. This fundamentally negative theology reflects the withdrawal and absence of the divine in modernism. There is no other place in history for these eschatological thinkers than the one in which the present is always a suspension of history. Each moment in time is marked by the absence of eschatological completion, such that there is fulfillment only in the constitutive incompleteness of fulfillment. The crisis of historical understanding in modernism is shaped by the struggle to reinvent history in light of the simultaneous presence and absence of the eschatological moment.
CHAPTER ONE

Thresholds of Time and History: Dialectical Theology and the Eschatological Limit

“Es gibt Höhepunkte der Geschichte,” Karl Barth ventures in his 1922 commentary on the Römerbrief: “Sie sind dort zu finden, wo die Geschichte über sich selbst hinausweist, wo in der Geschichte ein Befremden, ein Entsetzen über die Geschichte stattfindet.”34 The theologian thus avowed in no uncertain terms his interest in a historiography that goes beyond a historicist account of inner-historical progress. The high points of history, in Barth’s view, are not the culmination of historical developments but rather the moments in which history undergoes a shock and alienation of itself. By exposing history in this way to its outside and questioning its limit, the Dialectical Theology of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Paul Tillich undertook a rigorous reflection on the value of history and on the difficulties and possibilities of historiography. Dialectical Theology, I argue, produced an array of temporal and historiographical concepts—the now, kairos, contemporaneity, primal history, the qualified moment—that reconfigured the understanding of history in classical modernism.35

Such theological discourse redefined the modernist historiographical situation not merely as one of crisis, but as one in which history is viewed in terms of its dialectical opposite, which it

34 Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 17. ed., (1922; reprint, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005), 71.
35 The theological scholarship on Barth’s relationship to modernity tends to approach the question in terms of Kulturkritik, examining the ways in which Barth was critical of the culture of modernity in the way that Heidegger was critical of technology. See Trutz Rendtorff, “Karl Barth und die Neuzeit: Fragen zur Barth-Forschung,” Evangelische Theologie 46 (1986), 298–314; and Graham Ward, “Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity,” The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274–95. This study poses the question of Barth’s modernism in a fundamentally different way, seeking to understand how Barth was embedded in the emergence of modernist artistic and cultural production, and how he produced a specifically modernist understanding of history.
contains as its limit and condition of possibility.\textsuperscript{36} Whereas nineteenth-century theology, and above all that of Friedrich Schleiermacher, articulated religious experience as the intensification of life through the radiance of the historical impulse of Christ,\textsuperscript{37} Dialectical Theology took the limit phenomenon of death as its starting point and theorized history in terms of that which exceeds history: eternity, the divine, the eschatological. One of the unique interventions of Dialectical Theology was therefore to take the rich tradition of negative theology and apply it to the problematic of history. Just as Dialectical Theology defined God as das ganz Andere, who exceeds the categories of human knowledge and yet can be recognized as that which is unknown and foreign, so too is the eschatological time of eternity utterly incompatible with historical time and yet contemporaneous with history in its negative relation.

The driving force behind Dialectical Theology’s challenge to historical thinking, therefore, was the idea of eschatology, a topos that experienced a renaissance in 1920s.\textsuperscript{38} What was formerly understood as the doctrine of the “last things,” with apocalyptic connotations,

\textsuperscript{36} This is, as it were, a Kantian gesture without a providential philosophy of history.

\textsuperscript{37} As Emil Brunner argues, Schleiermacher’s emphasis on inner religious experience as the intensification (Steigerung) of life through an immediate relation to the divine thus expresses, in theological terms, an ideology of progress in which the individual ascends, exceeding himself, to higher and higher forms of life. Schleiermacher theorizes the soul as the site of divine experience and understands religious experience entirely in terms of the present, a present which in the absence of any notion of limit or boundary becomes equivalent with the entirety of time: “Die Erregtheit der Seele ist das, worauf reflektiert und was gesucht wird. Die ganze Technik der Ekstase ist auf Steigerung gerichtet. Intensität des Erlebnisses ist der beherrschende Gesichtspunkt, hier, wie in aller romantischen, pietistischen und mystischen Religion. Das Ziel ist Unmittelbarkeit, das Zusammenfließen der Gottheit und Menschheit in der Seele. . . . Hier wird das Unendliche Ereignis und fällt alles dahin, was die menschliche Existenz von der göttlichen unterscheidet: Begrenztheit, Gebundenheit durch Raum und Zeit, Zahl und Gesetz.” Emil Brunner, \textit{Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube}, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1923), 7–9.

however, underwent a semantic shift and came to stand for an “end” in the sense of a border or limit (Grenze).\textsuperscript{39} Barth’s interrogation of temporality in terms of eschatology entailed a consideration of the way in which the present moment touches upon or is limited by an “eschatological now.” The theological notion of the “now” as a moment of all moments is at once radically incompatible with historical time and yet inherent in each moment as a potential. It both throws historiography into question and emphasizes the urgency of the present moment as bearing the possibility of becoming a “qualified moment.” The resulting tension of the present moment in its relation to the other temporality of the “now” provides the key to a historical understanding that was crucial for classical modernism.

This chapter will approach this historiographical tension in four stages. First, drawing on Barth’s reading of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, I will examine the idea of eschatological time as a “now” that arises at the limit of historical time. The liminal relation is negotiated via a series of spatial metaphors: negative spaces, fractures, tangents, and vertical cuts account for the paradoxical negative presence or remote proximity of the eschatological now in history. This eschatological account of history at once destabilizes historical representation by suspending the self-sufficiency of inner-historical development and enacts a turning point in historical consciousness that manifests a new relation to temporality.

Second, the tension between the poverty of the present moment and the fullness of the eschatological now will be considered in terms of the historical specificity of the 1920s.

\textsuperscript{39} On the new concept of eschatology in Barth, see Keith Innes: “Eschatology has traditionally been the study of the ‘last things’ and the doctrine that issues from such study. However the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth saw eschatology as dealing not with the future but with the breaking of eternity into time . . . .” “Towards an Ecological Eschatology: Continuity and Discontinuity,” \textit{Evangelical Quarterly} 81.2 (2009), 126. This redefinition of eschatology, however, is not merely a theological matter. The Barth scholarship has yet to recognize that Barth’s understanding of the end as a limit has larger implications for the concept of history in modernism.
Dialectical Theology sought to establish the historical urgency of the question of temporality by accounting for the potential of each singular historical moment. The concepts of kairos, contemporaneity, and prophetic traces articulate both the potential for each historical moment to be a “moment of moments” and a referential structure of history that accounts for the contemporaneity of discontinuous historical moments. Yet the relation of historical time to the eschatological moment manifests not only a potential but also a tension: insofar as the particular historical moment stands on the threshold of the contemporaneity of the eschatological now, the frame of history is suspended.

Third, I will work out the implications of the paradoxes inherent in the eschatological concept of history in terms of the concepts of Urgeschichte and parousia. Insofar as eschatology is not the cessation of history but rather generative of history as Urgeschichte, it marks a condition of history that eludes ultimate completion. Yet the originary force of eschatology in constituting primal history is a function of the figure of resurrection, in which the possibility of new life is predicated upon an end in death. The vanishing point of eschatological thought is therefore the concept of parousia, the return of the Messiah, and parousia is the very thought of the eschatological completion, the fulfillment of what is revealed in the promise of resurrection.

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40 Bruce L. McCormack provides an eloquent summary of Barth’s claim that each moment stands in potential relation to the eschatological now: “Thus, Barth developed in Romans II distinct features of an ‘eschatology of the hic et nunc’, in which all moments of our time and history can be thought of as being in the same nearness to the eschaton.” Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 264. For more on Barth’s eschatology of the ‘here and now,’ see Michael Beintker, Die Dialektik in der “dialektischen Theologie” Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthischen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der “Kirchlichen Dogmatik” (München: C. Kaiser, 1987), 53ff; and Walter Kreck, Die Zukunft des Gekommenen; Grundprobleme der Eschatologie (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1961), 40–50. As McCormack notes, Rudolf Bultmann, who I discuss in Chapter Four was heir to Barth’s eschatology of the hic et nunc. McCormack, Beintker, and Kreck grasp the potential of the temporal moment to become a parable of the eternal moment in Barth, but they miss the extent to which this destabilizes historical experience and explodes the frame of history.
The presence of *parousia*, the inception of eschatological completion, however, is incompatible with any temporal present.\textsuperscript{41} The terms with which to grasp its temporality, moreover, exceed the resources of human knowledge. In this way, the reality of *parousia* constitutes an epistemological limit of theological knowledge. Dialectical Theology therefore relinquishes the prospect of completion in its eschatological account of history.

Finally, the chapter will conclude by analyzing the ethical position that results from this epistemological impasse. For Dialectical Theology, ethics provides a means of negotiating between the limitation of history by eschatological time and the incompatibility of eschatological fulfillment and completion in time. This ethical stance depends upon a mode of persistence in the present (*Beharrlichkeit*) that waits without anticipation. Such an ethics is defined not by the expectation of a futural event, but by the relation to the eschatological limit in the present. The approximation of what is incommensurable with historical time takes place in the mode of the “as if,” through the metaphor of the qualified moment in which time becomes *like* eternity. The absence of completion in time, moreover, determines a concept of the ethical act as revolutionary: since it can never be complete, it must be carried out again and again.

In short, eschatological discourse redefined the understanding of history in classical modernism by confronting history with its outside. By pushing the historical present beyond the frame of history and revealing it as an unhistorical moment, Dialectical Theology called into question the representability of history. Yet by reflecting on the relationship between the

\textsuperscript{41} Barth’s skepticism towards the idea of eschatological completion in the 1920s reflects what Bruce L. McCormack has called the shift from a “process eschatology” in Barth’s work from 1915–1920 (culminating in the First Edition of the *Römerbrief*) to a “consistent eschatology” in the 1920s (and especially in the Second Edition of the *Römerbrief*). Whereas the former “preserved a tension between present realization and future fulfillment,” the latter “allowed for very little present realization (even to the point of making the incarnation itself most problematic.” *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 21. The figure of *parousia* therefore remains a limit phenomenon for Barth, and this shapes his account of history.
concrete historical moment and the limit of historical knowledge, it also carved out a place for a
historiography of the “qualified moment” in which a thread of contemporaneity runs through a
discontinuous history. By figuring the present as the threshold of another history that cannot be
actualized but only held in tension with the singularity of the moment, Dialectical Theology
posed a rigorous challenge to the terms of historical self-understanding in classical modernism.\(^{42}\)
By reclaiming the terms with which temporality is conceived from the grips of historicist thought,
Dialectical Theology transformed the very landscape of historical understanding in its time.

1. \textit{Approaching the “Now”: Dialectical Theology’s Perception of Time at its Limit}

Aware of its position in the historical moment of the early 1920s and attentive to the role
of theology as posing a crisis of consciousness, Dialectical Theology engages in a critical
contestation of the value of history in light of the eschatological thought of the last things.\(^{43}\) This
is what makes Dialectical Theology a crucial cultural force in the 1920s and 1930s: it is not
content simply with a self-reflection on its own role in its historical moment but makes a call on

\(^{42}\) John C. McDowell, who has written about the relation and hope and eschatology in Barth,
points out that “serving as an influence on his later reflections on hope’s interrogative mood, . . .
eschatological discourse specifically serves as an interrogation of life in the present.” \textit{Hope in
Barth’s Eschatology: Interrogations and Transformations beyond Tragedy} (Aldershot: Ashgate,
2000), 8. McDowell is right to note the importance of the present moment for Barth, but it is
important to understand how his “historiography of the present” depends upon a critique of
historicism.\(^{43}\) My claim is that Barth’s attention to his historical moment makes him a key figure in the
intellectual thought of the 1920s. Douglas Cremer makes a similar claim that Dialectical
Theology needs to be understood within the broader context of Weimar intellectual thought. See
“Protestant Theology in Early Weimar Germany: Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann.” \textit{Journal of the
History of Ideas} 56.2 (1995), 289–307. However, in Cremer’s reading, Dialectical Theology
sought to resolve the crisis of culture following the First World War by returning to a
transcendent source of meaning. My claim, by contrast, is that eschatology functions as a means
of enacting a crisis of culture and history.
humanity to view its engagement in history from the perspective of a “now” in which the contingency of the present historical moment becomes apparent. From the vantage point of such a “now,” the present takes on meaning in relation to its determination by the eschatological limit. What is at stake, then, is no simple negation of the value of history but the thought of history in other terms, terms that are no longer historical in the sense of historicism.

Dialectical Theology seeks to understand history from the vantage point of its end, which, properly understood, is at once its origin. As Karl Barth argues in his 1924 text *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, an interpretation of Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians, it is important to work with a strong sense of the “end” when considering the notions of the “end of history” or the “end of time”; to speak of the “Endlichkeit der Geschichte, von der Endlichkeit der Zeit” is thus at once to speak of that which “alle Zeit und alles, was in der Zeit geschieht, begründet. Endgeschichte müßte . . . gleichbedeutend sein mit Urgeschichte, die Grenze der Zeit . . . müßte die Grenze aller und jeder Zeit, und damit notwendig der Ursprung der Zeit sein.” For Barth the eschatological end is not a temporal end of history but rather the ground of history as its limit, thus its condition of possibility.

The perception of the eschatological limit, however, has a historical index. The figure of the historical Jesus, for Barth, marks a point of contact between eternity and history. Dialectical Theology therefore works from within history in order to approach the limit at which history gives way to its end and reveals its meaning. Faith, for Dialectical Theology, is grounded in

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45 The problem with which Barth wrestles is how a God that is radically other can be revealed and known in history. According to Bruce L. McCormack, Barth seeks “to speak of a presence of God (revelation, the Kingdom of God, the new humanity, etc.) in history in such a way as to make it clear that these realities are not of history.” *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical*
history and founded upon a revelation that can only take place in history, and yet it points toward a world that is beyond history and at the same time its ground. It is a matter of pushing a historical dynamic to the limit point at which history is suspended.

Barth is therefore attentive to the groundedness of Christianity in a historical tradition; he recognizes that Paul can announce the fulfillment of the gospel only as a confirmation of its prophecy: “Eben weil es die Botschaft von Gott ist, darum ‘längstverkündigt’, darum kein Einfall von heute, sondern der Sinn, der reife Ertrag der Geschichte, Frucht der Zeit als Same der Ewigkeit, erfüllte Weissagung. Es ist das Wort, das die Propheten von jeher sprachen, das jetzt vernehmbar und vernommen wird. . . . Also auf dem Boden der offenbar gewordenen und wohlverstandenen Geschichte steht, der hier redet.”

It is in this sense that Christianity’s suspension of history is at the same time its confirmation of history. The gospel gives meaning to history because it shows it to be the fruit of a potential contained within eternity. Whereas historicism takes the past to be fully contained within itself, Barth’s understanding of the Römerbrief is such that past, present, and future are related to one another through a structure of prophecy and fulfillment. The relation itself, however, is bound in its beginning, middle, and end to the ground of history in eternity.

The paradox that the gospel of Christ confirms history by broaching a world that is beyond history guides Barth’s interpretation of Paul’s Epistle of the Romans. The second edition of Barth’s commentary on the Römerbrief (1922) not only had a groundbreaking impact in theology but was also an important document for German culture as a whole. For the text made an intervention not only in theology but moreover in the wider cultural understanding of history.

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Theology, 209. The eschatological limit, in other words, reinvents the understanding of history even as it is utterly incompatible with history.

46 Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 4–5.
By approaching history from the perspective of its eschatological limit, a limit that becomes manifest in history even as it disrupts the self-contained determination of this history, Barth’s work posed a challenge to prevailing historicist categories of temporality. In order to conceptualize an end and origin of time that exceeds temporal categories, Barth makes recourse to a series of spatial metaphors. This is the decisive passage in which Barth theorizes the relation between history and eternity that comes together in the figure of Jesus Christ:


Barth is committed to articulating a dualism of humanity and the divine, of time and eternity in terms of a relation, insisting, however, that the “plane” of eternity, that of creation and redemption, is unknown. This is to say that Barth takes as a starting point a negative theology in which God is foreign, unknown, and entirely other. Nevertheless, the relation between humanity and God, between time and eternity might be recognized through an act of divine self-revelation. For Christianity, this self-revelation of God takes place in the figure of Jesus Christ, who represents a point of contact between the planes of eternity and time.

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47 *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)*, 5.
But this is not to say that the relationship exists only in the figure of Jesus Christ. According to Barth, the plane of the known world is “cut” by the plane of the world of God, and therefore the relation is that of a “line of intersection” (Schnittlinie); however, insofar as the plane of the divine is unknown, this edge remains concealed. The relation becomes visible only at a single point, and this point has to be thought of as a historical determination: it coincides with the historical figure “Jesus.” That this historical point of contact between time and eternity is described as a break or fracture (Bruchstelle) suggests that what is at stake in the historical Jesus is a rupture in the historical continuum, an interruption in the flow of time in which its relation to eternity becomes visible. This adds a level of ambiguity to the picture of two planes that meet and separate from one another, for it suggests that the cut or intersection, hitherto unseen, has in fact not left the plane unscathed, that it has been broken and fractured by this contact.

The point at which the concealed line of intersection of time and eternity becomes visible, however much it is historically determined and corresponds to the years 1–30, simultaneously suspends its historical specificity insofar as the plane of eternity that becomes visible in this historical moment reveals itself as having cut through all time. At stake, then, is a revelation that opens up the possibility that every moment in time is a potential time of revelation, a breaching of history that gains historical force not through the temporal movement of history, not by being sustained, but by being enacted again and again as a breach of history. This phenomenon might be thought of as “repetition,” were this term not itself bound to a notion of temporal structure. Instead we might think of it as an incessant, persistent negation of history in history, or, to
borrow a phrase from Kierkegaard, a movement whose effect is to “negate the historical historically.”

Barth is careful, it should be noted, to distinguish his spatial metaphors from the romantic notion of charismatic radiance, in which the communication of the gospel extends outward from the historical point of its revelation by way of a historically charged “impulse,” for this would assume that the point of contact between the planes of time and eternity could be expanded within the plane of the world known to humanity. On the contrary, Barth continues,

Jener Punkt der Schnitlinie selbst aber hat wie die ganze unbekannte Ebene, deren Vorhandensein er ankündigt, gar keine Ausdehnung auf der uns bekannten Ebene. Die Ausstrahlungen oder vielmehr die erstauenlichen Einschlagstrichter und Hohlräume, durch die er sich innerhalb der historischen Anschaulichkeit bemerkbar macht, sind, auch wenn sie “Leben Jesu” heißen, nicht die andre Welt, die sich in Jesus mit unserer Welt berührt. Und sofern diese unsre Welt in Jesus von der andern Welt berührt wird, hört sie auf, historisch, zeitlich, dinglich, direkt anschaulich zu sein.

The historical Jesus, in Barth’s reading, is not a mediator between this world and the beyond; his historical presence does not bring the other world into this world but rather “announces” its possibility. But insofar as our world is “touched” by Jesus, insofar as the unknown world becomes apparent, the world as we know it loses its historical, temporal, and material character. Eternity becomes present in time and history not as an outward radiating force (Ausstrahlung) but through hollow spaces or lacunae (Hohlräume); at each moment in which eternity makes itself felt within time, time continues to exist only as the negation of itself. Such negative spaces


50 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 5.
cannot be filled with worldly possibilities; rather, for Barth, their only conceivable content is that of faith (Glaube).

Thus on the one hand Barth seeks to circumscribe the historical parameters in which the figure of Jesus marks a point of contact between time and eternity, humanity and the divine; his appearance in history, in the figure of a person, is of significance insofar as it announces and reveals the line of intersection at which time is cut by eternity, but insofar as this significance is grasped, its historical character recedes. On the other hand, Barth is attentive to Jesus’ character as “Christ” by way of his resurrection from the dead, in which he takes on a significance that is no longer historical. In contrast to Jesus, Christ is not a rupture in the continuum of time, but rather the impossible limit and boundary of time, or, as shall become clear, the eschatological limit of time as its end and origin. Barth continues:

Jesus ist “kräftig eingesetzt als Sohn Gottes nach dem heiligen Geist durch seine Auferstehung von den Toten.” Dieses sein Eingesetztsein ist die wahre Bedeutung Jesu, als solche freilich gerade historisch nicht zu bestimmen. Jesus als der Christus, der Messias, ist das Ende der Zeit, er ist nur als Paradox (Kierkegaard), er ist nur als der Sieger (Blumhardt), er ist nur als Ur-Geschichte (Overbeck) zu verstehen. Jesus als der Christus ist die uns unbekannte Ebene, die die uns bekannte senkrecht von oben durchschneidet. . . . In der Auferstehung berührt die neue Welt des Heiligen Geistes die alte Welt des Fleisches. Aber sie berührt sie wie die Tangente einen Kreis, ohne sie zu berühren, und gerade indem sie sie nicht berührt, berührt sie sie als ihre Begrenzung, als neue Welt.51

In the move from considering Jesus as historical figure to considering Jesus as “Christ,” Barth’s spatial metaphors undergo a subtle shift: as Jesus, he is the point of fracture that reveals the plane of eternity; as Christ, he is this unknown plane and as such cannot be grasped in historical terms. Nevertheless, as the unknown plane, Christ cuts through the plane of the known world from above; he is that transcendental point of reference that bears a vertical relationship to the world at all points in history. The resurrection, however, regardless of its reference to each moment in

51 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 5–6.
history, must be understood, according to Barth, as the limit that both conditions and suspends history; through the resurrection, Christ is both the end of time and primal history (Urgeschichte). The resurrection is precisely the moment in which the figures “Jesus” and “Christ” come together, in which the known world and the unknown world, time and eternity touch. They touch, however, only by not touching, which is to say eternity touches time as its limit, as that which it cannot exceed, and thus as the possibility of a new world.

Emil Brunner, another central figure for Dialectical Theology, struggled with the same problem of how to conceive the relation of historical time to that which exceeds time and history. Barth characterizes the relation of humanity to the divine as a dialectic of nearness and distance, whereby Annäherung taken to infinity approaches a limit: a point of contact without contact, a liminal relation to the entirely other. For Brunner, by contrast, the dualism of humanity and the divine, time and eternity entails a stricter opposition. The divine word, as embodied in Jesus Christ, according to Brunner, has truth only outside of historical time and therefore deprives history of all meaning and force: “Nicht als geschichtliche Kraft, nicht als Anfänger einer geschichtlichen Reihe, sondern als das Wort Gottes an uns, ist Jesus der Christus des Glaubens. . . . Wer in die Wahrheit eintritt, tritt eben damit aus der Zeit heraus. . . . Nur vor der Wahrheit wird die Zeit bedeutungslos. Nur die Wahrheit setzt die Geschichte außer Kraft, und mit ihr alles, was der Geschichte angehört.”

Whereas for Hegel it is necessary for the absolute to become historical in order to unfold itself and return to itself by encountering its other, Brunner admits the presence of the absolute within history only as a force that makes history relative and without significance. For Brunner, the absolute has no historical traction; it cannot reproduce itself in time nor begin a causally perpetuating sequence of historical force.

52 Die Mystik und das Wort. Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers, 208–209.
The very incompatibility of eternity with historical time, however, transforms the contours of historical understanding insofar the revelation of the divine word redefines the limit of history. Whereas for Barth the liminal relation of time and eternity is structured by the unknown quality of that which exceeds history, for Brunner the stronger opposition of time and eternity dictates an understanding of faith in which eternity is thought to enter history as its negation. While Brunner insists that the word of God cannot be comprehended in time and history, he nevertheless attributes it the power to break through the limit of history: “Daß dieses Wort gesprochen sei in Jesus Christus, in der Fülle der Zeiten, d.h. als ein jenseits-geschichtliches die Geschichtsgrenze durchbrechendes, Ewigkeit in der Zeit offenbarendes und Ewigkeit den zeitlichen Menschen bringendes – das, das gehorsame Hören dieses Anspruchs, der ein Vollmachtsanspruch zur Rettung ist, das ist der christliche Glaube.”

The divine word is therefore the vehicle of the crisis and revaluation of time and history; by breaching the historical limit, Brunner suggests, the divine word transforms the concept of history by placing it into relation to eternity. In light of such revelation, humanity ceases to be historical and temporal and yet partakes of a “fullness of time” through faith. In this way, Dialectical Theology theorizes a time beyond temporality; the prospect of “eschatological time,” in turn, transforms the way in which historical time is understood.

The confrontation of historical time with a moment of primal history, as embodied in the figure of Christ, enacts a critical destabilization of the mode of historical representation. Barth’s metaphor of a circle touched by a tangent at a single liminal point emphasizes both the proximity and distance of eschatological time; this other temporality at once limits history and is in this way constitutive of it, and yet there is no transition or passage from history into the other

53 Die Mystik und das Wort. Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers, 211.
temporality. Whereas historicism catalogs the ruins and remains of history, Dialectical Theology brings about a crisis of earthly categories by confronting history with the proximity of the moment that arises at the impassable border of death and renewed life — an unhistorical moment that nonetheless grounds history. At stake is not the inauguration of a new history but rather a turning point in historical consciousness.

For Barth, this turning point coincides with the perception of another time at the limit of historical time. The revelation of the word of God in the figure of Christ is not merely the revelation of an absolute truth but moreover of a particular temporal mode. The notion of a time of revelation (*Offenbarungszeit*) thus takes on a new significance; it is not merely the historical time in which humanity receives revelation but also the peculiar kind of time that such revelation reveals. In this connection, Barth draws attention to the significance of Paul’s “But now” (*Jetzt aber*) in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. The suspension of time and history as we know them is not carried out for the sake of an eternity understood as everlasting presence but rather for the sake of another temporality, a time that is no longer temporal:


The other temporality of the “now” (*Jetzt*) presupposes a crisis driven by the eschatological thought, a “crisis of the last things” (*aufs Letzte gehende Krisis*). The Pauline “But now” (*Jetzt aber*) is rhetorically powerful because it suggests that the rupture in time, in which eternity breaks in for a moment, comes suddenly and can happen at any moment. And yet this “now” is

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54 Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)*, 72–73.
by no means commensurable with any present in time. It is rather a time without time, a turning point in which the dialectical extremes of eternity and time, life and death are seen to be constitutive of one another, not as oppositions but as non-mutually exclusive possibilities.

The challenge of Barth’s work is to understand the time of the “now” as the most radical negation of time, world, and humanity as we know them, a suspension of these possibilities, and yet simultaneously as a “now” constitutive of and inherent in our time. As such, the impossible possibility of the “now” accompanies and requires a re-predication of humanity; or, as Barth puts it: “Der Messias ist das Ende der Menschen. Auch da, gerade da ist Gott treu. Der neue Tag der Gerechtigkeit Gottes will anbrechen mit dem Tag des ‘aufgehobenen’ Menschen.”

Primal history thus denotes a suspension (Aufhebung) of history and historical humanity in the presence of a “now” that coincides with humanity’s self-overcoming. Such a turning point is not a turning point “in” history, nor does it signal the arrival of a new historical epoch; rather, it marks the commencement of a new relation to temporality, a temporality that is structured in relation to a moment of eternity.

Nevertheless, the “now” that poses the possibility of a new relation to history can never be, according to Barth, a history within history. The “now” signifies a time of revelation that can

55 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 79.
56 Barth’s understanding of the “now” as constitutive of time and yet also the manifestation of another temporality depends upon a liminal understanding of the relation of time and eternity. As such, his reading of the “now” in Paul does not historicize the “now” as a transitional period or epoch between two parousias, a reading still prevalent in Barth’s time. Gustav Stählin, for example, in his entry on νῦν in the Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, writes that: “dieses Jetzt ist eine Übergangszeit zwischen zwei Zeiteinschnitten, und zwar zwischen den beiden Parusien, von denen die erste den Anfang des neuen und die zweite das (endgültige) Ende des alten Aions markiert; demnach gehört dieses merkwürdige νῦν, in dem auch wir noch mit dem NT leben, beiden Aionicen an. / Für Menschen dieser Periode ist ihre Gegenwart gleichzeitig ein Jetztnoch (jetzt noch im alten Aion!) und ein Jetztschon (jetzt schon im neuen!), beides jeweils bestimmt von einem Gegensatz, sei es zum neuen, sei es zum alten Aion.” Gustav Stählin, “Eintrag zum νῦν,” Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Vierter Band: L-N, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1942), 1107–1108.
take place only insofar as time, history, and humanity as we know them are suspended.

Revelation provides a ground and meaning to history, but it does so “apart” from the law, and hence it has no presence in history:

“Es [dass Gott spricht] ist der Sinn aller Religion- und Kirchengeschichte, ja aller Geschichte überhaupt, aber eben darum nicht ein Teil, nicht eine Strecke, nicht eine Geschichte in der Geschichte. (Es ist, sofern auch es eine Geschichte in der Geschichte hat, der Fragwürdigkeit aller geschichtlichen Dinge nicht entzogen.) Es ist die Begründung alles dessen, was als Offenbarungseindruck, Anbetung, Glaube (im weitesten Sinn) geschichtlich und seelisch anschaulich wird; es fällt aber eben darum nie und nirgends damit zusammen.”

Revelation, Barth argues, should be sharply distinguished from impressions of revelation (Offenbarungseindrücke): the latter are visible and apparent within history, but they only refer to revelation and cannot approximate its time; revelation itself, by contrast, has no historical presence, and indeed can only provide a ground for history insofar as it can never coincide with history.

It is crucial, therefore, to avoid any simple identification of the “eschatological now” that arises at the limit of history with the present historical moment. For the recognition of the “now” through revelation does not do away with humanity’s historicity. Barth’s attention returns to this problematic in the context of Romans 8: 18ff, in which Paul considers the “time” in which the “now” is able to become manifest. Barth’s translation of Paul, which anticipates his interpretation of “the time of the now,” runs as follows: “Denn ich rechne, daß die Leiden der

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57 Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 73.
58 Such an identification of the “eschatological now” with the present moment, is still implicit, I would argue, in the notion that the “now” encompasses the past, present, and future in a single moment, marking the entire in-between time between the coming of the Messiah and his return. Barth’s reading of the “now” forestalls any claim that Christianity, in contrast to Judaism, already lives in a fulfilled present, as Gustav Stählin suggests: “Dennoch gilt für das AT ganz allgemein: Jedes Jetzt schaut wieder voraus auf ein neues Einst; das vôv des AT steht schließlich doch immer vor der ersehnten Zeitenwende, das vôv des NT fällt mit ihr zusammen.” “Eintrag zum vôv,” 1107. Dialectical Theology, by contrast, argues that the fulfilled eternal future of the “now” can have but a liminal relation to the time of history.
Zeit des Jetzt nicht ins Gewicht fallen gegenüber der Herrlichkeit, die sich an uns offenbaren wird. . . Denn wir wissen, daß alles Geschaffene einstimmig seufzt und gemeinsam in Wehen liegt bis auf das Jetzt hin.”

Barth’s interpretation of the passage hinges upon his reading of Paul’s expression τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ, which he correctly translates as “the time of the now” (die Zeit des Jetzt) as opposed to the more familiar, but grammatically implausible “the present time” (die jetzige Zeit). What at first glance appears to be but a slight change in emphasis turns out to be of particular significance for understanding the relation of historical time to the moment of the “now.” Indeed, Barth draws an explicit connection between “the time of the now” and the “But now” (Jetzt aber) considered above in the context of Romans 3:21:

Wir sehen damit die Zeit, in der wir leben, charakterisiert, als “die Zeit des Jetzt.” . . . Denn die Wahrheit ist das Jetzt (3, 21), der Augenblick außer aller Zeit, in dem der Mensch nackt vor Gott steht, der Punkt, der kein Punkt neben andern ist, von dem wir herkommen, Jesus Christus der Gekreuzigte und Auferstandene. Was vor und nach diesem Augenblick aller Augenblicke ist, was diesen Punkt, der selber keine Ausdehnung hat, als Fläche umgibt, das ist die Zeit. An diesem Jetzt, an der Ewigkeit entsteht als ihre Negation die Zeit, die immer schon gewesene Vergangenheit und die immer erst kommende Zukunft. Die “Zeit des Jetzt” nennen wir sie nach dem, was sie verhüllt und worauf sie hinweist, woran sie gemessen ist und ohne das sie nicht wäre.

This passage makes clear the extent to which Barth refuses the terms of a temporal continuum of past, present, and future; rather, he is interested in the way in which our understanding of time conceals a moment of absolute presence that is at once our origin and our end. While time bears eternity within itself, both concealing it and referring to it, our relation to eternity is ultimately not a temporal one but rather a spatial one; that is, Barth does not project eternity into the future of a “not yet” (noch nicht) but rather understands it as absolute presence within time in the mode

59 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 311.
60 Were nun to have an adjectival function, it would be declined. The novelty of Barth’s translation is apparent in contrast to Luther’s translation: “Denn ich halte es dafür/das dieser Zeit leiden der Herrlichkeit nicht werd sey/die an vns offenbaret werden.” Martin Luther, Die gantze heilige Schrift, ed. Hans Volz, vol. 2 (Bonn: Edition Lempertz, 2004), 2282.
61 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 313–314.
of its negation: “Im Schatten des nicht angebrochenen, aber unendlich nahen Tages Jesus Christi sehen wir unsern Lebenstag sich abspielen, im Schatten des Jetzt die Zeit sich abrollen.”

Time as we know it does not partake of this moment of all moments, for our time is always still to come or already past. Time can be the negation of eternity only insofar as it is grounded in eternity; thus the absolute presence of the “now” is our origin but not in a temporal sense; likewise, the “day of our lives” (unser Lebenstag) tends towards death and a return to the origin, but the “now” does not therefore constitute a future possibility of redemption. The “now” is that limit that stands not at the extremes of past and future but always in the closest proximity. In the light of the limit of the “eschatological now,” time and history lose their value as self-sufficient entities and take on threshold character, appearing as shadows that point to a “now” that remains unknown despite its nearness. Historical time thus bears the potential of becoming a “time of the now” insofar as it is seen to refer to the moment of all moments that it conceals within itself, even though this moment as such has no presence in historical time except in the mode of negation.

2. Dialectical Theology and the Urgency of the Historical Moment: from Kairos to Contemporaneity

Dialectical Theology’s theorization of a “now” as a moment of all moments does not take place in an abstract, ahistorical mode; on the contrary, this theology shows an uncommon attention to its historical moment and indeed can hardly be conceived in isolation of its embeddedness in the context of the 1920s. Dialectical Theology participates in a more general

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62 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 314.
self-reflection on its historical moment, and far from being a mere symptom of a cultural crisis in the aftermath of the First World War, it played the critical role of producing a crisis of culture from the point of view of theology. The dialectical theologian, in his dual role as pastor and theologian, can thus be understood as an intellectual whose task was to generate a certain urgency for his time. In a number of texts from the early 1920s, we can see an exemplary self-diagnosis of the situation (Lage)\(^6\) of humanity in the historical present and a critical reflection on how this moment might be grasped in relation to the charged moment of the “eschatological now.”\(^6\) For Dialectical Theology, humanity does not stand at the end of time, nor on the brink of an impending end, but stands rather “between the times.”\(^6\) It belongs to the world of the flesh, it is grounded in historical consciousness, and yet it also contains a moment of eternity that manifests itself as a radical alterity that seeks to communicate itself as self-revelation. Historical

\(^{63}\) See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus: das Beispiel Karl Barths* (München: Kaiser, 1972), 1–25. Marquardt was one of the first Barth scholars to address the impact of the social, political, and historical context in which Barth moved for his theology. As Bruce McCormack notes, “The great merit of Marquardt’s book . . . was its insistence that Barth's theology was always zeitgemäß; that is, it was always directed to a particular situation and really had no intention of being ‘timeless’.” *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 26–27. Whereas Marquardt focuses on Barth’s attention to social and political concerns, my thesis is that Barth’s attention to the “situation” of his time reflects concerns about the temporal and historical conditions under which theology can have an impact.

\(^{64}\) This study takes leave of the usual contours of Weimar history, which is typically understood as a political history that is determined by its failure and end in National Socialism. Cf. Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); and Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). By contrast, the thesis proposed here is that the theological intellectuals of the 1920s had an acute awareness of the urgency of “their time,” but not in relation to the political and economic crises of the Weimar Republic. Rather, they functioned as intellectuals not only by “commenting on” and “criticizing” their time, but moreover by raising the question of the eschatological limit of history in relation to the particularity of their historical moment.

\(^{65}\) Hence the name of the journal that Barth founded together with Eduard Thurneysen and Friedrich Gogarten: *Zwischen den Zeiten.*
consciousness itself is burdened by what Kierkegaard diagnosed as a “sickness towards death,” for it is unable to grasp the moment of resurrection that could transform the fallenness of history. Yet humanity also stands before the time of eternity, before the time of the now; its engagement in its historical moment points and gestures towards this time, even though it cannot possess it. Humanity is between the times because it has been graced with the revelation of another “now” and yet is still burdened by its entanglement in temporality.

The dialectical theologian has the task of the intellectual to communicate to a community and congregation how such a moment of eternity can make itself present in our time. The task, then, is to show that the time of humanity is at each stage a potential time of revelation. For the time of Christ, the time of the Messiah, is not past, is not history, but constitutes a time that encompasses the past, present, and future. Dialectical Theology sought to show that this incision, this interruption in the fabric of the historical continuum, was not a mere historical anomaly but is also a possibility that arises in the present and specifically in the present of the 1920s. As an intellectual movement, Dialectical Theology sought to generate this urgency by producing a crisis of historical consciousness that is not a crisis in history (for the events of the recent past provided sufficient forms of such crisis) but rather a crisis of temporal and historical understanding as such.

The point of departure for Dialectical Theology is therefore a strong sense of the present, a *Gegenwart* so rigorously problematized that it reveals a presence that does not submit to temporal and historical reckoning, the presence of the “now.” Whereas for the nineteenth-century theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher this present takes the form of a “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*) that is subject to an infinite intensification within time and history, for Barth the present is always a juncture where a problem, a crisis, an aporetic situation arises, and only out
of the adversity (Not) and affliction (Bedrängnis) of this situation is something like the revelation of a fulfilled “now” possible. This is to say that the fullness of the “now” inheres in the poverty and emptiness of the present, but one perceives this “yes” only within a “no,” never on its own terms.

In the second issue of the journal Zwischen den Zeiten (1923), Barth addresses “Das Problem der Ethik in der Gegenwart” and articulates his theological position from the second edition of Der Römerbrief (1922) in terms of the concrete historical present of the 1920s. For Barth the ethical problem is not one problem among others but rather the problem that is posed to humanity, a problem, indeed, that poses itself relentlessly in such a way that it raises concerns “um unsre Existenz, um unsre eigenste realste Lage in diesem Augenblick, um eine Bedrängnis, von deren Aktualität wir keinen Moment abstrahieren können.” The ethical problem is described as “the eternal problem of all temporality” (das ewige Problem aller Zeitlichkeit), which should be given a strong reading. It is not merely a problem that affects each historical epoch; it is moreover the problem of temporality itself, the problem of the temporal relation as such. Nevertheless, Barth emphasizes that we cannot dispense with the task of posing the ethical question as a question of our time and addressing the problem in the light of our time, for only in this way does our belonging not only to “our time” but also to a “now” between the times become manifest:

Aber das alles kann uns nicht dispensieren von der Aufgabe, uns die ethische Frage als Menschen unsrer Zeit zu stellen und nicht anders, eingedenk freilich, daß wir damit in Wahrheit nicht unsre Zeit, sondern die Gegenwart, die Ewigkeit “zwischen den Zeiten” meinen. Warum können wir uns vom Blick auf unsre Zeit nicht dispensieren lassen? Darum nicht, weil von der ethischen Frage nicht zu trennen sind wir die Gefragten und Fragenden, die ganz bestimmten Menschen, denen sie gestellt ist, die von ihr beunruhigt und bedrängt sind. Und diese ganz bestimmten Menschen sind wir als Menschen unsrer Zeit. So gewiß das Problem der Ethik dem Menschen gestellt ist als seine Existenzfrage,

so gewiß ist es ihm im Licht einer bestimmten Zeit, seiner Zeit, so gewiß hat er sich mit ihm in besonderer, dieser Zeit entsprechender Weise auseinanderzusetzen.\footnote{\textit{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft Das Problem der Ethik in der Gegenwart,\textquoteright\textquoteright}, 33–34.}

For Barth, then, theology does not occupy an eternal, timeless position, even though its central concern is to articulate humanity’s relationship with such a position-less position. Theology has a concrete task in its moment of historical specificity, and this task is none other than to pose the ethical problem as a problem of humanity’s entrapment in temporality. By drawing attention to the crisis of historical consciousness before the inescapability of death, theology at once raises the possibility of renewed life from out of this relation to death. The historical urgency of Dialectical Theology, in all its historical specificity in the 1920s, is to pose the question of humanity’s relationship to temporality as an urgent question for its time.\footnote{In this way, Dialectical Theology was confronted with a challenge not unrelated to the methodological problem of this dissertation: it questioned the historicization of thought from the position of its own historical specificity. It found its own historical moment, that is, to demand a consideration of eschatology as a limit phenomenon of history. Barth’s interest in eschatology, it is worth noting, was no mere dogmatic interest, but reflected his engagement with contemporary debates about the role of theology and the church in relation to the idea of “culture.” See Karl Barth, \textit{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft Die Kirche und die Kultur,\textquoteright\textquoteright}, \textit{Zwischen den Zeiten} 4.5 (1926), 382. Whereas nineteenth-century theology understood Christianity as an inner-historical force that functions as a preserver and vessel for the transmission of revelation, and whereas Liberal Theology paved the way for a secularized version of theology to maintain its relevance by articulating itself as a cultural force, Dialectical Theology, by contrast, understood the historical task of its time to consist in a destabilization of culture by way of a challenge to the historicization of thought.}

Theological intellectuals of the 1920s thus had an acute awareness of “their time” and sought to submit it to critique; this critical impulse, in turn, reflects a persistent ambivalence about the promise of the time. Its task was historically to extricate its time from its entanglement in historical thinking, to bring it back to a fundamental theological situation and mode of questioning from which another understanding of time might emerge at the limit of temporality. This ambivalence and uncertainty about the prophetic promise of the time of the present comes to the fore in Barth’s sermon “Siehe jetzt!,” an interpretation of 2 Corinthians 6: 1-2, delivered

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on July 2, 1920. The sermon bears witness, on the one hand, to a certain skepticism that the present could be that fulfilled time that is revealed in the figure of Christ, but on the other hand, it recognizes that humanity has the task of being ready for such a time in the present, of being ready to receive divine grace by cultivating a stance of waiting.

Barth’s text is, of course, also a response to doubts in his congregation that Paul’s promise “Siehe jetzt ist die hochwillkommene Zeit, siehe jetzt ist der Tag des Heils!” could still hold true in the 1920s, when the historical events of the recent past seemed to have suggested otherwise. That is, the possibility, the suspicion, arises that the experience of messianic time that was felt in early Christianity (Urchristentum) may have been a unique occurrence, a historical anomaly, or even a lost possibility that can no longer be recuperated: “Die Frage, die uns alle fast sofort brennt, wenn wir das lesen oder hören, ist doch wohl die, ob Paulus heute in unserer Zeit auch so reden könnte und würde.”

It is thus a question of the “timeliness” of the Evangelium, of whether the message that the time is not empty but rather filled with grace, that it is not merely time but also contains eternity concealed within itself, whether this message, which demands a wakefulness and readiness, is still valid today as it was in the historical time of Paul.

Nevertheless, as much as Barth opposes the idea that the Pauline thought is irrevocably past, he still maintains, in opposition to the historicist Leopold von Ranke, that the times are not equal: “Tatsächlich sind die Zeiten ungleich, verschieden;” indeed, “die Zeiten sind ungleich in Bezug auf Gott.”

The Bible itself, according to Barth, gives evidence that the “now” of Paul’s Epistle does not take place every day but rather is something unusual and exceptional. It

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70 “Siehe jetzt!” 258.
71 Karl Barth, “Siehe jetzt!” 259. Here Barth takes aim at Ranke’s famous claim that all times are equally near to God. See Leopold von Ranke, Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Duncker, 1899).
therefore cannot be assumed that Barth’s congregation lives in its “today” in a time of salvation and grace: “Es ist nicht selbstverständlich, daß wir heutigen Menschen, weil wir den Krieg und die Revolution hinter uns haben, in der Lage sind, Gott und die Welt und uns selbst besser zu verstehen. Das Reich Gottes richtet sich auch nicht nach der Weltgeschichte.”

Barth was deeply aware of the poverty of his time, deeply skeptical of any suggestion that religious enthusiasm could make this time a fulfilled time, and unwilling to grasp his time as a time of rebirth, to see it as a particular, destined time that stands out amongst other times. Rather, only in the consciousness of the emptiness of one’s time and the poverty of one’s epoch can the fullness of time be revealed through grace. Hence while Barth insists that not all times are equal and doubts that his time can be understood as such an exceptional time that Paul speaks of, he also sees the possibility even amidst the deepest poverty and emptiness of time that one might enter into a time of Christ, for “Christus hebt den Unterschied der Zeiten auf.” The “now,” Barth suggests, is the threshold of “our time” and “eternity”; it is at once the specificity of historical moment, as possibility, and the moment of moments, a time without history and without temporality.

Barth’s interest in “his time,” in the specificity of its historical moment, is constitutive for his theological project. For it is precisely in its singularity, in its irremediable difference from other times, in the emptiness in which it passes by, that this time stands in relation to the eschatological limit broached by “the time of Christ” (Christuszeit). Insofar as history is subject to this transformation and “suspension” (Aufhebung) of itself, it is subject to an interruption of the movement of time as χρόνος in the inception of time as καιρός. As the theologian Paul Tillich put it, “Kairos heißt ‘erfüllte Zeit,’ konkreter geschichtlicher Augenblick und im

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72 Karl Barth, “Siehe jetzt!” 260.
73 Karl Barth, “Siehe jetzt!” 265.
prophetischen Sinne ‘Zeitenfülle,’ Hereinbrechen des Ewigen in die Zeit.”

Whereas the present cannot be identified with the Pauline “now,” as an eternal moment of all moments, it can nevertheless be understood as *kairos* and in this way bear a relation to the “now.” The present as *kairos* is a “fulfilled time” but not by virtue of its content; rather, the concrete historical moment of *kairos* is fulfilled from the outside, insofar as it is set in relation to eternity.

For Dialectical Theology, eternity is revealed in history and enters history as a prophetic interruption, but never becomes history; the becoming absolute of history, in turn, cannot be thought of as an event in history, but arises as possibility only at the eschatological limit of history. Indeed, Tillich is quite clear that his concept of *kairos* precludes the possibility of eternity establishing itself within time:

Die Idee des Kairos . . . enthält das Hereinbrechen der Ewigkeit in die Zeit, den unbedingten Entscheidungs- und Schicksalscharakter dieses geschichtlichen Augenblicks, aber sie enthält zugleich das Bewußtsein, daß es keinen Zustand der Ewigkeit in der Zeit geben kann, daß das Ewige wesensmäßig das in die Zeit Hereinbrechende, aber nie das in der Zeit Fixierbare ist. . . . Die Zeit wird nicht dadurch erlöst, daß die Ewigkeit in sie eingeht; das ist nicht möglich, denn zu ihrem Wesen gehört Widerspruch zur Ewigkeit; sondern die Zeit wird dadurch erlöst, daß sie aufgenommen wird in die Ewigkeit.

The concrete historical moment of *kairos*, then, is “fulfilled time,” but not in a static sense. The historical moment is fulfilled by a flash of recognition, by the revelation of eternity, but the

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moment of *kairos* cannot redeem time. The possibility of redemption, that is, depends upon a reversal of the directionality of the relationship between time and eternity. Eternity interrupts the continuum of time in the moment of *kairos*, but it persists in time only as interruption and never as presence. For time to be redeemed, it would have to be taken up into eternity, yet this would require that the concrete historical moment no longer be bound by its place in the historical continuum but stand outside of history.

The interruption of history in the moment of *kairos*, in other words, raises the prospect of the historical moment might be released from its historical context and come to stand in relation to the other temporality of the “eschatological now.” The singularity and concreteness of the historical moment, however, are the condition for this relation. The adversity and poverty of the historical moment, precisely by constituting an aporetic situation, open up the possibility of a time of revelation in which eternity disrupts the historical continuum and constitutes the present as a fulfilled moment, despite its emptiness. Only in the singularity of the moment can the present be recognized in its relation to the eschatological limit, and yet, in this way, the present moment ceases to be determined by its place in the historical continuum and takes on another set of non-historical temporal relations.

By placing the present moment in relation to the eschatological limit, the time of *kairos* points to the potential contemporaneity (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) of the present with the eschatological now. Just as the place of the present in the historical continuum depends upon contingency, however, so too is its contemporaneity a potential that touches but does not cross the threshold of eternity. The point of contact of eternity with the present, its circumscription of a limit to temporality, that is, does not imply an annulment of what Barth, drawing on Kierkegaard, called
“der unendliche qualitative Unterschied zwischen Zeit und Ewigkeit.” Yet insofar as the “now” of the present borders on the “eschatological now,” the movement of history as a continuum is suspended and the moment enters into a relationship to eternity characterized by “contemporaneity.”

For Dialectical Theology, the historical fact of the coming of Jesus inaugurates a “time of Christ” (Christuszeit) in which every time becomes a potential time of revelation. Yet it becomes so only as a particular time. The particularity of the present historical moment stands in a relation to prophecy and promise in such a way that it enters into a constellation with remote times.

Whereas Ernst Bloch notes a “non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous” (Ungleichzeitigkeit der Gleichzeitigen) insofar as various peoples or social classes can belong to differing historical stages of development despite their temporal contemporaneity, Dialectical Theology insists rather on a “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” (Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen): the most historically charged moment becomes contemporaneous with the remotest of historical times in the light of the eschatological now, in view of the limit posed to time by eternity.

Barth’s concept of a Gleichzeitigkeit that runs through history and connects disparate moments in history in terms of their relation to the “unhistorical” is at the center of his critique of historicism in nineteenth-century theology, and it defines his opposition to research in the early twentieth century on the life of the historical Jesus. Barth’s response to the rigorous historicization of the biblical text in relation to a model of philological-historical criticism is

77 Barth, Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), xx.
78 Ernst Bloch, Erbschaft dieser Zeit (Zürich: Oprecht & Helbling, 1935).
grounded in his reading of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. By considering Abraham’s justice not in terms of his inheritance of the law, but purely in terms of his faith, Paul had contested the theological significance of historical circumstances. Barth supports such an antinomian reading of Paul, in which the biblical text is understood not as history, but through the contemporaneity of what Kierkegaard called the “leap of faith.” Drawing on Nietzsche, moreover, Barth argues that the past has a value only insofar as speaks to the question of how we ought to live in the present. Indeed, as Nietzsche argued, one can write history only from the point of view of the present, only with the force of the present.

Barth brings together these threads in order to formulate a model of history grounded in the concept of contemporaneity. The communicative structure of contemporaneity, he shows, entails a relationship of the past to the present that exceeds historical causality. According to Barth, the past can “speak” to the present, and the present can “listen” to the voice of the past. Yet this “voice of history,” as Barth entitles his commentary on the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, is more than just a figure for historical relations that operate through discontinuity. The relation of the distant past to the present that interests Barth, that is, has a different character than the model of a “historical afterlife” or “allegorical refuguration” of the past in the present. For such modernist accounts of the overcoming of a linear history of

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80 See Barth’s reading of Romans 3, 31. Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 98ff.
development, as much as they account for the potential of a historical moment to enter into a diverse set of discontinuous historical configurations, still work within the frame of history.\textsuperscript{82} Barth’s concept of contemporaneity, I argue, differs radically from these anti-historicist historiographies insofar as the element of contemporaneity that places past and present in relation to one another does so by suspending history.

Whereas the theory of allegory entails the capacity of a historical moment to “speak otherwise”\textsuperscript{83} in a different historical context, Dialectical Theology’s theory of contemporaneity involves a monologue or \textit{Selbstgespräch} that suspends history and time. The contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous is hence the connection of past and present in terms of traces of the unhistorical ground of history; as Barth writes:

Die Historie kann einen Nutzen haben. Die Vergangenheit kann reden zur Gegenwart. Denn in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart ist ein Gleichzeitiges, das die Stummheit der Vergangenheit, die Taubheit der Gegenwart heilen, das jene zum Reden und diese zum Hören bringen kann. Dieses Gleichzeitige in seinem die Zeit aufhebenden und erfüllenden Selbstgespräch, es verkündigt und vernimmt das Unhistorische, Unanschauliche, Unbegreifliche, das aller Geschichte Ende und Anfang ist.\textsuperscript{84}

The self-communication of that which is contemporaneous in history, according to Barth, both suspends and fulfills time. Contemporaneity, that is, points to the eschatological moment that is the non-historical ground of all history, its non-temporal beginning and end. The alterity of past and present is therefore not just a function of discontinuity, but of the otherness of each moment in time in relation to the contemporaneity of the eschatological now. Barth therefore participates

\textsuperscript{82} The exception here might be Auerbach, whose Augustinian concept of a vertical relation to eternity sustains the inner-historical reference of prophecy and fulfillment.

\textsuperscript{83} Heinz Drügh notes that the alterity of the allegorical figure is implicit in the etymology of the term: the literal meaning of the Greek \textit{allos agoreuein} is “anders als auf dem Marktplatz reden.” See Heinz J. Drügh, \textit{Anders-Rede: zur Struktur und historischen Systematik des Allegorischen} (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2000), 8.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung)}, 132.
in a Nietzschean historiography of the present, yet his concept of contemporaneity at once enacts of a crisis of self-identity of the present. That is, Barth starts with the presupposition that the past has a claim on us, that Abraham’s situation is not only his situation, but also “our situation,” a matter for “our time” in its historical specificity. Yet the figure of contemporaneity also enacts a crisis of the “present historical moment” insofar as it shows that this moment is not contemporaneous with itself, but rather with a discontinuous, non-contemporaneous moment at the limit of history.

In this way, the eschatological relation of the limit brings together the temporal-historical moment of *kairos* with the notion of “contemporaneity.” Eschatology is that threshold at which the singular historical moment is related, precisely as a particular historical moment, to a moment of eternity in which history is released from its particularity and becomes contemporaneous. Whereas Hegel envisions the becoming history of the absolute, the gradual unfolding of the absolute in the history of the spirit, Dialectical theology conceptualizes a becoming absolute of history in which history is given a grounding and yet simultaneously released from temporality.

This horizon, I argue, separates Dialectical Theology from the general contours of the restructuring of historical understanding in classical modernism. Modernism’s overcoming of nineteenth-century historicism, that is, contested that the past is self-contained by showing that it constitutes an image-world, the unfolding of which depends upon a historical-allegorical reading that can only take place at a remove. The traces and potentials embedded in history, in this account, are never fully exhausted, but their reference is to a temporal future in which they unfold their latent energies. The modernist critique of historicism denied linear development, but
its concepts of citation and figural reference remain inner-historical. Dialectical Theology, by contrast, articulates a similar language of potentials, traces, and referential connections between the historically non-contemporaneous, but the unfolding of these potentials calls history into question in a fundamental way. For Dialectical Theology, primal history is not only a non-temporal origin in history whose visibility is concealed, but moreover a trace of the eschatological moment whose recognition suspends the movement of history itself.

For Dialectical Theology, then, historiography is concerned primarily with uncovering in history those traces of the unhistorical that enact a crisis of historical consciousness. History is of “use,” for Barth as for Nietzsche, when it appears in the light of the unhistorical such that the

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85 In speaking of such a modernist reconfiguration of historical understanding, I am thinking especially of the work of Aby Warburg, Benedetto Croce, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Auerbach. See footnote above. Compare also to Chapter Three, in which a discussion the “crisis of historicism” and its implications in the secular historiography of Karl Mannheim, Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Heussi, and Oswald Spengler.

86 In order to highlight the unique contribution that Protestant Theology makes to the modernist reconfiguration of historical understanding, I have grouped together Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Paul Tillich under the name “Dialectical Theology.” On an individual level, of course, these Theologians provide a spectrum of positions on the relationship of time and eternity. On one extreme, Tillich emphasizes the concreteness of the historical moment of kairos, and contends that the relation of time and eternity requires action in a fateful moment. Tillich criticizes Barth for his abstract negation of history, arguing that a critical engagement with history must take a concrete form. That is, for Tillich, Barth’s “Aufhebung der Geschichte” is too categorical. See Paul Tillich, Kairos. Zur Geisteslage und Geisteswendung (Darmstadt: Reichl, 1926); Paul Tillich, “Kritisches und positives Paradox. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Barth und Friedrich Gogarten,” Theologische Blätter 2.11 (1923), 263–69. Emil Brunner, on the other hand, stands at the opposite end of the spectrum. For Brunner, the concept of “faith” implies a direct relationship with eternity that makes all history irrelevant and meaningless; in his view, time and history are completely without value in relation to eternity. See Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort. Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers, 208–211. Barth, finally, stands somewhere in between these two extremes: he insists upon the suspension of history in relation to the eschatological limit, but he does not categorically deny history. Barth recognizes that history has a prophetic value in that it points and refers to eternity. The negation of history, for Barth, also confirms history and gives it a meaning.
past is able to speak to the present as though it were contemporaneous,\textsuperscript{87} for history contains traces and impressions of its relation to the unhistorical that can be read in the most disparate times because of their contemporaneity. The contemporaneity of history in light of the unhistorical is at once the point at which history is driven to its breaking point and the moment in which history serves as a witness of what exceeds the historical specificity of the moment: “Ist es nicht offenkundig, daß der Rahmen der Geschichte gesprengt wird in dem Augenblick, wo die Geschichte ihr Geheimnis enthüllt? Wir haben keinen Anlaß, das Licht der Geschichte zu scheuen; sie kann nicht anders als zeugen.”\textsuperscript{88} In the moment in which history reveals the traces of primal history, Barth ventures, the present is no longer constituted by the historical continuum, but exceeds the frame of history. The recognition of the unhistorical in history therefore has an explosive power; it displaces the historical frame and lets history reveal and bear witness to that which lies at its limit.

In this understanding of history, temporality is not structured by a principle of continuity and causality, but rather past and present are brought together in a relation to that which exceeds the frame of history. In this way, the eschatological “crisis of historicism” challenges not only the perspective from which history is written, as did its secular, modernist counterpart\textsuperscript{89}, but also poses a sweeping challenge to the understanding of temporality. Temporality, according to the


\textsuperscript{88} Barth, Karl. \textit{Der Römerbrief}, 126.

\textsuperscript{89} I discuss in detail the secular “crisis of historicism” that took place in the 1920s in Germany in Chapter Three. The broader point that I would like to make here is that Barth’s questioning of the limit of history goes beyond his critique of liberalism and the dominance of the “history of religion” in theology. Critics like Rudy Koshar are right to note Barth’s reaction of the liberalism of his teacher Adolf Harnack as an important element of his anti-historicism, but my claim is that Barth’s challenge to the understanding of history goes deeper and depends upon his liminal concept of eschatology. See Koshar, “Where is Karl Barth in Modern European History?” 343.
The referential structure that connects these discontinuous traces does not proceed horizontally from the past through moments of fulfillment culminating in a fulfilled future at the end of time. Yet neither is the relation of non-contemporaneous moments to the contemporaneity of a light from above a simply vertical relationship without any historical index. Instead, Barth argues for a dialectical tension between the particularity of the concrete historical moment and the way in which its determination by the eschatological limit explodes the frame of history. As an alternative to the poles of horizontal development and vertical abstraction, Barth suggests a diagonal cut of unhistorical presence through historical reality: “die Auferstehung geschieht quer hindurch durch das Leben und Sterben der Menschen, sie ist die Heilsgeschichte, die ihren eigenen Weg geht durch die andere Geschichte.” 90 For Barth there is no realization of a history of salvation in human history, contrary to the Hegelian supposition that the history of the spirit marks the steady unfolding of the absolute. At stake in the concepts of kairos and Gleichzeitigkeit is rather the tension of the concrete historical moment with an eschatological moment that exceeds history. The articulation of this tension, I argue, is at the heart of Dialectical Theology’s transformation of the understanding of history in the 1920s in Germany.

90 Karl Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten: eine akademische Vorlesung über 1. Kor. 15*, 122. My emphasis.
The constitutive tension of the concrete historical moment and its eschatological limit provides the focus for Dialectical Theology’s concept of history; the new concept of eschatology, therefore, does not depend upon a notion of transcendental completion. This is because Dialectical Theology understands eschatology not as a terminal end of history but as primal history or Urgeschichte. The suspension of history, the shattering of the frame of history, that is, does not mark a passage from historical time into the realm of eschatological completion, but rather is generative of history as the very tension of time and eternity. The figures of parousia and resurrection, I argue, raise this tension to its highest state of potential. Parousia – the return of Christ as the fulfillment of the promise – functions for Dialectical Theology as a figure of eschatological completion, yet it is one that exceeds the possibilities of human knowledge and therefore represents an epistemological limit. The suspension of history therefore takes place in the absence of eschatological completion; the tension of time and eternity never gives way to the realization of parousia as fulfillment.  

Dialectical Theology identifies liminal traces of eschatological time that explode the frame of history by setting it in relation to the unhistorical. Yet the interruption of the historical continuum by such fragments of eternity not only poses a crisis of historical consciousness by

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91 The fact that such dialectical tension is never resolved indicates just how far removed Barth’s Dialectical Theology is from Hegel’s dialectical method. The dialectic of history and eschatology involves an irreconcilable tension, one that can never be resolved in a higher synthesis. This is because the dialectic at stake exceeds Hegel’s inner-historical dialectic. Bruce L. McCormack’s makes a similar point about Barth’s dialectical method, which he describes as “a method which calls for every theological statement to be placed over against a counter-statement, without allowing the dialectical tension between the two to be resolved in a higher synthesis.” Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 11.
exposing it to its other; it is, moreover, generative of history. Dialectical Theology’s concept of
eschatology is unique because it figures not only an end but also an origin of history. Yet these
eschatological figures of end and origin are not temporal concepts; they do not belong to history
and time as such. Origin and goal, beginning and end, enter into a system of correspondences in
which the end is a return to the origin and death is the limit condition for resurrection and new
life. These phenomena lie at the limit of theological knowledge; they are the extremes at which
the realm of possible possibilities borders on the realm of impossible possibilities. If
eschatological time is the outermost limit of temporality, then our time stands in relation to
eschatological time and is maintained in the tension of this relation.

Dialectical Theology thus suspends its relationship to history, but cannot inaugurate a
new history. It remains on the threshold of time and eternity, for the limit of history cannot be
traversed. The end of history cannot be completed in the same way that its ground and origin
remain concealed. Theology therefore has the task of recognizing impressions and traces in
history that promise, refer to, and prophesize the moment of divine judgment in which history is
completed. Time and history contain within themselves the seeds of their own suspension, the
fruit of their own relationship to eternity. Yet by recognizing the limit of history as a limit,
Dialectical Theology relinquishes the fulfillment of promise and the moment of completion. The
liminal relation of the human and the divine is operative at the eschatological extreme, but the
extreme lies not at the periphery but in the proximity of the present. The eschatological situation
therefore concerns neither a remote past nor a distant future, but stands in a relation of tension to
the present. The concepts of resurrection and parousia bring this tension of eschatological time
and the historical present to its highest potential, yet they do not resolve the tension.
The eschatological situation of contemporaneity, in which humanity stands in relationship to the most distant epochs, insofar as each approaches the same limit and threshold of the impossibility of human knowledge of the divine, implies a strong sense of the origin that is never complete. The originary situation of contemporaneity is an “origin” not as a temporal beginning but as a force of \textit{Schöpfung} that asserts itself anew at each moment. The origin is history in the sense that the Fall or Abraham’s faith are history; they are history as stories of “Genesis” and not empirical histories. For this reason, Emil Brunner conceives the relation of contemporaneity as a strictly non-temporal one; in his reading, the origin is not the first element in a causal chain but stands in direct relation to the spirit: “Der Ernst des Geistes kennt nur die \textit{Gleichzeitigkeit}. Nur der Unernst schafft eine Distanz von Jahrtausenden zwischen uns und ‘Adams Fall,’ oder entlastet sich durch den Gedanken an die unvermeidliche ‘allmähliche Entwicklung.’ . . . Der Geist hat zur Zeit nur ein negatives Verhältnis. . . . Er schaut über sie hinweg – zum Ursprung.”

Barth’s reading takes a similar trajectory: in the mode of contemporaneity we are dealing not with empirical history, but with a non-temporal \textit{Urgeschichte} that has an originary force within history, a force that is persistently originary insofar as it ceaselessly recedes into the

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92 Dialectical Theology’s concept of \textit{Ursprung} is analogous to that of Martin Heidegger and Franz Rosenzweig in the sense that it is sustained in its coming to presence. Yet Protestant Theology in the 1920s and 1930s gave a unique direction to the theory of \textit{Ursprung} by working out its eschatological implications. See Chapter Four, where I discuss Protestant Theologian Edmund Schlink’s notion of “das eschatologische Faktum der Schöpfung.” Creation, in this sense, is always re-creation; the origin can re-assert itself only via negativity. Death is the the pre-condition of re-predication.


darkness of historical consciousness, lit up only in moments of contemporaneity. Drawing on Nietzsche, Barth understands “primal history” as precisely the unhistorical condition of history that is apparent only at the critical threshold separating the knowable from the unknowable: “Wir aber möchten gerade auf der kritischen ‘Linie, die das Übersehbare, Helle von dem Unauffellbaren und Dunklen scheidet’ (Nietzsche), die ungeschichtliche, d. h. aber urgeschichtliche Bedingtheit aller Geschichte, das Licht des Logos aller Geschichte und alles Lebens erkennen.” This paradox guides Dialectical Theology’s concept of eschatology as Urgeschichte: the unhistorical negates and suspends history in the moment of contemporaneity, yet it is also the ground, origin, and condition of history. Urgeschichte, according to Barth, is the light that gives history meaning, but it is a light that appears only in the mode of twilight, on the verge of its non-recognizability. It is not a matter of crossing the critical line of Urgeschichte, but perceiving the threshold and limit that it traces.


96 Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 127.
In this way, Barth’s reading of *Urgeschichte* at once deflects the pervasive historicization of thinking endemic to his time and affirms the historical significance of a non-historical origin. On the one hand, the Kierkegaardian concept of *Gleichzeitigkeit*, in which *Urgeschichte* becomes manifest, provides a potent response to historicism’s transformation of theology into the history of religion: for the generative origin of *Urgeschichte* is productive outside of the historical continuum and its causality. On the other hand, the eschatological concept of *Urgeschichte*, which Barth draws from Franz Overbeck, conditions history as determined by the tension of origin and end, each considered as liminal rather than temporal concepts.

Overbeck was a foundational figure and prophetic voice for Dialectical Theology, despite the fact that his radical critique of theology had little influence in the late nineteenth century. Of particular significance for Barth were Overbeck’s notebooks, published posthumously in 1919 by Carl Albrecht Bernoulli under the title *Christentum und Kultur*.\(^\text{97}\) Barth’s reception of Overbeck’s notebooks took place during the fertile years between the publications of the first edition of the *Römerbrief* (1919) and the completed revised second edition (1922). In 1920, Barth published, together with Eduard Thurneysen, a review of Overbeck’s notebooks, which was conceived as a series of reflections *Zur inneren Lage des Christentums*.\(^\text{98}\) In his book review, Barth articulates the significance of Overbeck’s notion of *Urgeschichte* from the point of view of eschatology, to which *Urgeschichte* stands in a relation of mutual tension.


\(^\text{98}\) Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Zur inneren Lage des Christentums: eine Buchanzeige und eine Predigt* (München: C. Kaiser, 1920). Barth’s interpretation of Overbeck understands the eschatological problem as being rooted in Christianity’s origins: Dialectical Theology’s recovery of the eschatological problem as a fruitful mode of questioning is at once its recovery of a potential in *Urchistentum* that had receded behind the historicization of Christianity as religion and Church history.
The critical line at which the urgeschichtliche conditionedness of history becomes manifest is at once the eschatological limit: the limit of the origin coincides with the limit of the end, and that which we call “world” is maintained in a state of tension between these poles. The dialectical polarity of Urgeschichte and “eschatological end,” in turn, is related to a theory of resurrection and parousia as non-historical conditions of history. That is, Barth’s interest in Overbeck’s concept of Urgeschichte as a limit phenomenon of history is related to his own interest in eschatology. Characteristic of Barth’s interpretation is the interchangeability of beginning and end: in light of the eschatological moment, beginning is end and end is beginning. Barth writes:


What Barth draws from Overbeck, then, is an understanding of the eschatological limit as a primal historical condition of history. The end posed to humanity by death has the same threshold character on the border of something “incomparable” and “inscrutable” as does humanity’s origin in Urgeschichte. We “know” something about the last things, about the

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99 Zur inneren Lage des Christentums: eine Buchanzeige und eine Predigt, 7–9. It is worth pointing out here that what Overbeck understands as “Entstehungsgeschichte” may not necessarily be equivalent to what Walter Benjamin understands under the term. It may rather be closer to what Benjmain calls “Vorgeschichte.”
eschaton, despite the fact that we cannot know them, because they are the ground—and the abyss—of all “things” in the world. If Urgeschichte is simultaneously eschatologische Endgeschichte, if the world bears these histories as its ground and abyss, then life and history are suspended in tension between creation and redemption. Thus Barth argues that Overbeck’s critical understanding of Urgeschichte and death contains a “tiefe Erkenntnis der Dialektik von Schöpfung und Erlösung.”

The idea of resurrection, however, is not the resolution of the dialectic of creation and redemption but rather this dialectic conceived in its highest potential tension. History is the relentless witness of the impossibility of this tension being resolved within time. For Barth, then, the coming of Christ through his resurrection from death, is both the end of time and Urgeschichte, both the ground of history and the threshold of another time that has no history within history. The dialectical relation of Urgeschichte and Endgeschichte is expressed in resurrection because resurrection is Urgeschichte at the very moment that it is a suspension of temporality and history. At the moment at which theology approaches resurrection, it has reached the limit of religion, it is placed in a situation of crisis by the terrible sublimity of the resurrection, and it is confronted with its impossible possibility.

In short, the coming of Christ is conceived by Barth not as an event within history, but as an primal historical event, for this coming is announced at the threshold between life and death, at the moment in which the crucifixion is transformed into resurrection. But since resurrection as Urgeschichte is at once the suspension of history and time, it is to be grasped eschatologically. Urgeschichte and eschatology become one in the figure of the resurrection. We thus have another perspective from which to understand Barth’s claim that “Christentum, das nicht ganz

\[100\] Zur inneren Lage des Christentums: eine Buchanzeige und eine Predigt, 7–9.
and gar und restlos Eschatologie ist, hat mit Christus ganz und gar und restlos nichts zu tun."

The resurrection, as primal historical moment, is the limit of human possibility. It is a limit because eschatology is conceived here not in terms of the “end” but in terms of the “extreme.”

For Barth, the limit of religion, as a merely human possibility, is the point at which the dialectical reversal from death to renewed life takes place:


The limit of religion, and hence of historical experience as such, is that quiet, unmoved place where humanity is part of Urgeschichte and Endgeschichte and hence released from the duality, polarity, and contradictions of life. In such a moment, temporality appears in its totality, as something complete through its limitation by eschatological time. The extreme of the eschaton is thus not at the outermost of the sudden reversal of a peripeteia of religious experience, but is grounded through the perpendicular relationship to eternity inherent in each moment.

This thought of being released from religion through the sublimity of the resurrection, however, is too hasty and simple. Indeed, the resolution of duality and polarity is impossible for humanity insofar as Urgeschichte and Endgeschichte are the limit of human knowledge and possibilities. One can at best stand at the threshold drawn by this limit. As Barth writes:

Wir wissen nicht, was wir sagen und wir sagen, was wir nicht wissen, wenn wir sagen, daß das Gesetz nicht mehr der Bereich ist, in dem “wir” stehen, daß die religiöse Möglichkeit erledigt hinter “uns” liegt. Wir sagen es trotzdem. Wir sagen es als das

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101 Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 325.
102 Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 239.
Unmögliche, wie wir auch den unerhörten Imperativ der Heiligung erkannt und ausgesprochen haben (6, 12-23), weit über das hinaus, was in eines Menschen Ohr und Mund kommen dürfte; als den Pfeil vom andern Ufer, das wir nie betreten werden, der aber uns getroffen hat, als die Wahrheit jenseits der Grenze, die wir nie überschreiten werden, die aber von dorther zu uns geredet hat. Wehe uns, wenn wir nicht sagten, was gesagt werden muß, wo nichts mehr anschaulich ist als – das Unanschauliche. Wir sagen es als die Gefangenen und doch Freien, als die Blinden und doch Sehenden, als die Sterbenden und siehe wir leben. Nicht wir sagen es: Christus ist des Gesetzes Ende, die Grenze der Religion.\footnote{Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 239–240.}

Humanity stands at the limit of eschatological time but cannot cross the threshold; yet humanity is struck by the knowledge of this limit and the truth that lies beyond it as if by an arrow, for humanity is addressed by what is beyond this limit through revelation. When “we” say that the religious possibility is behind us, according to Barth, we speak from the position of “not we,” from the position of a predication of humanity that is only promised, announced, referred to, but which is present to us only as a negation of our predication through the flesh. This situation of impossible communication, where humanity is compelled to speak to that which it cannot know for certain, is the correlate of the impossible historical relationship between human history and \textit{Endgeschichte} / \textit{Urgeschichte}. The relation is that of a threshold that cannot be crossed, and yet for this reason the relation persists.

This tension between the perception of the limit and the recognition of the impossibility of crossing the limit is manifest in the Pauline concept of \textit{parousia}, which Barth works out in his reading of 1 Corinthians 15. If resurrection, thought of as \textit{Urgeschichte}, constitutes history and time by circumscribing its limit, then \textit{parousia} denotes the thought of the fulfillment of what is implied and promised in resurrection. The return of Christ as “fulfillment” or “completion” stands in tension with resurrection and its promise, even as it signifies the resolution and overcoming of the tension inherent in humanity’s faith in resurrection. \textit{Parousia}, one might say, both contains the tension of resurrection understood as eschatological limit and itself stands in
tension with resurrection: it is thus an eschatological limit of a second degree; it broaches the thought of the fulfillment and resolution, a loosening redemption (*Er-lösung*) by standing in tension with this tension. It, too, can be understood as *Endgeschichte*, just as resurrection is both *Urgeschichte* and *Endgeschichte*; yet whereas resurrection provides a ground to history from its limit in the form of revelation, *parousia* signifies a redemption of history in terms of its absolute end.

*Parousia* is thus the limit of the limit: just as *Christuszeit* is the limit of historical temporality, the time of *parousia* is the outer limit of *Christuszeit* in the time of *das Reich Gottes*. If Christ’s revelation is the turning point that can be grasped only as the threshold of another temporality, then the return of Christ is the transformation or *Verwandlung* that coincides with the ultimate suspension of history. As such, it is not just the impossible possibility but rather the possibility of the impossible possibility. It is an ultimate limit: the eschatological limit of eschatology. As such it is a necessary thought for eschatology, for its promised fulfillment defines and gives meaning to what has been revealed.

The limit case of *parousia* is therefore essential for eschatological thought. According to Dialectical Theology, *parousia* is the fulfillment of what has been revealed in the resurrection, and as such it constitutes the eschatological situation of humanity, even though it is never present in time and history. It constitutes the eschatological limit despite its absence, and poses a negative crisis of time and history. It is the (negative) *reality* that confirms what in revelation is only *possibility*. As Barth writes,

*Die Parusie Christi ist nichts anderes, zweites neben seiner Auferstehung, nur das endgültige An-die-Oberfläche-Treten desselben unterirdischen Stromes, der in der Offenbarung erstmalig in der Zeit wahrnehmbar geworden, die Erfüllung dessen, was in der Zeit immer nur als Verheißung zu fassen ist. Man muß, um zu verstehen, auch hier, wie bei der Auferstehung versuchen, den Gedanken einer Grenze aller Zeiten zu denken, nur daß sie nun nicht bloß offenbart und geglaubt ist, sondern – aber damit verliert unser*
This passage makes clear how the concept of eschatology is suspended between the present and the future. Yet this future arises from the other side of the limit of all time and hence cannot be grasped in terms of the historical concept of time. Whereas revelation takes place in the present, in a moment of kairos in which eternity breaks into time without becoming time, the fulfillment of this revelation takes place in a “now” that cannot be present because it is the absolute crisis of humanity and its time. In this thought, and it is a matter here of a thought-experiment, the limit of all time is not merely revealed and believed, but is moreover posited as reality. The dialectical tension of humanity’s relationship to the limit disappears in the thought of parousia, because “humanity” undergoes an entirely new predication in this crisis.

The monism inherent in the thought of parousia is therefore possible only in the mode of futurity, but in a futurity that is not “to come” in the usual reckoning of time. Barth speaks rather of another futurity, a futurum aeternum, or what is the same, a futurum resurrectionis. For Barth this monist future cannot be conceived as present, nor can it be anticipated; humanity has no other alternative than to persist (erharren) in the dialectical tension of a dualism: “Daß Gott alles in allem ist, das ist nicht wahr, das muß wahr werden. Christlicher Monismus ist keine gegenwärtig mögliche, sondern eine kommende Erkenntnis. Soll sie echt sein, so muß sie jetzt erst als christlicher Dualismus, als Spannung zwischen Verheißung und Erfüllung, zwischen ‘noch nicht’ und ‘einst’ begriffen und darf nicht vorweg genommen werden.” For Barth the futurity of the futurum aeternum is therefore raised to a second degree: it cannot be known as

105 Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 185–186, 190–191.
something to come; rather, the very knowledge of such futurity is still to come. We are dealing, in other words, with an epistemology yet to come. That is, the resolution of the tension between promise and fulfillment not only cannot be anticipated, but it must moreover be understood precisely in terms of this tension. The recognition and knowledge of the “eschatological now” has this same character: it is recognized in the present as that moment that exceeds the present and the very schema of temporality provided by historicism. Eschatological time is constituted by privation, by the irresolvable tension of “not yet” and “still to come.”

The tension of eschatology and history is a tension of promise and fulfillment that redefines the temporal categories that underlie these notions. The purported resolution of the crisis, the reality of the resurrection, produces a crisis of temporal categories that transforms their valence. For promise is constituted in relation to something that is to come, but the event to come—parousia—can only be conceived in the mode of presence. Thus it can neither be present in a temporality that is split into past, present, and future, nor can it be futural in that other temporality that is the crisis of time considered as continuum. Parousia is futural for us, but present in its own time, and herein the tension is apparent once again. As Barth puts it, “Warten heißt einem erst Kommenden wirklich entgegensehen, und hier ist es nur die Absicht des Paulus, dieses Kommende als solches kräftig zu bezeugen. Es ist die παρουσία, die Ankunft, nein Gegenwart des verborgenen Christus und seines Sieges, mit der die ζωοτοιχία, die Auferweckung auch der Seinigen Ereignis wird.”

To wait is more than to remain, it is moreover to face (entgegensehen) what is to come, but what is to come is the arrival of Christ as presence, presence that comes to pass in the event of the resurrection. The paradox of

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eschatological fulfillment can therefore be stated as follows: that which is to come is not the future, but a presence that overcomes temporality.

The future of resurrection, that is, can best be understood by analogy to the form of the present, with a slight yet decisive difference. The resurrection as event, as parousia, has the form of a presence that is not a part or splinter of time, but rather an eternal, always contemporaneous (in view of the time of history) presence. It is as such a presence that is between the past and the future yet cannot be divided into past and future, a presence in which the movement of time has been suspended. Continuing his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15, Barth writes: “Drei merkwürdige Bestimmungen dieser hereinbrechenden, alle Zeiten der Länge nach aufreibenden Krisis nennt v 52: Erstens: ἐν ἀτόμῳ werde das geschehen, wörtlich in einem Unteilbaren, also eben nicht in einem Zeitteil, sonst könnte es allerdings nicht allen Geschlechtern gleichzeitig geschehen, sondern in der Gegenwart. Nur die Gegenwart ist ein wirkliches ἄτομον, ein Unteilbares zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft.” If the futurum resurrectionis has the form of a presence, then it is clear that humanity’s hope for the fulfillment of this promise must take the form of a waiting in the present. The subtlety of this reading of “ἐν ἀτόμῳ” is that it leaves undecided whether the temporal determination at stake concerns lived, historical time or eschatological time. On the one hand the “present” at stake here cannot be limited to a particular time, for then it would entail a division; on the other hand the “present” of historical temporality stands in precisely such an ambiguous relationship to the past and the future: the present is never fully at hand, yet nor can it be sharply delineated from the past and the future.

Yet Barth names a second characteristic of the crisis of the futurum resurrectionis, one that is difficult to reconcile with the indivisible contemporaneity of its presence. The “moment”

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of resurrection, namely, is not a part of time, but it has a temporal determination in the
suddenness with which it interrupts the historical continuum; as Barth writes: “Zweitens: \( \varepsilon \nu \omicron \pi\tau\iota \omicron \omicron \phi\theta\alpha\lambda\mu\omicron \omicron \varepsilon \), in einem Augenblick; damit soll wohl die ‘Plötzlichkeit’ des Hereinbrechens
dieser Krisis beschrieben sein: Sie kommt nicht in allmählichen oder katastrophalen
Entwicklungen; wenn es zu solchen kommt, so haben sie nicht \textit{damit} zu tun: die Auferstehung
geschieht quer hindurch durch das Leben und Sterben der Menschen, sie ist die Heilsgeschichte,
die ihren eigenen Weg geht durch die andere Geschichte.” 109 The presence of the \textit{futurum resurrectionis} is at once the crisis of the singularity of each historical present. It is not only
“present” to all times in the mode of \textit{Gleichzeitigkeit}, but it moreover appears in each case in the
“blink of an eye”—as Paul’s Greek emphasizes—in a sudden moment of breaking in, in a
moment of \textit{kairos} in which there is a point of contact between history and \textit{Heilsgeschichte}. From
the point of view of eschatological time, that which is promised in revelation is always already
present as \textit{Heilsgeschichte}, yet it cannot be possessed and established within time. The
suddenness with which historical time opens to the time of the history of salvation precludes, as
it were, the permanence of its presence. The cut that the moment of resurrection makes through
historical time is therefore negative: it does not permit an isomorphism of the historical moment
with the \textit{Augenblick der Auferstehung}.

109 \textit{Die Auferstehung der Toten. Eine akademische Vorlesung über 1. Kor. 15}, 122. The third
determination of the crisis enacted by the \textit{futurum resurrectionis}, according to Barth, is its
finality: “Drittens: \( \varepsilon \nu \tau\iota \omicron \sigma\chi\acute{\alpha}\tau\iota \omicron \varsigma \alpha\lambda\pi\gamma\iota\gamma\iota \), beim Schall der letzten Posaune. Das ist das
dessenende Merkmal dieser Krisis. Gott \textit{will} sie . . . und zwar nicht nur vorläufig, sondern
endgültig, nicht nur mahndend und vorbereitend, sondern mit ganzer Autorität zum sofortigen
Aufbruch und Gehorsam dringend.” \textit{Die Auferstehung der Toten. Eine akademische Vorlesung
über 1. Kor. 15}, 122. This underscores the impossible convergence of the two formally similar
kinds of presence: our present is always provisional, \textit{vorläufig}, whereas the divine present is final
and irrevocable, an absolute crisis of our temporality.
The cultural significance of eschatological thought for the understanding of history in the early twentieth century is therefore a function of Barth’s negative theology. At stake is neither a loss of transcendence, nor a secular decoupling of history from *Heilsgeschichte*, but rather an understanding of history as determined by its eschatological limit that is incommensurable with history. The reference of allegorical figures of history to eschatological fulfillment is unbroken, yet it is a reference to that which exceeds objective representation. Eschatological fulfillment, for such a negative theology, exceeds what can be known: the absolute crisis of *parousia* cannot be represented because it involves a re-predication of humanity as that which it is not, a re-predication that leaves historical experience groundless. As Martin Heidegger puts it, considering Paul’s Epistle to the Thessalonians, “Indem man ohne weiteres von ‘Vorstellung’ redet, verkennt man, daß das Eschatologische niemals primär Vorstellung ist.” Insofar as the eschatological limit exceeds humanity’s knowledge, it is at once an epistemological limit. The thought of the eschatological takes away the ground of representation because it exceeds temporal localization. History, then, is neither dependent upon eternity understood as permanent presence, nor cut loose from a transcendent origin and hence naturalized, but rather has its ground in the groundlessness of eschatological crisis. Eschatology therefore decenters the understanding of history in classical modernism and places it in relation to its negative limit.

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The concepts of resurrection and *parousia* raise the eschatological limit to its highest state of tension. Yet the prospect of eschatological fulfillment—that is, the enactment of what has been promised in revelation—is never able to resolve the incommensurability of history and eschatological time. The realization of the possibility inherent in the eschatology, moreover, cannot be represented because it exceeds what humanity can know and defines an epistemological limit. The very tension of historical time with the limit posed by eschatology, however, produces a form of ethical self-relation in which these temporal paradoxes are translated into an ethical stance.

The ethics of eschatology, as worked out by Karl Barth and Martin Heidegger, have two principal features. First, since eschatology is not conceived as a temporal end, the ethical mode of waiting does not depend upon anticipation or expectation. Rather, in accordance with the relation of the eschatological now to each moment in time, the ethics of eschatology is defined by persistence in the present or what Barth calls *Beharrlichkeit*. Persistence can only be thought of as a form of waiting in a qualified sense: it is waiting without expectation because it is a waiting without an object. As Barth argues, there can be hope only for that which one cannot know. If hope takes a determinate object that can be fulfilled, then it is no longer, strictly speaking, hope.

Second, this ethics is carried out in the mode of the “as if,” for it depends upon an impossible hope. Accordingly, the ethical act of love takes place through the metaphorical...

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approximation of eternity in time. That each moment bears the potential of becoming a “qualified moment” is the ground of ethical action for Dialectical Theology. Yet the consequence is that the ethical act can never be complete or finished. The ethical act strives for Erfüllung and is never exhausted by Erfülltheiten, and since the eternal moment can never be complete, so too must the ethical act be carried out again and again. In this form of ethical self-relation, the eschatological moment can qualify historical time, even if it can never enter into history. The ethics of eschatology therefore contains a historiography of the qualified moment, which is, in a special sense, a historiography of the present.

The event of resurrection, were it to be enacted, would overcome the tension of Diesseits and Jenseits, of humanity in Adam and humanity in Christ. Yet humanity’s relationship to eschatology in historical time can consist but in the recognition of this tension as it plays out in the tension between the present of hope and waiting and the promised future of fulfillment. The tension of time as “waiting” and time as “fulfillment” can find no resolution in time and thus must be sustained in terms of a certain relation to the self. As Martin Heidegger argues in his lectures on the Phenomenology of Religious Experience, delivered during the Winter Semester 1920/1921, the question of “when” the fulfillment of the promise of resurrection will take place is not the proper question for Paul; it is rather a matter of an attitude of wakefulness in relation to the eschatological limit. In Heidegger’s view, Pauline Christianity is characterized by a particular relationship to temporality that cannot be understood in terms of an objective concept of time. This relationship to temporality is structured by the event of parousia, yet not in an inner-historical sense.

The relation to parousia circumscribes an ethical comportment that reflects how one lives in time. Yet the temporal relationship in which parousia serves as a structuring principle is
defined not by the futural expectation of the arrival of this event, but rather by a persistently present wakefulness in the knowledge of parousia. As Heidegger argues, “ἡμερα heißt ‘Tag des Herrn’ d. h. ‘Tag der παρουσία’ . . . Durch diese (‘laßt uns wachsam sein’) sehen wir: die Frage nach dem ‘Wann’ leitet sich zurück auf mein Verhalten. Wie die παρουσία in meinem Leben steht, das weist zurück auf den Vollzug des Lebens selbst.”113 The question of “when” the parousia will take place is misplaced because humanity stands in relationship to parousia at every moment as a possible, yet unfulfilled potential. The reality of parousia can never coincide with a time in life because the relationship to parousia is always structured by the tension of possibility and reality. The question is therefore not “when” this possibility shall become reality, but rather “how” one relates to this possibility through the relation to the self, that is, through the ethical relation. Heidegger concludes: “Paulus denkt gar nicht daran, die Frage nach dem Wann der Parusie zu beantworten. Das Wann ist bestimmt durch das Wie des Sich-Verhaltens, dies ist bestimmt durch den Vollzug der faktischen Lebenserfahrung in jedem ihrer Momente.”114

This reading underscores that Paul’s understanding of eschatology does not concern das Endgeschichtliche; it is not characterized by an expectation of an end, however near or far away it may appear to be, but rather by a certain ethical relation, that is, a relation to temporality that is grounded in each moment by eschatology. This ethical relationship might be thought of as a kind of waiting (Warten), but such waiting has no element of expectation. Heidegger is quite explicit on this point: “Man könnte zunächst denken: das Grundverhalten zur parousia ist ein Erwarten und die christliche Hoffnung (ἐλπίς) ein spezieller Fall davon. Aber das ist ganz falsch! Wir kommen niemals durch die bloße Analyse des Bewußtseins von einem zukünftigen Ereignis auf

113 Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 104.
114 Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 106.
den Bezugssinn der παρουσία. Die Struktur der christlichen Hoffnung, die in Wahrheit der Bezugssinn zur Parusie ist, ist radikal anders als alle Erwartung.\textsuperscript{115} There is no expectation and no anticipation of the eschatological end for Pauline Christianity; there is only a relation to temporality that sustains the tension between the time of humanity and the presence\textsuperscript{116} of an eternal now that cannot be resolved in time. The eschatological concept of hope is related not to the expectation of a future event, but to an ethical comportment. In Heidegger’s interpretation, as in Barth, then, Paul’s understanding of eschatology is not to be conflated with Apokalyptik nor with any mythology that represents when and how the “last things” will transpire.\textsuperscript{117} For Paul there is no tension between the expectation of an immanent end and the delay of its inception, for the question of “when” does not pose itself. Rather, the tension is expressed in the Christian subject’s relation to itself as epistemological and ethical subject.

In his commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Karl Barth provides a similar account of an eschatological ethics defined by waiting without expectation or what he calls \textit{Beharrlichkeit}. After working out a theory of the “eschatological now” as the ground and limit of history, Barth goes on consider how one can persist in the presence of the “time of the now” (\textit{die Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 102.}

\textsuperscript{115} As I argued in section 3, \textit{parousia} connotes not only the return of Christ in the sense of \textit{Ankunft}, but also retains its original meaning of \textit{Anwesenheit} or presence.

Zeit des Jetzt) if historical time can never approximate the eschatological now. One the one hand, Barth argues, the “now,” as a turning point in time or a Zeitenwende, has been revealed insofar as humanity has been graced with the word of God, that is, insofar as the “spirit” which resurrected Christ from the dead lives in us. But on the other hand, humanity still lives in the world of the flesh and still belongs to the old time the Law in a condition of fallenness. It is fulfilled in the presence of the “now” but only so in the mode of hope, waiting, and persistence. The eternal moment of the “now” is already at hand and yet only as unknown possibility. The suffering of the flesh, that of humanity’s consciousness of its fallen nature, passes over in the moment of revelation to a different kind of pain, that of spiritual Wehen in relation to the impossibility of this Jetzt: has it arrived, then we have already passed the threshold of death; is it still yet to come, then we are conscious of God’s revelation but not yet redeemed.

The ethical relationship of humanity to the eschatological now, in Barth’s reading, depends upon a temporality of Beharrlichkeit related to the very inaccessibility of the “now.” Barth develops this interpretation through his translation of Romans 8: 22–25:

Denn wir wissen, daß alles Geschaffene einstimmig seufzt und gemeinsam in Wehen liegt bis auf das Jetzt hin. Und nicht nur es, nein auch wir, dir wir die Erstlinge des Geistes besitzen, auch wir seufzen bei uns selbst in Erwartung unserer Sohnschaft: der Erlösung unsres Leibes. Denn durch Hoffnung sind wir gerettet. Sichtbare Hoffnung ist aber nicht Hoffnung. Denn was Einer sieht – was braucht er das noch zu erharren? Sofern wir aber hoffen auf das, was wir nicht sehen, warten wir mit Beharrlichkeit.118

The ethical relation of persistence or Beharrlichkeit, as Barth’s reading of Paul makes clear, depends upon a negative theology in which the divine remains, despite all revelation, unknown and foreign. As much as the possibility of the “now” has entered into time and history, humanity lives in the presence of this “now” only in the mode of hope. But this hope is a “hope without hope” insofar as it is defined in relation to that which cannot be seen or known. The paradox of

118 Barth’s translation of Romans 8: 18–25. Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 311.
waiting for redemption is that such redemption exceeds the bounds of temporality; hence the ethical relation to the “now” cannot be a waiting for a future event, but only a waiting of persistence in the present.

The persistence of hope, for Barth, is neither beginning, middle, nor end of a promised fulfillment, but the very movement of fulfillment itself. For hope is constituted not by that for which one hopes, but in its persistence despite its impossibility, in the face of all hopelessness. In hope humanity persists “as if”\(^1\) it were waiting for “something,” when in fact humanity’s redemption is the impossibility that is possible only in the mode of hope itself. To wait with insistence (\emph{beharren}) is for Barth the ethical stance in which humanity encounters redemption through the persistence of its hope:

\begin{quote}
Erlösung ist das Unanschauliche, Unzugängliche, Unmögliche, das als \emph{Hoffnung} uns begegnete. Können wir etwas Anderes, Besseres sein wollen als Hoffende oder etwas anderes daneben? Beharren, das ist doch . . . der tiefste Sinn unsrer als Aufgabe erfaßten menschlichen Lebenslage: Beharren, \emph{als ob} es ein Jenseits gäbe von Gut und Böse, Freud und Leid, Leben und Tod, beharren, \emph{als ob} wir im Glück und Unglück, im Aufstieg und Niedergang, im Ja und Nein unsres Da-Seins und So-Seins auf etwas warteten, beharren, \emph{als ob} ein Gott wäre, dem wir unterliegend oder siegend, lebend oder sterbend in Liebe zugewandt zu dienen hätten.\(^2\)
\end{quote}

For Barth, then, a historical humanity has a relationship to the “now” in the mode of persistent presence that is \emph{Beharrlichkeit}: it is no longer a matter of past, present, and future, but of a moment, an \emph{Augenblick}, in which the impossible entrance of eternity into time is grasped in the form of eschatological hope. The ethics of eschatology therefore consists in a persistence in historical time “as if” the eschatological now were present, “as if” time and history were suspended, “as if” the tension of history and eschatology could be resolved. Persistence does not

\(^1\) On the topos of the “\emph{als ob}” in early twentieth-century philosophy, see Hans Vaihinger, \textit{Die Philosophie des Als Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus} (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1911).

\(^2\) \textit{Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung)}, 325.
imply the realization of these possibilities in a determinate future but rather holding fast to them as possibilities, in the mode of the “as if.”

Such persistence is fulfilled as persistence precisely to the extent that the “as if” is never completed. For Beharrlichkeit defines an ethics in the present that has no end in completion. It is in this sense that Barth will say of humanity’s love for God that: “Sie ist so sehr ein Warten auf die Erlösung, daß sie auf keine Zeit, auf keine Ereignisse, Erfülltheiten, Erlösttheiten zu warten braucht.” \[121\] There is a qualitative difference that cannot be bridged between Erlösung and Erlöstheit, between Erfüllung and Erfülltheit. Dialectical Theology engages in a rigorous suspension of time and history because it is not interested in a forward-driven motion towards a fulfillment that is accomplished in the perfect mode (Erfülltheit): fulfillment as Erfüllung, by contrast, is always to be accomplished and yet at the same time always already accomplished. For the time of the “now”—and this is the time to which all eschatological thought refers—contains these temporally inflected moments only in the form of their referential whole. There is redemption only to the extent that it refers to revelation and creation, not as their temporal end, but as a referential end.

Insofar as to wait for redemption is to wait for a mode of eschatological time that cannot be grasped within history, its fulfillment never surpasses the openness of its possibility. The eternal “now,” always intimated from the perspective of a concrete historical present, is at the same time recognized as a kind of presence that cannot be grasped within time. The moment of kairos, in which eternity breaks into time, is never reality, but only a negative possibility. But the recognition of this negative possibility provides the ground for an ethical imperative that serves as a preliminary fulfillment of the law and a metaphor for the completion of history within

\[121\] Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 331.
history, despite the fact that such completion would be a suspension of history and thus can take place only outside of history. The ethical act of love of one’s neighbor, which can never be completed as such, according to Barth, is a metaphor (Gleichnis) of the fulfillment of the law; it is humanity’s only possible reciprocation of divine grace.

The ethics of eschatology is therefore structured by a relation to the eschatological moment “as if” it were present in time. The ethical act does not take place in the presence of the “now,” but it is carried out in knowledge and recognition of the moment: “Und solches tut in Erkenntnis des Augenblicks! (εἰδότες τὸν καιρόν) (Röm 13, 8 ff).”\(^\text{122}\) The eschatological moment is at once unumgehbar and unhintergehbar: for the “right time” of ethical action is always defined, according to Barth, in relation to the temporality of the eschatological moment, and yet this moment itself can only be grasped in negative terms. The act of love, in which the human being takes up an ethical relationship to his neighbor in terms of his relation to God, and in this way finds himself in his neighbor, has, according to Barth, an “unerhörter Anlaß.” The incomprehensible act of love takes place when the incommensurability of time and eternity is bridged by the knowledge of their metaphorical relation, that is, when the ethical act is carried out “as if” in the presence of eternity. As Barth writes:


The emphasis should be placed on the wie as a mode of metaphor (Gleichnis): time becomes like eternity and eternity becomes like this time. This is the only mode in which a similarity can

\(^{122}\) This is Barth’s translation. See Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 518ff.

\(^{123}\) Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 523.
negotiate this infinite difference, in which some kind of proximity can approximate what lies at a
distance. The eschatological moment, I argue, is the vehicle that makes the metaphorical relation
possible: as a moment “between the times,” it is never identical with any moment in time, and
yet, in contrast with eternity, it has a temporal structure. The ethical act gives its moment in time
the dignity of the eschatological now insofar as it is carried out “in recognition of the moment.”

In this sense, the ground of ethics, according to Barth, is a metaphorical relation of time
and eternity that enables a historiography of the qualified moment. Each moment carries the
potential to be a moment of revelation that points to the eternal moment, and the ethical act is the
realization and enactment of the metaphor. The literalization of the metaphor therefore takes
place as the qualification of the moment, insofar as the ethical act embodies the “as if” relation.
Yet the movement of historical time, too, as Barth argues, is determined by the simultaneous
presence and absence of the moment:

‘Wir gehn dahin und wandern von einem Jahr zum andern’ — das ist das Geheimnis der
Zeit, offenbart in jenem ewigen Augenblick, der immer ist und nie, im Augenblick der
Offenbarung. Des zum Gleichnis das unwiderrufliche Davoneilen der Vergangenheit, das
unaufhaltsame Kommen der Zukunft: die Unumkehrbarkeit der Zeit. Des zum Gleichnis
aber auch die völlige Verborgenheit, Unanschaulichkeit und Nicht-Gegebenheit der
Gegenwart “zwischen” den Zeiten. Gleichnis des ewigen Augenblicks ist in beiderlei
Hinsicht jeder Augenblick der Zeit. Jeder trägt das Geheimnis der Offenbarung
ungeboren in sich, jeder kann qualifizierter Augenblick werden.¹²⁴

The metaphorical relation of this Gleichnis works in both directions: the nature of the eternal
moment, which is both always present by way of its contemporaneity and yet only ever present
as absence, as the impossibility of its enactment, is not only revealed in time, but moreover
reveals something about time. Only the present persists amid the irreversibility of time, while
past and future are always in motion; yet the presence of the present between the times is never
given but remains concealed. Our time is at once always, at every moment, the moment of

¹²⁴ Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 524.
revelation, and yet never equivalent to it. Each moment carries within it the potential of the eternal moment of revelation, the possibility of becoming a qualified moment. The recognition that each moment stands in relation to the eschatological time of the “now,” therefore, is the ground of all ethical action.

The necessary consequence of this qualification is that the act of love, as ethical act par excellence, can constitutively never be complete or finished. For then it would no longer stand in relation to the infinite moment. This follows from the constitution of the act in Erkenntnis, for the recognition of the eternal moment can never be complete. Fulfillment is never accomplished once and for all, but rather must be carried out again and again in each moment. The recourse to eternity, which the ethical act makes by grasping the metaphorical relation of time and eternity, is an overcoming of time that is uncertain unless it maintains its recognition of the moment and sustains its deed as revolutionary act:

Immer steht dieser letzte zentrale Regreß von der Zeit auf die Ewigkeit, immer steht diese nur durch das Wunder mögliche Beziehung der Ewigkeit in Frage, wenn die Liebe als die große positive Möglichkeit zum Gebot wird. Immer nur in Erkenntnis des Augenblicks können wir tun, was wir tun, und haben es deshalb nie ‘schon getan’; denn wann wäre etwas in dieser Erkenntnis ‘schon getan’? . . . . [Die Liebe] will grundsätzlich in der Zeit nichts Bleibendes, nichts ‘Bestehendes’ schaffen. Nur in Erkenntnis des ewigen Augenblicks, tut sie, was sie tut, und ist eben darum das eigentlich revolutionäre Tun. \(^{125}\)

The ethical act of love is a revolutionary act that must be persistently carried out, for it cannot establish anything permanent. It relentlessly refers to the eschatological moment, yet not as an end in a temporal, futural sense, but as the possibility of a new predication of humanity. The ethical act of love is a fulfillment of the law because it enacts again and again the perception of revelation. It is an act grounded in this highest knowledge. As such, the ethical act qualifies each moment as a moment that refers to the eternal moment of revelation. As revolutionary act it grounds anew in each moment the referential, metaphorical relation of time to eternity.

\(^{125}\) Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung)*, 524–525.
Dialectical Theology’s theorization of eschatology, it should be clear, is rigorously dialectical. It entails a relationship of history to an eternal moment that is not only inaccessible, but moreover represents the negation of historical time. In the eschatological moment, humanity is related to a God that it is not, to an unknown God who is recognized as unknown. The eschatological moment cannot, by its nature, enter into historical time; it is no time alongside historical time that might arrive at the end of a temporal succession. Yet the relationship to the eschatological moment qualifies the concrete historical moment in its specificity. The relationship between time and eternity for Dialectical Theology entails an infinite qualitative difference, while the relationship of different historical times to one another is that of various unqualified times to one another. A historical time first becomes qualified by standing in relation to that eternal moment that is infinitely other. This relationship itself, in which two qualitatively different times are related to one another, can be recognized in time only in the mode of revelation and given form only in the ethical act.

The reality of the eschatological moment, in turn, is present only as a horizon, as an absolute limit of all time. Historical time is qualified by the eschatological moment as by a moment that is foreign, incommensurable, and inaccessible to it. Hence the impossibility that the eschatological moment might persist as presence; hence the necessity that its relationship to historical time is dialectical. As Barth writes, ‘Jetzt ist unsre Errettung näher als damals, als wir gläubig wurden.‘ Immer besteht diese Spannung zwischen dem ‘damals’ unsres geruhigen Seins und dem ‘jetzt’ der störenden Erinnerung an unser Nicht-Sein, immer die Spannung zwischen den Zeiten des ‘schon’ erkannten Gottes und den Zeiten des Gedenkens, Erwartens und Hinblickens auf das existentielle Ereigniswerden des nur vermeintlich ‘schon’ Bestehenden, auf
den ewigen Augenblick der Erscheinung, der Parusie, der Gegenwart Jesu Christi.”126 This does not imply a temporalization of the relation to the eschatological moment but rather a fundamental instability of the relation, for eschatology functions within time only as a crisis of temporal categories. The qualification of time must be carried out anew at each moment.

The central place of eschatology in Dialectical Theology is therefore anything but a symptom of a prevailing apocalypticism in the aftermath of the First World War. Rather, it represents an appropriation of the eschatological discourse that precludes the thought of the “end” of the “last things” in terms of catastrophic decline. Barth articulates his polemic against apocalypticism as follows:

Will das unnütze Gerede von der “ausgebliebenen” Parusie denn gar nicht aufhören? Wie soll denn “ausbleiben” was seinem Begriff nach überhaupt nicht “eintreten” kann? Denn kein zeitliches Ereignis, kein fabelhafter “Weltuntergang,” ganz und gar ohne Beziehung zu etwaiigen geschichtlichen, tellurischen oder kosmischen Katastrophen ist das im neuen Testament verkündigte Ende, sondern wirklich das Ende, so sehr das Ende, daß die neunzehnhundert Jahre nicht nur wenig sondern nichts zu bedeuten haben, was seine Nähe oder Ferne betrifft, so sehr das Ende, daß schon Abraham diesen Tag sah und sich freute.127

The proximity of the eschatological end cannot be measured in years or even centuries because the end is not an end in time, for then it would not be an Ende but merely an Abbruch. Rather, the end is a horizon for every present in the mode of dialectical negation. It is the recognition that all Sein has its ground in the Nicht-Sein Gottes. If the relationship to the futurum resurrectionis is understood as “waiting,” it is at the same time a dwelling in a certain remembrance of humanity’s origin in God.

Thus for Barth the end in parousia is not deferred; rather it is the awakening to the shock that every temporal moment is limited by the eschatological end:

126 Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 526.
127 Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 527.
Nicht die Parusie “verzögert” sich, wohl aber unser Erwachen. Erwachten wir, erinnerten wir uns, vollzogen wir den Schritt von der unqualifizierten in die qualifizierte Zeit, erschräken wir vor der Tatsache, daß wir, ob wir wollen oder nicht, an der Grenze aller Zeit, in jedem zeitlichen Augenblick tatsächlich stehen, wagten wir es, an dieser Grenze stehend, den Unbekannten zu lieben, im Ende den Anfang zu erkennen und zu ergreifen, wir würden wahrlich weder mit den Aufgeregten auf irgend ein glänzendes oder schreckliches Finale warten, noch uns mit der geradezu frivolen “Frömmigkeit” der unentwegten Kulturprotestanten des Ausbleibens dieses Finales getrösten.\textsuperscript{128}

Dialectical Theology understands Christianity as the persistence in the crisis posed by eschatology. Or, one might say, it is the internalization of this crisis as a task of persistent wakefulness. The task has an urgency that arises from the realization that the eschatological limit of time concerns each moment of time and hence relentlessly concerns “our” time. It is therefore not without a certain risk: we can only dare to stand before the limit and recognize a beginning in the eschatological end. The eschatological situation, that is, provides no stable ground upon which to stand.

There is no alternative to humanity’s historical entanglement in temporal categories, but there is a qualification of history in which it is constituted by the eschatological limit. This relation takes place as dialectical negation. In the moment of divine judgment, history is finished: “Die Geschichte ist erledigt, sie wird nicht fortgesetzt.”\textsuperscript{129} Yet history itself is the scene in which \textit{Heilsgeschichte} is revealed: “Und gerade der Blick auf Gott den Richter zeigt die einzige positive Beziehung zwischen hier und dort, es zeigt sich in der Erkenntnis der grundsätzlichen Entfernung zwischen Gott und Welt die eine einzige mögliche Gegenwart Gottes ist der Welt.”\textsuperscript{130} For Dialectical Theology, history is the threshold of a relation to the divine; history is limited by the eschatological horizon but in this very way contains its signs and traces. Dialectical Theology’s appropriation of the eschatological idea suspends history and time as

\textsuperscript{128} Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 527–528.
\textsuperscript{129} Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 56.
\textsuperscript{130} Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief: (zweite Fassung), 71.
understood by historicism by predicking these concepts on the perception of the eschatological limit. This, then, is the thrust of Dialectical Theology’s transformation of the concept of history in classical modernism: to approach history by way of its liminal relation to its dialectical opposite. For the very possibilities of historiography then become defined by the tension of the concrete historical moment with its eschatological limit.

The following chapter, which considers the place of eschatology in the work of Franz Rosenzweig, will develop further this concept of history as defined by a state of tension. Yet whereas for Barth and Dialectical Theology the limit that sustains this tension is fundamental, Rosenzweig takes this thought further by considering the possibility of dialectical reversal, whereby the valence of the polarity flips over into its opposite. Here, too, eschatology provides a framework with which the concept of history in modernism is reworked.
CHAPTER TWO

From Beginning to End and End to Beginning: Franz Rosenzweig’s Eschatological Reversal

“Ein Zwischen umkehren heißt sein Hernach zum Zuvor, sein Zuvor zum Hernach, das Ende zum Anfang, den Anfang zum Ende machen. Und das tut das ewige Volk. Es lebt für sich schon so, als ob es alle Welt und die Welt fertig wäre . . . .”131

—Franz Rosenzweig

Franz Rosenzweig’s Der Stern der Erlösung (1921) provides a second perspective—along with the Dialectical Theology of Karl Barth—on how eschatological thought reconfigured historical understanding in German modernism.132 Borrowing freely from both Jewish and Christian sources, Rosenzweig gives a syncretic philosophical account of the unique temporalities of theological concepts such as Schöpfung, Offenbarung, and Erlösung. His work stages a confrontation of time and eternity, history and eschatology, showing both their reciprocal interaction and their irreconcilable tension. For Rosenzweig, the suspension of history between an eternal beginning and end implies that history is not self-sufficient but determined by the relation to its eschatological other. Such an encounter of history with its outside leads Rosenzweig to theorize an alternative set of temporal relations in which the present contains a moment of eternity that exceeds the narrative flow of history. In the final analysis, however, such

131 Franz Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 467.
132 Recent scholarship has drawn attention to Rosenzweig’s encounter with and affinity to the Protestant “theology of crisis,” yet while attention has been drawn to their common anti-historicism, the central place of eschatology in Rosenzweig’s rethinking of history has been neglected. See David N. Myers, Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 69-70. In a similar vein, Peter Gordon notes that: “Rosenzweig shared a great deal with the Protestant crisis-theologians of the 1920s (e.g., Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Friedrich Gogarten).” Cited in: Samuel Moyn, “Is Revelation in the World?” The Jewish Quarterly Review 96.3 (2006), 400.
a moment, which Rosenzweig calls the “today,” exceeds the bounds of the present and points to the “end of the days.” The eschatological constitution of the present moment becomes operative, therefore, through the figure of dialectical reversal, in which the end is transformed into the beginning and the beginning into the end. Rosenzweig’s inversion of temporal sequence stretches historical concepts to their breaking point, submitting them to the energies of eschatological time.

In the wake of such eschatological discourse, historiography becomes a historiography of the present: “das Geschichtliche,” as Rosenzweig puts it, becomes “ganz dichte Gegenwart.”133 The openness of the future, conversely, is anticipated in the present of the eternal moment. In Rosenzweig’s philosophy, eschatology is not just the limit of history but the attempt to reconcile death with eternity. Such eschatological discourse offers a counterpoint to prevailing concepts of time and history: history is conceived as an arc suspended between two eternities rather than as a self-sufficient circle; as a path without a focal point rather than a line of development; as being too limited to hold the energies of eternity rather than following the course of providence towards a telos; and as having a futurity inherent in the eternity of the moment rather than one deferred until an epoch to come. Each of these features of Rosenzweig’s approach to history marks a break with nineteenth-century philosophies of history and their historicist commitments. Rosenzweig’s work therefore provides a second case study of how theological discourse challenged and provided an alternative to the narrative of history in German modernism.

This chapter will analyze Rosenzweig’s reconfiguration of historical concepts in four parts. First, it will explore Rosenzweig’s critique of the closed nature of the Hegelian system, as epitomized in the image of the circle that contains infinity within itself. The motivation for this

133 Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 351–352.
critique, I argue, is to reinstitute a strong sense of the end that is more than just a folding back into the beginning, one that instead has eschatological connotations. Rosenzweig’s counter-image, which draws upon the theological tradition to offer a philosophical alternative, is that of an arc or parabola spanned between a beginning and end. As such, Rosenzweig provides an eschatological model of history that is “open” to infinity, since infinity is “outside” of time rather than contained within it. At the same time, Rosenzweig theorizes a concept of the “standing moment” or “hour” in which eternity is approximated in time. Eschatological time, in the figure of the “end of the days,” provides a common frame of reference in establishing a calendar of time. Yet however much the Jewish calendar anticipates completion, the “qualified moment” cannot contain eternity within itself. Hence the antinomy that structures Rosenzweig’s account of the Jewish people as “outside of history”: as much as the present can anticipate a futural moment of completion, it cannot contain the fulfillment of eternity. The parabolic movement of time therefore breaks out of the cyclical repetition of the calendar year. In this way, Rosenzweig’s account of eschatology criticizes both the linear and cyclical models of history. It carves out a space for the “eschatological now” within time, yet maintains its threshold character in light of the absence of completion in time.

Second, I will analyze Rosenzweig’s account of Christianity as the embodiment of a second concept of eschatological time. Here it is not a matter of constructing a “moment” in history as a “today” in analogy to an eternal moment, but rather of staking out a “path” in history that stands “between” the eternity of a beginning and the eternity of an end. Yet the “before” and

134 David Myers notes that Rosenzweig and Ha-Levi had a “shared belief that the Jewish people operated outside the normal flow of historical events.” Myers, Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought, 74. This observation should be taken further: the extra-historical place of Judaism is not merely a conviction for Rosenzweig, but the result of a subtle reversal of temporal sequence.
“after” that structure such a “between” are themselves not historical; and in this way, the spanning of the arc between eschatological extremes defines a relationship of history and its eschatological other, time and eternity. Rosenzweig’s concept of time as a Strecke between eschatological extremes, I argue, appropriates the image of a line while short-circuiting the notion of linear development, for each point on the line is equally a midpoint in relation to the eschatological extreme. Judaism and Christianity, in Rosenzweig’s argument, represent two orientations of the dialectical tension that sustains history between eschatological beginning and end. Whereas Judaism is defined by a hope for the end that entails the inward rootedness of the self, Christianity’s faith in the beginning results in its outward propagation. Both of these temporal modalities, however, run up against an eschatological limit. That is, each exhausts and consumes itself at the eschatological limit by being confronted with the figure of death. In Rosenzweig’s account, therefore, eschatology marks the incision of the figure of death in the construction of history. This conclusion makes a history of development untenable, for the telos of such a history would negate itself. The tension of history and eschatology, for Rosenzweig, is not to be resolved but rather intensified.

Third, the chapter will excavate the historiographical possibilities implicit in Rosenzweig’s approach to the eschatological limit at which death and eternity are confronted with one another. Rosenzweig rejects the notion of the “last things” as an “otherworldly eternity” insofar as this opens up a chasm between Diesseits and Jenseits that cannot be bridged. Instead, the eschatological limit serves as an optic with which the relationality of temporal moments can be understood. Eschatology prefigures the way in which the moments of creation, revelation, and redemption are contained within one another. Rosenzweig therefore approaches the threshold of the eschatological limit not via the thought of ultimate completion, but through a reversal of the
temporal sequence. Eschatological time enters history through the inversion of beginning and end; the specter of death offers the prospect of a new understanding of life. Insofar as end becomes beginning and beginning becomes end, the constitution of time “between” two eternities is overcome. Eschatological reversal therefore places the limit of history in relation to each present. This new historiographical mode brings to bear the figure of resurrection to invert the temporal sequence of the nineteenth-century understanding of history. The result is a modernist syntax of temporal and historical concepts.

Finally, the chapter will argue that Rosenzweig’s concept of history is eschatological and not messianic. The thesis that the relation to eschatological time places the Jewish people “outside of history” stands in contrast to the messianic idea of an inner-historical future of redemption. By considering Hermann Cohen’s theory of messianism, I will show how Rosenzweig’s eschatological concept of history is determined not by an inner-historical force driving towards a historical period “at the end of the days,” but by a destructive moment that induces a crisis of historical thought. As both Barth and Rosenzweig recognize, a strong sense of the end gives force to history not because its inaccessibility and otherness, but because of the way in which this limit reflects back on historical time. In contrast to the ceaselessly deferred futurity of the messianic age, eschatology focuses the liminal possibilities of the future in a present of ethical action. The resulting historiographical model dispenses with the deferred teleological fulfillment of the messianic or providential narrative of history in favor of an intensified construction of the present.

Hence Rosenzweig’s immersion is eschatological thought, in which the eschatological moment is considered as a gathering and intensification of temporal vectors, provides a key to his reconfiguration of historical understanding in modernism. Theological reflection drives a new
understanding of the temporality of history, for eschatology defines a mode of temporality in which eternity is present in time, even as it lifts humanity “outside of history.” History becomes the scene of eschatological time, even as its suspension between eschatological extremes never gives way to transcendent completion. Historical experience is charged by the tension in which it stands to an eschatological beginning and end, while dialectical reversal lets the “end of the days” function as a starting point for new reflection on history. For Rosenzweig, eschatology is not just a constitutive limit of history, but induces a rigorous revaluation of historical experience.

1.  *Rosenzweig’s Temporal Arc: the Calendar of Eschatological Time*

   Like a perspective on a prism whose vantage point is varied, Franz Rosenzweig’s *Stern der Erlösung* repeatedly stages a confrontation of time and eternity, history and its eschatological other. His work challenges the reader to consider figures (*Gestalten*) of eternity in time and to conceive of eternity in terms of temporal vectors, yet these approximations take place in light of a fundamental difference, never in terms of identity. Rosenzweig’s eschatological reading of history therefore runs counter to German Idealism and the Hegelian tradition, whose pantheism made a claim for the divinity of the world and for the consciousness of the “I” as a cipher for divine subjectivity.\(^{135}\) In Hegel’s philosophy of history, world history embodies the successive stages of the spirit’s progression to its full recognition and consciousness of itself; the divine is thus entirely immanent in the unfolding of the spirit. In Rosenzweig’s characterization of this philosophical perspective, its model is that of a circle whose end is at once its beginning, whose

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\(^{135}\) For an overview of Rosenzweig and Hegel’s competing views on history, see Ulrich Bieberich, *Wenn die Geschichte göttlich wäre: Rosenzweigs Auseinandersetzung mit Hegel* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1990), 44–45.
goal is a return to the origin, a circle that contains infinity within itself. The concept of Being as a sphere or circle, according to Rosenzweig, depends upon a philosophical concept of unity whose consequence is the immanence of eternity in time, the inherence of the infinite within the finite.

Rosenzweig criticizes such an “Einheit der überall in sich selbst zurücklaufenden Kugel” because it has no genuine sense of the end; its seamless folding of the end back into the beginning denies it a true eschatological moment:

Denn was in ihren ersten Anfängen die Philosophie mit naiver Offenheit ausgesprochen hatte, daß sie das “Sein” als Kugel, zum mindesten als Kreis, erkennen wollte, davon blieb sie beherrscht bis an ihren Ausgang in Hegel. Noch Hegels Dialektik glaubt sich selbst rechtfertigen zu können und zu müssen, indem sie in sich selbst zurückführt. . . . Jene Einheit des in sich selber, in den eigenen Anfang Zurücklaufens, die Un-endlichkeit in dem Sinn, daß das Ende sofort wieder sich in den Anfang verwandelt und so nie als Ende greif- und begreifbar wird, jene Einheit lag uns nur an den äußersten Grenzen unsrer Welt.

This passage provides a good example of Rosenzweig’s complicated relationship to Hegel’s philosophy. On the one hand, Der Stern der Erlösung is nurtured by the possibility that the end can become a new beginning, yet on the other hand the concept of the unity of the circle tames the reversal of beginning and end in such a way that there is no proper end. Rosenzweig’s

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137 Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 283.
critique of the circle is not just that it is a speculative unity with little relation to life, but
moreover that its beginning and end are so self-contained that they ultimately disappear in the
infinity encompassed by the circle. For Rosenzweig, by contrast, the eschatological end does not
simply return to the origin, but marks a threshold of death and new life that exceeds the limits of
the circle.

Such a rupture of the unity of the circle, its opening to the outside, implies a different set
of images to describe the relationship of the finite and the infinite. Rosenzweig therefore speaks
of a “sea of infinity” that extends “before” the beginning and “after” the end.\footnote{138} The finitude of
the world, Rosenzweig suggests, is suspended between these two infinities:

Die Welt also, wie sie uns im Steigen zusammenwächst, kreist nicht in sich selbst zurück,
sondern bricht aus dem Unendlichen hervor und taucht wieder ins Unendliche zurück,
beides ein Unendliches außer ihr, dem gegenüber sie selbst ein Endliches ist, während die
Kreislinie oder auch die Kugel das Unendliche in sich selber hatte, ja es selber war, und
also alles scheinbar Endliche in ihr aus ihrer eigenen Unendlichkeit hervorging, in ihrer
eigenen mündete.\footnote{139}

Rosenzweig’s eschatological account of history is encapsulated in the image of an arc spanned
between a beginning and an end, suspended between an origin in the infinite and an end in the
infinite. Yet the world that lies in the middle does not take part in this infinity, for Rosenzweig,
contrary to Hegel, insists on the alterity of history in relation to the infinite.\footnote{140}

\footnotetext[138]{See Rosenzweig, \textit{Der Stern der Erlösung}, 283. A similar metaphorics is at work in Barth’s \textit{Römerbrief}: “Wir sehen dann die \textit{Zeit}, in der wir leben, charakterisiert, als ‘die Zeit des \textit{Jetzt}’, d.h. als das Meer der gegebenen Wirklichkeit, das die submarine Insel des ‘Jetzt’, der göttlichen
Offenbarung, der Wahrheit vollständig überflüet, unter dessen anschaulicher Oberfläche sie aber
nichtsdestoweniger vollständig intakt vorhanden ist.” Karl Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)}, 17. ed., (1922; reprint, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005), 313.}

\footnotetext[139]{Rosenzweig, \textit{Der Stern der Erlösung}, 284.}

\footnotetext[140]{Silvia Richter arrives at a similar conclusion in her discussion of eschatology in the work of Emmanuel Levinas: “The function of eschatology lies exactly in the realization of this
relationship of the same to the other, manifested in the experience of being faced by the other
which relates the Same to a beyond of history: ‘Eschatology institutes a relation with being
beyond the totality or beyond history.’” Silvia Richter, “Language and Eschatology in the Work
according to the image of the arc, bears a relation to the infinite only as to that which is outside of itself. Contrary to Tillich’s image of eternity breaking into time, for Rosenzweig the world breaks forth out of the infinite as its other. Like Dialectical Theology, Rosenzweig articulates a relationship between time and eternity but denies any commensurability or identification between the two. Whereas the cyclical model is fundamentally Hellenic (pantheistic, Hegelian), Rosenzweig’s model of the arc represents a Judeo-Christian eschatological understanding of history.

The potential of this eschatological account of history is that it embodies not a “closed” infinity but rather an “open infinity,” such that the eternity of the beginning and end is “open” to the temporality of the world and the arc it traces. The open infinity of the eschatological model is imperfect or “poor” in comparison to its Idealist counterpart, yet its decentered nature, for Rosenzweig, is at once its virtue:

Um diese nicht in sich zurückgekrümmte, also nach der philosophischen Ansicht grade “schlechte”, Unendlichkeit sichtbar zu machen, deshalb hatten wir die in sich selbst zurückgekrümmte Unendlichkeit des Idealismus zerschlagen müssen; indem wir nämlich an Stelle der durch das Verhältnis eines eignen Punktes zu einem Beziehungspunkte vollständig bestimmten Kreislinie die gegeneinander vereinzelten Punkte setzten, von denen keiner eindeutig als Beziehungspunkt für die anderen gelten konnte, erzwangen wir die Konstruktion der Linie durch diese, ohne daß ein Konstruktionsgesetz eine gedanklich-absolut gültige Beziehung zwischen “jedem beliebigen” Punkte der Linie und einem gemeinsamen Beziehungspunkt setzte; durch eine solche Beziehung, nämlich in der durch sie möglichen Formel, wird ja selbst die an sich “schlechte”, nämlich ungeschlossene Unendlichkeit etwa einer Hyperbel zur “guten”, nämlich eben zur geschlossenen formulierbaren.  

Whereas the circle has a definite center by means of which it can be constructed through a formula, the arc cannot be formulated in advance because it has no common point of reference.

Peter Gordon’s reservations about reading Rosenzweig through Levinas are to be taken seriously, but in this case the comparison helps to emphasize the extent to which Rosenzweig breaks with Hegel’s understanding of the totality of history, as embodied in the figure of the circle. See Peter Eli Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9–12.

Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 284.
(gemeinsamen Beziehungspunkt). The points of the arc are in and of themselves without relation to one another; a line can be constructed through these points, but a center is lacking. Rosenzweig therefore extends his critique of the “closed” infinity of the Idealist circle to any formulaic relation of points on a line, such as that of a parabola. For once a law of construction can be posited by which any arbitrary point on the line can be determined in relation to focal point, the infinity to which the line tends is no longer truly open. The contingency of the arc is decisive for Rosenzweig’s eschatological understanding of history, for it grounds his opposition to a linear, parabolic, or cyclical model of history. The infinity of the eschatological beginning and end defines for Rosenzweig an alterity to which the arc itself is never equal.

Rosenzweig, like Barth, makes use of mathematical metaphors in order to stage a liminal encounter of history with its eschatological other. Each provides an alternative to the totality of the Hegelian circle by pointing to the otherness of eternity. Barth’s circle is constituted not by its center, but by the tangent that borders on the circle without truly touching it. The circle’s relation to infinity is therefore grounded by an instance whose origin is outside of the circle. That there is an “outside” of the circle at all distinguishes Barth’s metaphor from that of Hegel, for whom the circle is a “totality.” Barth’s circle cannot bend back into itself because its “end” is not located on the circle itself, but at the limit at which the circle is touched by a “line” whose origin is radically other. Rosenzweig, by contrast, shatters the unity of the circle and its self-contained focal point. He traces instead a temporal arc suspended between an eternal beginning and eternal end. For both thinkers the contact at the limit takes place by way of an instance from the outside. Each provides a series of metaphors with which the inner-historical dialectic is exposed to its limit, to an instance that cannot be incorporated into the narrative thread of history, one that destabilizes the construction of history through the law of a center.
Rosenzweig, however, is invested in articulating a temporal approximation of eternity in history. The “open” infinity analyzed above contains the possibility that time could be a metaphor for eternity, insofar as it breaks forth out of eternity. The eschatological construction of history, moreover, in contrast to a concept of history determined by inner-historical relations, produces temporal vectors that are interwoven rather than structured in the linear terms of before and after. In short, Rosenzweig pursues the idea of an eschatological constitution of historical time in a more engaged and rigorous manner than Barth, for whom eschatology has a negative relation to history, as its rupture and interruption.

Rosenzweig’s starting point is the dual determination of the theological concepts of creation, revelation, and redemption. On the one hand, he claims, creation is grounded in the past, revelation in the present, and redemption in the future. On the other hand, however, each of these moments is eternal: creation was in the beginning, but continues to be in its beginning in each moment of the present. The futurity of redemption, likewise, is such that it has always been coming since the beginning. The futurity of eternity, Rosenzweig suggests, might take on the form of a “today.” The interwoven nature of temporal moments informs the articulation of an “eternal now” as a temporal, worldly possibility:


At stake is this intricate unfolding of hypothesis upon hypothesis, each of which serves as both a corrective and expansion of what precedes it, is an attempt to reconcile the simultaneous futurity and eternity of the kingdom of God. Barth, as we have seen, considers such a futurum aeternum.

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142 Der Stern der Erlösung, 250.
as lying at the limit of history and time, thus as depending upon a moment of resurrection.

Eternity, for Barth, lies in a certain disjunction with temporality. For Rosenzweig, by contrast, eternity makes itself felt throughout all time; the modes of “immer” and “zukünftig” are brought together in a single thought. The kingdom is already there, yet it is future; therefore it must already be there as that which is coming. The eternity of the kingdom, according to Rosenzweig, becomes present as a present future without ceasing to be futural. Eternity is present in a today, yet it is more than the today and its present. Rosenzweig thus attests to a figure of eschatological time in the present that exceeds the bounds of the present. The result is a concept of history in which past, present, and future implicate and complicate one another.

Rosenzweig’s confrontation of history with eschatological time redefines the understanding of the present moment and its transience. The anticipation of eternity in the form of a “today” qualifies the moment as a “standing moment” or what Rosenzweig calls Stunde. This is Rosenzweig’s solution to the paradox of how to reconcile the “unendliches Nun” of eternity with a temporal moment that is “pfeilschnell verflogen.” The transformation of eternity into time requires a transformation of time itself. The “today” of eternity, according to Rosenzweig, is more than a mere moment but has the permanence of an “hour”:

So muß dieser Augenblick mehr zu seinem Inhalt haben als den bloßen Augenblick. Der Augen-blick zeigt dem Auge, so oft es sich öffnet, immer Neues. Das Neue, das wir suchen, muß ein Nunc stans sein, kein verfliegender also, sondern ein “stehender” Augenblick. Ein solches stehendes Jetzt heißt man zum Unterschied vom Augenblick: Stunde. Die Stunde, weil sie stehend ist, kann in sich selber schon die Vielfältigkeit des Alten und Neuen, den Reichtum der Augenblicke haben; ihr Ende kann wieder in ihren Anfang münden, weil sie eine Mitte, nein viele Augenblicke der Mitte zwischen ihrem Anfang und ihrem Ende hat. Mit Anfang, Mitte und Ende kann sie werden, was die bloße Abfolge einzelner immer neuer Augenblicke nie werden kann: ein in sich zurücklaufender Kreis.

143 See Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 322.
144 Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 322.
Rosenzweig’s *Stunde* is not unlike Barth’s “moment of all moments”: it is inherent in each moment in time and thereby surpasses the passing away of the individual moment. The approximation of eternity in history as *Stunde* appears to restore the figure of the circle that Rosenzweig had criticized in its Idealist formulation. Yet whereas the philosophical tradition up to Hegel had envisioned Being as a circle whose end returns to its beginning, Rosenzweig reserves this image for the temporality of the “hour.” It remains to be seen whether the “hour,” as an approximation of eternity in history, can contain the infinity of eternity, or whether it, too, is sustained in eschatological tension.

For the “hour” is not a speculative concept of natural or objective time but rather a man-made concept that establishes calendrical time as a common frame of reference. Rosenzweig goes on to explain that the world of creation knows nothing of this “hour” that is announced with the chime of a bell, that indeed the hour is an entirely human creation and belongs only to the world of redemption. The very constitution of such an “hour” is a redemption for humanity from the objective concept of time that ceaselessly passes away: “In der Stunde also wird ein Augenblick zum stets, wenn er vergehen sollte, wieder neu Angehenden und also Unvergänglichen, zum Nunc stans, zur Ewigkeit umgeschaffen. Und nach dem Bild der selbstgestifteten Stunde, in welcher der Mensch sich von der Vergänglichkeit des Augenblicks erlässt, schafft er nun die Zeiten um, welche die Schöpfung seinem Leben gesetzt hat.”

The transience of the fleeting moment, in other words, is transformed into the permanence of a cultural calendar that repeats itself. The “eschatological now” at the heart of this “hour,” according to Rosenzweig, does not merely lie at the outer limit of temporality, as it does for Dialectical Theology, but rather has a concrete manifestation in the cultural institutions that

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145 Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 323.
celebrate the repetition of the circle in the holidays of the calendar year: “Nicht der himmlische Kreislauf, sondern die irdische Wiederholung macht diese Zeiten zu Stunden, zu Bürgen der Ewigkeit in der Zeit.” Rosenzweig’s approximation of eternity in history, one might say, is a function of the transformation of natural time into cultural time.

Rosenzweig’s “calendar of eschatological time,” then, suggests that history can manifest or vouch for the presence of eternity in time. This is a prospect that Paul Tillich and Karl Barth were not willing to entertain, as much as they articulated the transformation of historical concepts in their negative relation to eternity. Whereas Tillich proposed the task of making time ready to be taken up into eternity, Rosenzweig is interested in making time ready to take up eternity. Rosenzweig, in other words, proposes a temporalization of eternity in calendrical repetition: “In der alltäglich-allwöchentlich-alljährlichen Wiederholung der Kreise des kultischen Gebets macht der Glaube den Augenblick zur ‘Stunde’, die Zeit aufnahmebereit für die Ewigkeit; und diese, indem sie Aufnahme in der Zeit findet, wird selber – wie Zeit.” The accommodation of eternity in time, according to Rosenzweig, allows time to serve as a metaphor for eternity: “die Ewigkeit ... wird selber – wie Zeit.” Rosenzweig thus approaches the liminal

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146 Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 323.
148 Der Stern der Erlösung, 324.
relation of time and eternity from the opposite direction as Barth, who sees the potential that time might become “like” eternity, that eternity might provide a “Gleichnis” for the temporal moment. Rosenzweig and Barth therefore provide two case studies for the estrangement of history in its relation to eternity. Whereas for Barth the encounter with eternity lifts the temporal moment outside of history and places it in a relation of contemporaneity beyond the historical continuum, for Rosenzweig the temporalization of eternity in calendrical time brings eschatological time into history and thereby suspends the linearity of historical time.

The eschatological “end of the days,” for Rosenzweig, provides the common perspective and framework within which eternity can enter time. For eschatological time is time that is common to all and thereby constitutes the calendar. The common element that unites the divergence of standpoints within the community is the end of all things, the last things:

Denn die Zeit, die er [der Kult] bereitet zum Besuch der Ewigkeit, ist nicht die Zeit des Einzelnen, nicht meine, deine, seine geheime Zeit; sie ist die Zeit Aller. Tag, Woche, Jahr gehören allen gemeinsam. . . . Der Glockenschlag der Stunden kommt zu jedem Ohr. Die Zeiten, die der Kult bereitet, sind keinem eigen ohne alle andern. . . . Dies für alle Gemeinsame, über alle Standpunkte der Einzelnen und die durch die Verschiedenheit dieser Standpunkte bedingte Verschiedenheit der Perspektive hinaus, kann aber nur eines sein: das Ende aller Dinge, die letzten Dinge. Alles was auf dem Wege lieg, würde sich jedem nach dem Ort, wo er steht, anders darstellen, alle Tage haben für jeden nach dem Tag, den er lebt, verschiedenen Inhalt; nur das Ende der Tage ist allen gemeinsam.¹⁴⁹

The last things, the end of the days, Rosenzweig suggests, provide the perspective on a time that is common to all and hence approximates the presence of eternity in history. Since the last things exceed the standpoint of any particular individual and his own personal reckoning of time, eschatological time is the horizon to which the movement of hours, days, months, and years is set. The time that is prepared to take up eternity is therefore eschatological time; it is a time that lives in the hour of the last days and persists in the present futurity of these final days. The calendar of the community, according to Rosenzweig, anticipates eternity by marking the infinite

¹⁴⁹ Der Stern der Erlösung, 325.
repetition of these last days in the rhythm of weeks and years. This communal sense of time brings what is most far away, the last days, into the present as the rhythm and cadence of historical time reconfigured by eschatology.

The implications of such a calendar of eschatological time are far-reaching, for the marking of historical time in relation to the “end of the days” not only provides a place for eternity in time, but moreover lifts the community constituted by such eschatological time outside of history. In articulating this thought, Rosenzweig touches upon in a unique way the problem of the reconstitution of historical experience in German modernism. At the very juncture at which it becomes possible to envision a temporalization of eternity in the calendar of eschatological time, and hence at the point at which historical time is transformed by its encounter with the frame of the “end of the days”—at this very moment at which the theological energies of eternity appear to transfigure and transform history, Rosenzweig suggests that history has been suspended and the entanglement in history overcome. For Rosenzweig, the calendrical relation of the Jewish people to the end of the days amounts to an overcoming of history in history. This distinguishes Rosenzweig’s reconfiguration of historical understanding from that of Dialectical Theology, for which the suspension of history takes place at the limit of historical time, through the interruption of revelation into the historical continuum. For Rosenzweig, by contrast, the encounter of history with its eschatological other has a temporal-historical embodiment even as this embodiment lifts the body outside of history.  

150 David Myers interprets Rosenzweig’s claim that the Jewish people are outside of history as a function of his anti-historicism. My argument builds on this by showing how this suspension of history is a function of an eschatological reconfiguration of historical time. See Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*, 102–103: “Like Hermann Cohen before him, Rosenzweig now saw fit to combat the alliance of land and time, history and nation, historicism and Zionism. The Zionist ambition to restore the Jews to the normal flow of history badly missed the true nature of Judaism. For, as Rosenzweig concluded: ‘The Jewish
The temporality of an eternal present outside of history, according to Rosenzweig, is manifest in the Jewish people and their relation to the law. Inasmuch as this law is the point of reference for their conduct in each moment, he claims, the people is not entangled in history but rather lives in an eternal present. Rosenzweig’s thesis, I argue, should not be read as a statement about the disposition of Judaism as such, but rather as a reflection on the mode of temporality that it makes manifest. In this vein, Rosenzweig claims that the Jewish relation to the law overcomes history by living in an eternal present:

Indem so die heilige Gesetzeslehre – denn beides, Lehre und Gesetz in einem, umschließt der Name Thora – das Volk aus aller Zeit- und Geschichtlichkeit des Lebens heraushebt, nimmt sie ihm auch die Macht über die Zeit. Das jüdische Volk zählt nicht die Jahre einer eigenen Zeitrechnung. Weder die Erinnerung seiner Geschichte noch die Amtszeiten seiner Gesetzgeber dürfen ihm zum Maß der Zeit werden; denn die historische Erinnerung ist kein fester Punkt in der Vergangenheit, der jedes Jahr um ein Jahr vergangener wird, sondern eine immer gleich nahe, eigentlich gar nicht vergangene, sondern ewig gegenwärtige Erinnerung. . . . Die Zeitrechnung des Volkes kann also hier nicht die Rechnung der eigenen Zeit sein; denn es ist zeitlos, es hat keine Zeit.

Rosenzweig gives the *topos* of being lifted out of historicity, which we have seen in Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Barth, a unique spin: for him, the mode of being without time, of being lifted out of the historical continuum, takes place as an eternal present for which the past and future are always close at hand. Rosenzweig’s account of the relation of eternity to the present shares with

spirit breaks through the shackles of time. Because it is eternal and aims for the Eternal, it disregards the omnipotence of time. Indeed, it walks unperturbed through history.”


Barth and his contemporaries a fundamental temporal operation that suspends historicity, yet in his case it is a different set of forces that sets this operation into motion. For Barth, it is the moment of faith that lifts the believer outside of history and places him in a relation of “contemporaneity” with the most distant of times. The historicity of the coming of Christ recedes before the dwelling of the believer in this moment in which a splinter of eternity enters into time.

For Rosenzweig, by contrast, it is the law, and more precisely, the teaching of the law that lifts its people out of all relation to temporality and historicity. Whereas for Christianity the “law” comes to stand for a relation of tradition and a groundedness in the past, for Judaism the law is eminently present in its mode of being; indeed, by being bound to an immutable law, the Jewish people are an eternal people that are not measured by changing historical epochs. This is not to say that the people is without historical consciousness, quite the contrary; it suggests rather that the historical memory of the people is grounded not in a fixed point in the past (say, in the receipt of the law by Moses on Mount Sinai) but moreover in the present of remembering, in which these past events are as near as if they took place yesterday. According to Rosenzweig, the people lives with an “eternally present memory” and yet for just this reason it stands apart from time.153 This is certainly the most controversial aspect of Rosenzweig’s claim: that the Jewish people do not actively take part in the world-historical life of peoples, but rather maintain an everlasting existence “above and beyond” time, not in the eternal afterlife of the individual, but in the endless persistence of the “people” in their relation to the law. At stake is an inner-historical eternity of a people for whom “history” as such is without value. Rosenzweig therefore participates in the deactivation of history characteristic of the 1920s in Germany; yet in contrast to Dialectical Theology, this deactivation takes place for Rosenzweig not by way of a shock of

153 See Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 337: “Und wieder erkauft sich das ewige Volk seine Ewigkeit um den Preis des zeitlichen Lebens.”
eschatological time that exposes the limit of history, but through a stasis of the passing moment as eternal presence.\textsuperscript{154}

Nevertheless, Rosenzweig is cognizant of the limitations of his account of the approximation of eternity in time as the “hour” of an eternal presence. That is, as much as the confrontation of history with eschatological time carves out a space for an extra-historical presence in history, the timelessness of this position is unable to contain the energies of eternity. The “eternal people” that is lifted out of history in the “ganz dichte Gegenwart”\textsuperscript{155} of its relation to the law is thrown back into history insofar as its present cannot fully embody eternity. For the eternal presence of the Jewish people is held in a state of tension by the futurity of the anticipation of eternity. The true engine of the eternal circulation of the Jewish calendar, in which eternity is anticipated in time, according to Rosenzweig, is not the present but the future; the extra-historical constitution of the people is therefore re-inscribed with a temporal impulse:

\begin{quote}
Es war der Kreislauf eines Volkes. Ein Volk war in ihm am Ziel und wußte sich am Ziel. Es hatte für sich den Widerstreit zwischen Schöpfung und Offenbarung aufgehoben. Es lebt in seiner eignen Erlösung. Es hat sich die Ewigkeit vorweggenommen. In dem Kreislauf seines Jahres ist die Zukunft die bewegende Kraft; die kreisende Bewegung entsteht gewissermaßen nicht durch Stoß, sondern durch Zug; die Gegenwart verstreicht, nicht weil die Vergangenheit sie weiterrückt, sondern weil die Zukunft sie heranreißt. In die Erlösung münden irgendwie auch die Feste der Schöpfung und Offenbarung. Daß dann das Bewußtsein der noch unerreichten Erlösung wieder hervorbricht und dadurch der Gedanke der Ewigkeit über den Becher des Augenblicks, in den er schon abgefüllt schien, wieder überschäumt, das gibt dem Jahr die Kraft, wieder von vorne anzufangen und seinen anfangs- und endelosen Ring einzureihen in die lange Kette der Zeiten. Aber das Volk bleibt gleichwohl das ewige Volk. Ihm gilt seine Zeitlichkeit, dies daß die Jahre sich wiederholen, nur als ein Warten, allenfalls als ein Wandern, nicht als ein Wachsen. Wachsen – das würde ja bedeuten, daß die Vollendung ihm in der Zeit noch unerreicht bliebe, und wäre also eine Leugnung seiner Ewigkeit. Denn Ewigkeit ist grade dies, daß
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{154} See Rosenzweig, \textit{Der Stern der Erlösung}, 337: “Ihm [dem ewigen Volk] erstarrt der Augenblick und steht fest zwischen unvermehrbarer Vergangenheit und unbeweglicher Zukunft; so hört der Augenblick auf zu verfliegen.”

\textsuperscript{155} Rosenzweig, \textit{Der Stern der Erlösung}, 352.
These remarks, which Rosenzweig will later give the section heading “Die Völker der Welt. Messianische Politik,” ground the eternity of the eternal people not in the present as such, but in a present that is informed by the energies of the future. One might say that the eternal people is a people grounded in eschatology, insofar as it “lives” its own redemption and is conscious of itself as being at the “end” or “goal.” And yet at the same time one would have to say, in light of Rosenzweig’s subsequent clarification of his thought, that it is a people the lives before the eschatological end, ever on its threshold. For Rosenzweig points to a tension in the temporality of Judaism between living in redemption through the anticipation of eternity, on the one hand, and a “consciousness of an as yet unattained redemption [that] again breaks forth,” on the other. The consequence of this indeterminacy is the threshold character of redemption as manifested in the presence of eternity.

The undecidability of the present or future constitution of redemption calls into question the prospect of eschatological completion. For history, Rosenzweig suggests, is too limited a vessel to contain the fulfillment of eschatological time. Rosenzweig at once entertains and explores the possibilities of the temporalization of eternity and points to the tensions and contradictions that such an encounter of eschatology and history entails. The duality of redemption at hand and redemption yet unattained was constitutive, as we saw in Barth, of the Christian waiting for the return of the Messiah in parousia. A similar consciousness now shows itself in Rosenzweig’s account of the Jewish people: as an eternal people they are already redeemed, already in the midst of redemption, yet as a historical people, a people stranded in time, the redemption that this eternity promises brims over an over-filled cup, escaping their

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156 Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 364–365.
grasp. That is, the cup or chalice of the moment is incapable of containing eternity within itself; it is too limited and finite to contain the measureless, boundless infinity of eternity. There is too much eternity for it to be expressed in the moment, even when this moment stands still in the “Stunde.” Rosenzweig’s image of the chalice of the moment overflowing with eternity thus provides an insightful counterpart to Barth’s discussion of fulfilled time. Whereas Barth points to a movement of Erfüllung that can never be taken as complete in the mode of Erfülltheit, Rosenzweig articulates a fulfillment that exceeds the bounds of the temporal moment. It is therefore not a question, for Rosenzweig, of an impossible completeness, because there is always something left to do, not a matter of a chalice that can never entirely be filled, but rather of a temporality of presence that is too limited to “hold” the energies of eternity with which it might be fulfilled.

The consequence of this deficiency of the temporal moment, in Rosenzweig’s view, is that the Jewish people are cast back into historical time, returned to the linear progression time that passes from year to year. The end of the calendar year marks the threshold of eternity that cannot be crossed, and hence it must return to its origin in a gesture of repetition. Yet for Rosenzweig this disjunction of eternity and the chain of temporal moments does not imply a negation of eternity; on the contrary, it results in a concept of the eschatological now (what Rosenzweig calls “today” or “Heute”) that suspends the temporal gap between the present and the future. In other words, the deficiency of the temporal moment, its inability to contain eternity, suggests for Rosenzweig a concept of eternity that suspends time. Whereas Dialectical Theology envisions humanity “between” time and eternity, Rosenzweig is less willing to dwell in the aporia of such a temporal dualism and holds fast to the eternity of the Jewish people. The mode of “waiting” is therefore merely the temporal form that corresponds to such eternity, the
approximation of its eternal presence in the repetition of the years, in the return of the circulation of the year to the chain of linear time. There is completion or Vollendung for the eternal people, Rosenzweig claims, just not a completion in the mode of temporality. This leads Rosenzweig to a concept of eternity that overcomes the linear concept of time and the deficiency of its present by de-temporalizing the notion of futurity.157 Whereas the concept of eternity was previously described as a “today” that is more than today, as a future that is present without ceasing to be futural, Rosenzweig now delineates the concept of eternity as follows: “Denn Ewigkeit ist grade dies, daß zwischen dem gegenwärtigen Augenblick und der Vollendung keine Zeit mehr Platz beanspruchen darf, sondern im Heute schon alle Zukunft erfaßbar ist.”158 Eternity, for Rosenzweig, is therefore the absence of time between present and future; it is the co-existence of present and future in which the temporal gap that separates them is negated. Such an eschatological perspective destabilizes the relation of present and future without producing their identification. The resulting de-temporalization of historical time is itself a new relation to temporality.

In short, Rosenzweig uses the concept of eschatology to transform the understanding of history and temporality; he places the present in a direct relationship with eschatological

157 This dialectic of the temporalization of theological concepts and the de-temporalization of historical concepts is essential to my interpretation of Rosenzweig. The Rosenzweig scholarship generally falls into two camps: those who emphasize the challenge to the metaphysical tradition in the temporal emphasis of the “new thinking” (Wiehl, Bieberich, and others who approach Rosenzweig from a philosophical perspective), and those who emphasize a resistance to history and historicism in Rosenzweig’s thesis of the “eternal people” “outside of time and history” (Myers, Kaplan, Hollander, and others who approach Rosenzweig from the perspective of Jewish Studies and the history of religion). My claim is that the tension between these opposing perspectives is at the heart of the confrontation that Rosenzweig stages between history and eschatology.

158 Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 365. The notion of “Vollendung” at work here is a thoroughly eschatological notion. However, as I will go on to show in Rosenzweig and later in Bultmann (Chapter 4), the figure of completion is generally articulated in the 1920s in negative terms, in relation to an absence of transcendence.
completion, yet simultaneously de-temporalizes such completion. Eschatological time is therefore a de-temporalized relation to eternity that allows the present to take on a determination outside of the linear structure of time. Like Barth, Rosenzweig recognizes the potential of the present to bear a relation to its eschatological other, even as its temporality can never contain eternity. The figure of completion is the crossroads of this dual determination of the present. For completion, by its very concept, can take place only at the end of time, that end in which time is finally fulfilled, and yet when time is placed in relation to eternity, its end no longer has a temporal index. If completion remains unattained in time, then the historical can have no claim to eternity and would rather be cut off forever from it. Yet completion implies that time has come to an end and is finished, and hence that the end of time is essentially futural. Rosenzweig’s concept of eternity overcomes this difficulty, for he conceives eternity such that there is no deferral of completion into a distant future, such that time cannot insert itself between the present moment and the future of completion. This implies that the present is excerpted out of time and placed in direct relationship to completion, without thereby suggesting that time has come to its terminus. In other words, Rosenzweig grounds eschatology in the present by sublating the linear structure of time. To say that the entirety of the future can be grasped in the “today” is to work with an extra-temporal concept of the present. The eternity of such a present, for Rosenzweig, does not deny temporality as such but rather carves a space for an eschatological now within the chain of linear time.
2. **Eschatological Tension in Judaism and Christianity: the Convergence of Death and Eternity**

Rosenzweig deepens his reflections on eschatological time and its relationship to eternity by complementing his discussion of Judaism and “the eternal people” with a theory of Christianity as the “eternal way.” As above, here too Rosenzweig’s discourse is concerned not with a “Christian” position as such but with the specific temporal dynamic for which Christianity stands in his writing. The figure of Christianity that Rosenzweig generalizes and falsifies has its roots in the nineteenth-century Protestant theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and in Hegel’s philosophy of history. The “eternal way,” which Rosenzweig describes as a historical “path” or “line” (*Strecke*) that extends outwardly following an originary “pulse,” reflects the historicization of Christianity in the wake of Schleiermacher and Hegel. At the same time, Rosenzweig’s account of Christian temporality struggles against the notion of linear development and constructs the “eternal way” in relation to an eschatological limit, thus subverting Schleiermacher and Hegel’s historicization of Christianity. In Rosenzweig’s work, the temporality of the “eternal way” embodies an eschatological arc that breaks open the eternal circle and intensifies the tension of beginning and end. Yet ultimately, Rosenzweig’s transformation of temporal and historical categories depends upon a complex interaction of so-called Christian and Jewish motifs. Each embodies a distinct formulation of the eschatological tension in which death structures the relationship between history and eternity.

The chapter of *Der Stern der Erlösung* entitled “Die Strahlen oder der ewige Weg,” in which Rosenzweig lays out his reading of “Christian” temporality, returns to the eschatological

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159 Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 373–423. This is the second book of the third volume.
problematic by delineating the temporal quality of an event that enters time but has its beginning and end outside of time. In doing so, Rosenzweig steps back from the symbiosis of time and eternity that he had worked out in his reading of Judaism and “the eternal people.” The concepts of the “hour” as a standing moment and of a “today” in which the future is already anticipated in the present, as we saw above, suggested a figure of eternity that nestles itself within the movement of time. The repetition and renewal of the moment in the cycle of the calendar year entailed an eternity that is completely contained within time, one whose beginning and end are temporalized in the mode of presence.\(^{160}\) The event that structures “the eternal way,” by contrast, has a beginning and end that resist temporalization:

>Doch nur deswegen bestimmt der Takt der Zeit alles, was in ihr geschieht, weil die Zeit älter und jünger ist als alles, was geschieht. Wenn ihr ein Geschehn entgegenträtne, das seinen Anfang und sein Ende außer ihr hätte, so könnte der Pulsschlag dieses Geschehens den Stundenschlag der Weltuhr regeln. Solch Geschehen müßte von jenseits der Zeit kommen und in ein Jenseits der Zeit münden. In jeder Gegenwart zwar wäre es in der Zeit, aber weil es sich in seiner Vergangenheit und in seiner Zukunft unabhängig von der Zeit weiß, so fühlt es sich stark gegen sie. Seine Gegenwart steht zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft; der Augenblick aber steht nicht, sondern verfliegt pfeilschnell und ist infolgedessen nie “zwischen” seiner Vergangenheit und seiner Zukunft, sondern ehe er zwischen etwas sein könnte, ist er schon verflogen.\(^{161}\)

\(^{160}\) Gregory Kaplan provides a nuanced summary of Rosenzweig’s reading of Judaism in comparison with Christianity: “Insofar as the Jewish People stand in the present as the actuality (or, from a historical viewpoint, prospective fulfillment) of redemption, their ritual practice stands apart from the ordinary history which Christianity not only inhabits but, even more, conducts. Embodying the telos, Judaism is not so much unhistorical as it is transhistorical: it simultaneously encompasses (as anticipatory) and surpasses (as ulterior) the vicissitudes of temporal change. Rosenzweig’s somewhat priestly account segregates Jewish redemption – “ausserhalb einer kriegerischen Zeitlichkeit” – from the historical alterations and the political vagaries which mark the Christian way to redemption.” Gregory Kaplan, “In the End Shall Christians Become Jews and Jews, Christians? On Franz Rosenzweig's Apocalyptic Eschatology,” Crosscurrents 53.4 (2004), 514. From the point of view of eternity, however, the situation is reversed: Rosenzweig thinks that Judaism articulates the presence of eternity in time, whereas Christianity, as I shall show, casts eternity as the outside or other of historical time, its eschatological beginning and end.

\(^{161}\) Der Stern der Erlösung, 374. An analogy might then be drawn between the Hegelian circle and the Jewish calendar, on the one hand, and the anti-idealistic parabola and the Christian path, on the other.
The event or *Geschehen* conceived here has the temporality of the eschatological arc that Rosenzweig developed in contrast to German Idealism’s circle that contains infinity within itself. It is suspended between an eternal beginning whence it comes and an eternal end towards which it tends. Since the event is not “contained” within time, the rhythm of historical time has no power over it. Indeed, to the contrary, Rosenzweig suggests that the “heartbeat” or *Pulsschlag* of such an event, precisely insofar as its past and future are independent of time, has a world-historical intensity whose pulse provides a measure for historical time. Rosenzweig may well have Schleiermacher’s concept of the inner-historical force of the figure of Christ in mind in this discussion; yet his claim that the present of the event stands “between” past and future in a more emphatic sense than the fleeting moment also resonates with Dialectical Theology’s postulation of humanity as “zwischen den Zeiten.”

The temporality of the “eternal way” is a radical revision of the way that historical time is conceived in terms of past, present, and future. In the historiography of world history, past epochs are preceded and succeeded by other eras, such that one can delineate points in time that structure relations of before, between, and after. At stake in “Christian” temporality, by contrast, is a “between” on a different scale. In this temporality, the entirety of time is conceived as a present, a present set off not by a before and after of historical time, but by a before and after in eternity:

Sollte auch die Gegenwart also zur Freiherrin der Zeit erhoben werden, so müßte auch sie ein Zwischen sein; die Gegenwart müßte epoche-machend werden, jede Gegenwart. Und die Zeit als Ganze müßte Stunde werden, – diese Zeitlichkeit; und als solche eingespannt in die Ewigkeit; die Ewigkeit ihr Anfang, die Ewigkeit ihr Ende, und alle Zeit nur das Zwischen zwischen jenem Anfang und jenem Ende.

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163 Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 375.
In this remarkable figure of temporality, the entirety of historical time is thought of as a moment of “presence,” one for which the true past and future lie not within time but in eternity. Time is thought to be held in tension between two eternities, an eternity of the beginning (creation) and an eternity of the end (redemption). The entirety of time between the coming of Christ and his return in the moment of *parousia* is thus conceived as a single epoch, *Christuszeit*, the historical past and historical future nothing more than aspects of this extended presence “between the times.”  

This understanding of temporality has implications for the concept of eschatology, for it displaces the end from its position as a terminal point in time and places it in direct relation to the present at each moment. Extending his spatial representation of the temporality of the “eternal way,” Rosenzweig stretches the limits of the imagination of this space by proposing that each point in time is equally near to the beginning and end and hence a midpoint:

> Die Zeit ist nun bloße Zeitlichkeit. Als solche ist sie von jedem ihrer Punkte aus ganz zu übersehen; denn jedem ihrer Punkte ist Anfang und Ende gleich nah; die Zeit ist ein einziger Weg geworden, aber ein Weg, dessen Anfang und Ende jenseits der Zeit liegt, und also ein ewiger Weg; während auf Wegen, die aus Zeit in Zeit führen, immer nur ein nächstes Stück zu übersehen ist. Auf dem ewigen Wege wiederum ist, weil doch Anfang und Ende gleich nah sind, einerlei wie die Zeit auch vorrückt, jeder Punkt Mittelpunkt.  

The metaphor of the “way” or “path” suggests that the points that constitute the “way” precede and succeed one another, and yet their relation to the beginning and end does not have such a temporal determination. For the beginning and end, in Rosenzweig’s image, are not themselves of the order of the points in time. By being fixed between two eternities, time is devalued, undergoes no development, and becomes “mere temporality.” For Rosenzweig, time is an arc

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165 Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 375–376.
spanned between two eschatological extremes, but this arc has no high point or climax. The
climax is rather the event by which time enters into this relationship with eternity, the event that
transforms the beginning and the end into eternal beginnings and ends and no longer temporal
ones. In such a climatic event the notches that are struck into time (“Kerben in die Zeit schlagen,”
in Rosenzweig’s suggestive formulation166) strike so deep that there is no time between the
present and the eternal beginning and eternal end.

In this way, Rosenzweig’s eschatological reading of “Christian” temporality calls into
question a model of history based on linear development. By emphasizing the proximity of each
moment to the eschatological beginning and end, Rosenzweig anticipates the Dialectical
Theology of Karl Barth. For Rosenzweig, too, the eschatological limit does not mark a horizon
that looms in the distance, but is equally near to each moment of the “eternal path”: “Beide,
Anfang und Ende, sind ihm [dem Christ] in jedem Augenblick gleich nah, weil beide im Ewigen
sind; und nur dadurch weiß er sich in jedem Augenblick als Mittelpunkt. Als Mittelpunkt nicht
eines Horizonts, den er übersieht, sondern als Mittelpunkt einer Strecke, die aus lauter
Mittelpunkt besteht, ja die ganz Mitte, ganz Zwischen, ganz Weg ist.”167 The line (Strecke) that
defines this path, however, has a peculiar non-linear character, since the path itself is not in
motion but rather defined by a kind of stasis. Since each point on the line is equally a midpoint,
there is no development but rather a single moment of presence. In Rosenzweig’s account,
“Christian” temporality pushes the temporal moments of past, present, and future to their limit in
eternity: “Die drei Zeiten der Zeit sind so auseinandergetreten in ewigen Anfang, ewige Mitte,
ewiges Ende des ewigen Wegs durch diese Zeitlichkeit.”168

166 Der Stern der Erlösung, 375.
167 Der Stern der Erlösung, 376–377.
168 Der Stern der Erlösung, 377.
Rosenzweig’s figuration of the temporalities of Judaism and Christianity, however much they are generalizations and indeed highly idiosyncratic interpretations, point to two different ways of articulating a fundamental eschatological tension. Rosenzweig’s reading of the underlying temporalities of these religious traditions, in other words, provides insight into his eschatological reading of history and more generally into his stake in the debate about historical understanding in the 1920s in Germany. This eschatological reading of history depends upon a polarity of beginning and end sustained by the common frame of the “end of the days.” Both the temporality of the “eternal people” and that of the “eternal way,” accordingly, are held in tension between two eternities. As we saw above, this sense of being “between” two eternities is constitutive of “Christian” temporality. Yet “Jewish” temporality is equally between beginning and end so long as the chalice of its eternal life again and again overflows and requires that the calendar year begin anew. There is, however, a considerable difference in how “Jewish” and “Christian” temporality respond to this tension and how they orient themselves in relation to the eternities of beginning and end. On the basis of an analysis of yearly holidays and weekly Sabbath days, Rosenzweig concludes that “Judaism” is oriented primarily towards the end, while “Christianity” draws its strength from the beginning:

Zuletzt drängt so jene Spannung von Anfang und Ende [beim Judentum] doch wieder gewaltig hin zum Ende; obwohl sie als Spannung nur aus beiden entsteht, sammelt sie sich schließlich doch an einem Punkt, eben am Ende. . . . Und wie jene Spannung zuletzt sich doch ganz ins Ende zusammenballt, auf den spätesten Sproß zuletzt, den Messias, den wir erwarten, so bleibt auch die christliche Sammlung im Mittelpunkt schließlich doch nicht dort haften. Wohl mag der Christ Christus im Bruder erblicken, zuletzt treibt es ihn doch über den Bruder hinaus unmittelbar zu ihm selbst. Obwohl die Mitte nur Mitte ist zwischen Anfang und Ende, schiebt sich ihr Schwergewicht dennoch hinüber auf den Anfang. Der Mensch tritt unmittelbar unter das Kreuz . . . . Denn das Kreuz ist ja, obwohl noch zum ewigen Anfang des Wegs gehörig, doch schon nicht mehr der erste Anfang, es ist selber schon auf dem Wege, und so steht, wer unter es getreten ist, in der Mitte und im Anfang zugleich. So drängt sich das christliche Bewußtsein, ganz versenkt in Glauben, hin zum Anfang des Wegs, zum ersten Christen, zum Gekreuzigten, wie das
Rosenzweig’s typology, I would argue, is heuristic in nature: it functions not as a means of defining the essence of the two contrasting religious traditions, but rather to isolate the varying potentials of the eschatological tension of beginning and end. If time is considered as suspended between a beginning and an end, as an arc stretching between two eternities, then these poles may be thought of as sustaining a dialectical tension that can be focused on either pole. The image of the circle that marks the repetition of the Jewish calendar, for example, is “bent” by the eschatological tension into the shape of an arc and becomes oriented in relation to the polarity of the end. That the end finds its way back to the beginning in the repetition of the calendar year is not so much a release of this tension as a renewal of its intensification. In Rosenzweig’s eschatological account of history, therefore, there is never a resolution of the tension of beginning and end, but rather an intensified gathering at one pole or the other, such that the energies of the tension are concentrated in a single pole.

This concentration of the eschatological tension either towards the beginning or towards the end, however, does not negate the opposite pole. Rather, the beginning is taken up in the end, and vice versa. Rosenzweig is not explicit on this point, but his remarks above suggest that for Judaism the “end” is invested with the energies of the beginning, such that the potential of creation is transferred, as it were, to the figure of the Messiah who is awaited. Conversely, insofar as the Christian “midpoint” is oriented towards a concentration in the dialectical pole of the beginning, the distance between beginning and end recedes. If the midpoint is infinitely close

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169 Der Stern der Erlösung, 385–386. See also Der Stern der Erlösung, 399: “Wir erkannten, mit welcher Kraft das christliche Bewußtsein von der Mitte des Wegs, auf der es steht, hin zum Anfang drängte. Das Kreuz ist immer Anfang, immer Ausgangspunkt der Koordinaten der Welt. Wie die christliche Zeitrechnung dort anfängt, so nimmt auch der Glaube von dort immer neuen Anlauf. Der Christ ist ewiger Anfänger; das Vollenden ist nicht seine Sache; jeder Christ lebt sein Christentum eigentlich noch heutigen Tags, als wäre er der erste.”
to the beginning, it is, by the same token, infinitely close to the end. Hence by drawing its energy from the beginning, “Christian” temporality stands all the more in relation to the end, just that it is “pushed” towards the end, rather than being “pulled” by the end, as Rosenzweig claims is the case for “Jewish” temporality.170

Rosenzweig’s thesis that Christianity is directed towards the beginning suggests, on the one hand, that the nineteenth-century theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher may have been his most important source for his reading of “Christian” temporality, yet his dialectical formulation of the matter also anticipates Karl Barth’s theology.171 Schleiermacher famously prioritized the originary force of the historical impulse of Christ, which perpetuates itself across history via charismatic radiance, while the eschatological problem of the end played little role in his theology.172 Rosenzweig’s attention to the world-historical impact of Christianity, moreover, suggests that a nineteenth-century philosophy of history may be behind his characterization of

170 See Rosenzweig, Der Stern der Erlösung, 364.
171 Of course, Rosenzweig could not have read Barth’s Römerbrief when he wrote Der Stern der Erlösung, since he composed his work during the First World War from the Front. A letter from Rosenzweig to Siegfried Kracauer dated 5 June 1923 suggests that Rosenzweig was skeptical of Barth’s work: “Dass also Gott kein Mensch und der Mensch kein Gott ist, sagt so wenig etwas gegen beide, dass es vielmehr die ‘Beziehung’ erst möglich macht, jedenfalls die absolute Beziehung. Und das Menschliche, unsre Schönheit, unser Gutseinwollen, unser Erkennen, unser Schaffen wird wahrhaftig nicht dadurch entwertet, dass es menschlich ist. Gott greift doch nicht als ein ‘fremder Gott in diese Welt ein, – wäre es so, dann wäre es freilich zum Verzweifeln oder zum Professor-für-reformierte-Theologie-in-Göttingen-werden, – sondern in seine Welt, in seine Schöpfung.” Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, A: Kracauer; Briefe an ihn von Rosenzweig, Franz; Zugangsnummer 72.2894/3-5. Despite their differing conceptions of God, however, Rosenzweig and Barth address the problem of history in similar ways. This convergence of interest in the eschatological constitution of temporality across confessional boundaries underscores the wider cultural significance of the problem.
“Christian” temporality. And indeed, at first glance it is not clear how the primacy of the beginning in the “eternal way” can account for a position like that of Karl Barth, for whom faith in revelation is paired with a hope for a fulfillment at the end of time, one that is awaited without expectation. Nevertheless, in a subtle way, Rosenzweig’s typology does help to illuminate the temporal dynamics at play in Barth’s work. “Waiting without expectation,” for Barth, is rooted in the present and has revolutionary force insofar as this stance is initiated again and again. Similarly, in *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, Barth claims that the end of time, as a limit phenomenon, is at once the origin of time, such that *Endgeschichte* becomes *Urgeschichte*. Even in the most intense encounter with the eschatological thought of the last things, “Christian” temporality is brought back to a sense of beginning and creation from out of this end. Rosenzweig’s claim that “Christian” temporality is focused on the beginning sheds light on the way in which the end, for Dialectical Theology, is transformed into an originary moment.

Rosenzweig’s comparative analysis of “Christian” and “Jewish” temporality, I argue, reveals two modalities with which the problem of the eschatological limit can be approached. In order to show this, Rosenzweig provides a further spatial delimitation of these temporalities. Judaism’s hope for the end is accompanied by an inward rootedness of the self, he claims, whereas Christianity’s faith in the beginning implies an outward propagation or expansion: “Verwurzelung ins tiefste Selbst, das war das Geheimnis der Ewigkeit des Volkes gewesen. Ausbreitung durch alles Außen hin – das ist das Geheimnis der Ewigkeit des Wegs.”

The notion of “Ausbreitung durch alles Außen hin” recalls the concept of charisma and again seems to strike a chord with Schleiermacher’s account of Christianity’s historical impulse. However, Rosenzweig’s subsequent remarks confront such endless outward propagation with the boundary

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173 *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 386.
of the eschatological limit. In posing the question of the limit, Rosenzweig, like Barth, put his finger on an approach to the problem of history characteristic of the early 1920s. For the eschatological limit, in Rosenzweig’s reading, is that limit that structures temporality insofar as it resists historicization:

Ausbreitung ins Draußen, und nicht so weit als möglich, sondern, ob möglich oder unmöglich, Ausbreitung in alles, schlechthin alles Außen, das also dann auch in der jeweiligen Gegenwart höchstens ein Noch-Außen sein kann, – wenn es so unbedingt, so grenzenlos gemeint ist mit dieser Ausbreitung, dann gilt offenbar auch für sie, was für die jüdische Verwurzelung ins eigne Innerste galt: daß nichts mehr als Gegensätzliches draußen stehen bleiben darf. Sondern auch hier müssen alle Gegensätze irgendwie in die eignen Grenzen hineingezogen werden. Aber eben Grenzen, wie sie das in sich selber sich verwurzelnde eigne Selbst wohl hatte, sind dieser Ausbreitung ins Außen ganz fremd, ja undenkbar, – wo soll das Grenzenlose, alle Grenzen immer wieder Sprengende Grenzen haben! Es selbst, die Ausbreitung, freilich nicht; wohl aber mag jenes Außen, in das die Ausbreitung geschieht, Grenzen haben: die Grenzen des All. Diese Grenzen aber werden nicht in der Gegenwart und auch in keiner zukünftigen Gegenwart erreicht, – denn die Ewigkeit kann heute und morgen hereinbrechen, aber nicht übermorgen, und die Zukunft ist immer bloß übermorgen.174

This passage is all the more remarkable for the way in which a seemingly infinite sense of limitlessness, one intent upon bursting all boundaries, this outward-directed opening of the self suddenly hits upon a limit that it is unable to surpass: the limit of the All. The opening of the self to its other in the figure of expansion into the outside might be thought of in terms of the Christian concept of love as agápē. Such love itself has no limit, nothing to dampen the passion with which it propagates itself. The boundlessness of its spatial expansion is such that it perpetually exceeds itself and explodes its own limit. The expansiveness of the temporality of the “eternal way,” in other words, is such that it ceaselessly incorporates everything outside of itself—even that which contradicts it—into its self.

Yet the limit of the All is a limit in a special sense: according to Rosenzweig it is a limit “that can be reached neither in the present nor in any future present.” At stake, then, I think it is

174 Der Stern der Erlösung, 386.
fair to say, is the eschatological limit. The limit that cannot be incorporated into the expansiveness of the temporality of the “eternal way,” in other words, is the limit of history itself, that which is outside of history and cannot be approximated in history. Rosenzweig gives the eschatological limit an even more emphatic formulation than Barth, a more binding and definitive necessity, since it is a limit that cannot be broached even by a boundless expansive force that otherwise explodes all boundaries. Rosenzweig stages the eschatological limit as the limit of all limits: it is the limit that remains even when all other limits are subsumed by the boundless force of the temporality of the “eternal way.” In Rosenzweig’s work, eschatology is the dialectic of history its other, with an other that cannot be synthesized or reincorporated into historical thought.

Hence, as much as “Jewish” and “Christian” figures of temporality articulate an interplay of time and eternity, suggesting that eternity has a temporal manifestation and that time partakes of eternity, there is nevertheless a remainder that does not permit temporalization and historicization.\(^{175}\) The eschatological limit, that is, cannot be reached even through the presence of eternity in time, neither via the “eternal way,” nor by the “eternal people.” For the eschatological limit resists the most persistent force of historicization. This is the sense of Rosenzweig’s remark cited above: “Diese Grenzen aber werden nicht in der Gegenwart und auch in keiner zukünftigen Gegenwart erreicht, – denn die Ewigkeit kann heute und morgen hereinbrechen, aber nicht übermorgen, und die Zukunft ist immer bloß übermorgen.” The eschatological limit cannot be reached by Christianity’s “eternal way,” according to Rosenzweig,\(^{175}\)

\(^{175}\) This distinguishes my interpretation from common readings of Rosenzweig, for example, that of Reiner Wiehl, who claims that for Rosenzweig’s “new thinking” “das Ewige im Zeitlichen und das Zeitliche im Ewigen sei.” See Zeitwelten: philosophisches Denken an den Rändern von Natur und Geschichte, 183. Wiehl’s interpretation misses Rosenzweig’s attention to the constitutive (eschatological) limit of thinking of eternity in temporal terms.
because it partakes of eternity in the mode of presence, and even the past and the future are
subsumed in such presence. The eschatological limit, however, exceeds the present and therefore
cannot be approached even in eternity. Such a limit that cannot be reached in the present, nor in a
future present, is a limit of eternity. “Christian” temporality runs up against a limit in a future that
cannot be grasped as presence: the last things, the end of the days, represent that limit that not
even eternity can broach.\footnote{A similar insight is at work in Karl Barth’s concept of a futurum aeternum: such a future can never be made into a present, even under the condition that the present is graced by an eternity that breaks into time in a moment of kairos.}

In Rosenzweig’s work, as I have argued, “Jewish” and “Christian” temporalities
approach the eschatological tension of beginning and end with different emphases: Christianity is
driven by an eternal beginning and dwells in the present of revelation, while Judaism is
motivated by a confidence in a messianic future and is therefore characterized by its hope for
redemption.\footnote{See Der Stern der Erlösung, 404: “Wie denn wirklich die im Sakrament erlebte und
genossene Gegenwart Christi ja für den Christen infolge seines auf Wegmitte und Weganfang
gerichteten Glaubens Ähnliches bedeutet, wie uns die gewisse Zuversicht der trotz alles Verzugs
bevorstehenden Zukunft des Messias und seines Reichs. So wie unser ganzer Gottesdienst, auch
wo er der Erinnerung von Schöpfung und Offenbarung geweiht ist, dennoch ganz durchsetzt ist
von dem Erhoffen und Erharren der Erlösung, so der christliche ganz vom Gedanken und
gegenwärtigen Gefühl der Offenbarung.”} Yet in the final analysis, Rosenzweig overcomes this typology and shows how its
elements in fact exist in a state of mutual relation and dependence. The ultimate perspective from
which such a dependency of temporal moments upon one another can be grasped is an “end” that
surpasses any end that might be associated with a messianic future. In the final book of Der Stern
der Erlösung, Rosenzweig introduces a vantage point from which the opposition of
Christianity’s outward-directed path, gathered in a present that repeats the beginning, and
Judaism’s inward-directed life, focused always on an imminent messianic future, is finally
overcome. These modalities exhaust themselves in “die Wahrheit,” and the truth, according to
Rosenzweig, has an eschatological figure. From the perspective of the eschatological limit discussed above, “Jewish” and “Christian” temporalities converge and their polarity dwindles. In order to develop this argument, Rosenzweig considers an eschatology of a second order, not merely as an eternal end, which, together with an eternal beginning, sustains time in the tension opened up between them, but now as the end of all ends.\textsuperscript{178}

In a section entitled “Die Gestalt der Bewährung: Eschatologie,” Rosenzweig traces the eternal nature of the Christian path and Jewish life to the point where they can go no further, where they confront the figure of \textit{death} despite their eternity:

Die Strahlen des Sterns, die also nach außen brechen, das Feuer, das nach innen glüht, – beide rasten nicht, ehe sie nicht ans Ende, ans Äußerste, ans Innerste gekommen sind. Beide ziehen Alles ein in den Kreis, den ihre Wirksamkeit erfüllt. Doch die Strahlen, indem sie sich im Außen teilen, zerstreuen, getrennte Wege gehn, die sich erst jenseits des ganz durchmessenen äußern Raums der Vorwelt wieder einen; das Feuer aber, indem es im zuckenden Spiel seiner Flamme die reiche Mannigfältigkeit des Daseins zu Gegensätzen des inneren Lebens in sich selbst sammelt und versammelt; Gegensätze, die gleichfalls ihre Einung erst finden dort, wo die Flamme erlöschen mag, weil die ausgeglühte Welt ihr keinen Brennstoff mehr beut und das züngelnde Leben der Flamme erstirbt in dem, was mehr ist als menschlich-weltliches Leben: das göttliche Leben der Wahrheit. Denn um diese, die Wahrheit, geht es uns hier, nicht mehr um die Spaltung des Wegs in der sichtbaren Welt, nicht mehr um die innere Gegensätzlichkeit des Lebens. Die Wahrheit aber erscheint immer erst am Ende. Das Ende ist ihr Ort. Sie gilt uns nicht für gegeben, sie gilt uns für Ergebnis. Denn uns ist sie Ganzes, nur Gott wird sie zuteil. Für ihn ist sie nicht Ergebnis, sondern gegeben, nämlich von ihm gegeben, Gabe. Wir aber schauen sie immer erst am Ende. So müssen wir jetzt jene Spaltung wie diese Gegensätzlichkeit bis zum Ende begleiten und dürfen uns nicht mehr zufrieden geben bei dem, was uns zuvor auf unserer Fahrt des Erfahrens begegnete, das Leben und der Weg.\textsuperscript{179}

The “truth” of the “eternal way” of Christianity (or: \textit{die Strahlen}) and of the “eternal people” of Judaism (or: \textit{das Feuer}), Rosenzweig suggests, arises only from the perspective of their ultimate end, in the figure of death. These temporalities, moreover, are driven ineluctably

\textsuperscript{178} There is a structural analogy between Rosenzweig’s treatment of eschatological figure of truth and Karl Barth’s discussion of \textit{parousia}. As I argued in Chapter 1, for Barth, \textit{parousia} entails an eschatological monism that figures an unrealized actuality at the heart of all potentiality in eschatological dualism, that is, of eschatology in its relation to time.

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Der Stern der Erlösung}, 442–443.
towards the end; they find no rest until they have arrived at their limit. The ultimate end, as a figure of death, betrays the finitude of these temporalities, yet it also offers them a unity in negation, a unity beyond all division and contradiction.

The approach to the eschatological end, of course, has a different quality and texture for Christianity and Judaism, yet they meet at this limit: the metaphors of radiance (Strahlen) and fire (Feuer), the two dimensions of the star of redemption, exhaust and consume themselves so that the Star can emerge as the eschatological figure par excellence. The temporalities of radiance and fire, according to Rosenzweig, are each constituted in relation to an end at the extreme, whether it be an outermost or an innermost extreme, and they take no rest until they reach this end. In doing so, however, they each break apart, precisely because they leave no ground uncovered: the radiance disperses, splits apart into separate ways, and thus finds no unity in the externality of space; whereas the fire collects and pulls together the diversity of life, holding together its contradictions. These contradictions can be united only when the flame itself extinguishes. The final dispersion of the radiance and the dying down of the fire therefore stand for that end in which the divided is unified. This eschatological end, embodying the metaphorical space of death by exhaustion and consummation, is for Rosenzweig “the divine life of truth.”

Such truth, however, is not given, but can be glimpsed only by following the splitting of the path and the contradictions of life to their death at the limit.

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180 The figuration of “the divine life of truth,” it is worth observing, depends very much on the concept of resurrection, although Rosenzweig does not refer to the concept. I will take up the question of resurrection further in the following section.

181 Commentators interested in Rosenzweig’s so-called “dual-covenant theology” often claim that Judaism and Christianity will be united at the “end of time.” The problem with this interpretation is that it depends upon a temporalized notion of eschatology as the terminus of history, whereas the metaphors surrounding Rosenzweig’s metaphor of the star are spatial. My claim is that Rosenzweig’s concept of the “end” is liminal rather than teleological. The tendency to project the “end of time” into the future, however, is pervasive. See, for example, Jacob
In conceptualizing the figure of the star as an *eschatological end*, Rosenzweig takes leave of his prior distinction between Christianity as eternal beginning and Judaism as eternal end. He now shows that both of these temporalities are determined by and end of a different kind, not an eternal end but an eschatological end. The tendency towards the extreme (*eschaton*) unites these two modalities, despite the divergent directions from which they approach it. In his discussion of the eternal beginning and eternal end, Rosenzweig could still take the temporal moments of past, present, and future as analogical forms, yet the figure of the star points to an end that marks the limit of all temporal categories, even those of eternal beginning and eternal end. Eschatology thus marks the incision of the figure of death into the temporal/non-temporal constitution of eternity. This question of how *death* can be reconciled with *eternity* is at the heart of Rosenzweig’s interest in eschatology.

3. *Eschatology as History: Rosenzweig’s Dialectical Reversal of Beginning and End*

The preceding section worked out Rosenzweig’s concept of the eschatological tension of beginning and end, and showed how both “Jewish” and “Christian” temporalities, despite their differing polarities, are each determined by an eschatological limit in which death and eternity

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are confronted with one another. Yet in considering an eschatological end that marks the outermost limit of temporality, the question arises as to what kind of relation this end could possibly have to history. Rosenzweig, I argue, is aware of this difficulty and criticizes the notion of the “last things” as an “otherworldly eternity” insofar as this opens up a chasm between Diesseits and Jenseits that cannot be bridged. In order to restore the proximity of the eschatological limit to historical time, Rosenzweig approaches the limit through a reversal of temporal sequence. Eschatological time enters history, he claims, through the inversion of beginning and end. This figure of eschatological reversal, in which the end becomes a beginning and the beginning an end, depends upon a concept of resurrection, one in which the relation to death guides a new approach to historical life. Eschatology offers a key to Rosenzweig’s transformation of historical understanding in German modernism, for it offers an optics through which the relationality of temporal moments can be rethought.

For Rosenzweig, the problem that eschatological end might be inaccessible to historical time because it depends on otherworldly completion forms the basis of his critique of a certain understanding of Christianity. In Judaism, Rosenzweig claims, death and eternity converge in Erlösung, that is, in a redemption that fulfills the law. Such redemption is thought of as the unification of all contradictions, hence the image of a fire that pulls together the contradictions of life with such intensity that it consumes itself. The Trinitarian nature of Christianity, however, is unable to achieve the unity of the One implicit in the Jewish notion of redemption, Rosenzweig suggests:

If one follows the “radiance” of Christianity to its extreme, one arrives not at a single unity, but rather at three separate end points, those of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This may be a necessary consequence of the division of the radiance in its outward path. In Rosenzweig’s view, however, these three end points, these three configurations of the divine cannot be brought into relation to one another; the extremes are un-joined, the bridge between them is lacking.

According to Rosenzweig, the attempt to account for the unity of the divine in Christian theology is fraught, for it defers the inception of such unity into a distant future and depicts it as otherworldly completion, thereby opening up an unbridgeable chasm between time and eternity, history and eschatology. The connection that might establish the unity of the divine in Christian theology, for Rosenzweig, is but a “theologumenon,” a mere thought without substance. The locus of such unity is the thought of the “last things” that one finds in Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15), and it is here that Rosenzweig’s critique of a certain form of Christianity and its concept of eschatology reaches its apex:


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182 Der Stern der Erlösung, 457.
183 Rosenzweig dismisses the notion that the Holy Spirit might serve as a mediating instance between the Father and the Son. In his view, this possibility depends on a mythological image of the Spirit that remains just that: “Bild” but not a true unity of feeling. See Der Stern der Erlösung, 458.
184 This is the same chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians, it is worth nothing, that plays a central role in Karl Barth’s Die Auferstehung der Toten, which I discuss in Chapter 1.
Brücke, auf der sich das Gefühl von einen zum andern Ufer hin und her bewegte, war er nicht und konnte er nicht sein. Dazu waren die beiden Ufer zu ungleich gestaltet, jenes zu sehr nur zeitlich, dieses zu sehr nur ewig.¹⁸⁵

The point here is not whether or not Rosenzweig’s critique of Christianity is accurate or persuasive. Rather, this passage is significant because of what it tells us about Rosenzweig’s own take on eschatology. He criticizes a concept eschatology in which the “last things” have no influence on or relation to time, one in which eschatology describes an “entirely otherworldly eternity.” In other words, Rosenzweig rejects any theory of eschatology that maintains a strict separation of Diesseits and Jenseits, time and eternity. His own interest in eschatology concerns precisely the ways in which eschatology has an impact on history and its temporality; like Dialectical Theology, Rosenzweig is interested in the way that eschatology informs the immanence of history, not in its representation of transcendent completion.¹⁸⁶

Rosenzweig’s criticism can be readily mapped onto the contrasting positions of Jewish messianism and Christian eschatology, and indeed this opposition informs the usual reading of Rosenzweig as a proponent of messianism.¹⁸⁷ Messianic thought generally rejects eschatology insofar as it opens up too wide a chasm between Diesseits and Jenseits and accordingly locates all possibility of actualized fulfillment in another world that is inaccessible to humanity.

According to this perspective, eschatology is merely a thought with neither reality nor the

¹⁸⁵ Der Stern der Erlösung, 458.
¹⁸⁶ As much as eschatology enacts a crisis of history by representing its limit, it also informs a new understanding of history. The decisive point for Rosenzweig is to articulate a relationship and tension between eschatology and history. Peter Gordon reaches a similar conclusion about Rosenzweig’s interest in history in terms of his concept of revelation: “Revelation, Rosenzweig concludes, thus finds its highest ‘certainty’ not as a phenomenon incommensurable with history, but rather, precisely ‘in’ our Geschichtlichkeit, or ‘historicity.’ This is an intriguing claim, and it is evidence of a thinker who can abandon neither religious transcendence nor the historicist doctrine that threatens to dissolve it.” Cited in Samuel Moyn, “Is Revelation in the World?” The Jewish Quarterly Review 96.3 (2006), 401.
¹⁸⁷ Dana Hollander, for example, refers to the “messianic philosophy of history that is suggested by Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption and related writings.” See “On the Significance of the Messianic Idea in Rosenzweig.” Cross Currents (2004): 556.
potential to become reality one day. The messianic idea, by contrast, concerns a projected future
that, however much it is deferred, is an emphatically inner-historical future for a redeemed
humanity.\textsuperscript{188} The contrast is therefore between an eschatological disjunction of time and eternity
so great that no bridge can connect them, on the one hand, and a messianic conjunction of time
and eternity that promises redemption in a historical future, on the other.

My claim, however, is that Rosenzweig’s work cannot be fit so easily into this schema.
Rosenzweig supports neither the narrative of otherworldly eschatological completion nor that of
inner-historical progress towards a messianic future.\textsuperscript{189} Rather, his work depends on a liminal
concept of the eschatological end that is placed in relation to historical time and reconfigures its
temporal relations. The vantage point of the eschatological end, which Rosenzweig developed in
relation to both “Jewish” and “Christian” temporality, provides a perspective on the relationality
of temporal moments that it prefigures. It may appear strange that the “end” should pre-figure
time, but this difficulty disappears once one conceives of the “end” as more than a mere terminus.
In light of the eschatological end, Rosenzweig claims, redemption is not only anticipated in

\textsuperscript{188} Hermann Cohen, Rosenzweig’s teacher, for example, warns against confusing messianism
and eschatology, since only messianism, in his view, concerns a historical future, whereas
eschatology concerns a beyond with no connection to this world: “Diese unendliche Entwicklung
der Menschenseele verkündet und verbürgt der Messianismus. Und hier sehen wir positiv, wie
verhängnisvoll seine Verwechslung mit der \textit{Eschatologie} ist. Denn von jener jenseitigen Welt
aus ist schwerlich die Brücke zu schlagen für die Verbindung mit der Materie, welche die
notwendige Bedingung ist für die Entwicklung der Seelenanlagen, welche die \textit{Vererbung} zu
übernehmen und zu pflegen hat. Der Messianismus hingegen bleibt im Klima des menschlichen
Daseins. Und wenn er die Zukunft des Menschengeschlechts zu seinem Problem des Menschen
macht, so ist es die geschichtliche Zukunft, die Zukunft in der unendlichen Geschichte des
Menschengeschlechts, in deren Aufgabe die Aufgabe des heiligen Menschengeistes gelegt wird.”
\textsuperscript{189} Compare to Gregory Kaplan, 511: “What Scholem articulates and, I aim to show, Rosenzweig
illustrates, is a tension within the messianic idea of Judaism between this-worldly and other-
worldly, temporal and eternal focii of redemption.”
creation and in revelation but in fact already present in them; eschatological time, in other words, reconfigures the temporal coordinates of these theological concepts:

Im ewigen Leben war allerdings der Welt die Erlösung schon in der Offenbarung, in der ja alles drin ist, vorweggenommen; in der Offenbarung an das eine Volk war ewiges Leben gepflanzt, es selber verändert sich nicht mehr; jenes ewige Leben wird dereinst in der Frucht der Erlösung wiederkehren, so wie es einst gepflanzt war; so wird hier in die Welt, die sichtbare Welt, wirklich schon ein Stück Erlösung hineingestellt, und es wird wahr, daß von der Welt aus gesehen die Offenbarung eigentlich schon die Erlösung sei. Und andererseits wird im ewigen Weg wirklich wieder bei der anerschaffenen Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen begonnen; die Erlösung geschieht hier durch den neuen Adam, den sündlosen, nicht gefallenen, und ist in ihm schon da; so wird hier der Mensch, der beseelte Mensch, indem er sich diese mit der wunderbaren Geburt des zweiten Adam erneuerte gottebenbildliche Geschaffenheit aneignet, schon Erbe der Erlösung, einer Erlöstheit, die ihm von uran, von der Schöpfung her eignet und nur der Aneignung harrt; also daß es wahr wird, daß vom Menschen her eigentlich schon die Schöpfung die Erlösung sei.190

In this passage, Rosenzweig stretches the temporal possibilities of language to their limit. Having previously identified creation with the past, revelation with the present, and redemption with the future, he now considers a perspective from which the temporalities of these theological concepts become intertwined. Like Karl Barth, Rosenzweig uses the future tense to describe a reality that will become truth, and in doing so, inflect upon all reality past, present, and future: “it will be true that from the perspective of the world revelation is actually already redemption . . . . it will be true that for humanity creation is actually already redemption.” Redemption, for Rosenzweig, is a future recognition of what has always been; yet its futurity is not that of a temporal end, but that of the eschatological end. The end in redemption is not futural in a definite temporal sense but rather in that of an einst or dereinst; and eschatology, by marking the limit of temporal categories, provides the perspective from which the “future” of redemption is already implicit in the “past” of creation and the “present” of revelation. In light of eschatology, redemption is not futural as such, but merely a deferred appropriation (Aneignung) of what was one’s own

190 Der Stern der Erlösung, 466.
(eigen) from the very beginning (von uran). The eschatological end is therefore that end in which past, present, and future enter into relations that anticipate and prefigure one another. By pointing to a more varied set of temporal relations, Rosenzweig’s eschatology overcomes a linear concept of time.

Eschatological time, for Rosenzweig, therefore enables a reversal of temporal sequence, such that the “end of the days” becomes a starting point. Yet if the future of redemption is recognized as already inherent in the present, the consciousness of being in history and time is called into question. The reversibility of temporal sequence, in other words, is at once an overcoming of history; and this is Rosenzweig’s key contribution to the reconfiguration of historical understanding in German modernism. At the end of Der Stern der Erlösung, Rosenzweig returns to the dialectic of beginning and end discussed at length above. He had previously considered beginning and end through the metaphors of the circle whose end is a return to the beginning and the arc suspended between eternal beginning and eternal end. The perspective of the eschatological end now provides a third figure for the relation of beginning and end, one that I would like to name, although the term does not appear in Rosenzweig, the figure of *dialectical reversal*:

Ziel. So erlebt es das Zwischen nicht, obwohl es doch natürlich, wirklich natürlich, darin lebt. Es erlebt grade die Umkehrung des Zwischen, und also leugnet es die Allmacht des Zwischen und verleugnet so die Zeit, dieselbe Zeit, die auf dem ewigen Weg erlebt wird.\footnote{Der Stern der Erlösung, 467.}

The eschatological element in such *Umkehrung* is the negation of time that places the “eternal life” outside of time and history. Yet the reversal of beginning and end does not overcome history in purely negative terms; it does so in the subjunctive mode, through the metaphor of eternity in time, “als ob alle Welt und die Welt fertig wäre.” The life lived under the condition of such an temporal inversion is, of course, in time and history, but it lives as if the world were complete, as if redemption were at hand, as if it were eternal. The figure of dialectical reversal is Rosenzweig’s most decisive alternative to historicist concept of time, for it reverses the teleological trajectory of history and turns the eschatological end of death into a starting point for a new experience of history as the anticipation of eternal life.\footnote{Dana Hollander arrives at a similar conclusion, noting that “Rosenzweig, with his distinction between Christian history and Jewish eternity, has broken with the idea that Jewish existence should be understood as a linear historical process, along the lines of Kant’s view of history as a teleological progression” (561). However, for Hollander this opposition to linear historical process derives simply from the eternity of Jewish life in contradistinction to the historical path of Christianity. My reading is that Rosenzweig does not simply oppose eternity to history, but uses eschatology to invert the temporal relations of history, thereby undercutting the teleological model of historical development.} Dialectical reversal, for Rosenzweig, overcomes the linearity of history by inverting its temporal relations; by grasping the “end of the days” as already at hand, it points to the potential for a new beginning at the threshold of death and eternal life.

Now, although Rosenzweig frames such eschatological reversal in terms of the “eternal people” and claims that it overcomes the “between” characteristic of Christianity’s “eternal way,” his concept of *Umkehrung* has strong resonances with Karl Barth’s Dialectical Theology. Both writers make an important contribution to the modernist concept of history by arguing that
eschatological *Endgeschichte* can take on the originary force of *Urgeschichte*. Rosenzweig’s invocation of the subjunctive *als ob*, moreover, recalls Barth’s idea of a persistence in time *as if* history were suspended in the eschatological now, and both seek to account for the approximation of eternity in time. For Barth too, the reversal of end and beginning takes place at the threshold of death and new life, at the limit of historical time. For Dialectical Theology, however, the frame for such reversal is provided by the concept of resurrection. The precondition of resurrection, according to Barth, is a figure of death as radical reversal: “Im Begriff des Todes liegt also auch hier der Begriff einer radikalen Veränderung, Wendung und Umkehr, eines Wechsels aller Prädikate.”¹⁹³ For Dialectical Theology, then, the reversal of end and beginning in which death is transformed into new life is fundamentally a re-predication of humanity in resurrection.

The crucial question for both Rosenzweig and Barth is whether such re-predication is a re-predication *of* history or a re-predication *in* history. It is the question of whether the suspension of history is a radical negation *of* history or an overcoming of history *in* history. It remains for both writers an undecidable question, for it circumscribes the heart of an unresolvable tension of eschatology and history. Barth’s concept of resurrection as re-predication, on the one hand, can be read as an emphatic overcoming *of* history, and he resists bringing the eschatological end too near to historical time, for this would temporalize eternity and therefore blunt its potential. Rosenzweig’s concept of reversal, by contrast, can be read as the overcoming of history *in* history insofar it accounts for an end in time as the beginning of “eternal life.” For Rosenzweig, however, the “eternal people” are nevertheless placed “outside” of historical time.

¹⁹³ Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)*, 234.
through this relation. And for Barth, as much as eternity is separated from history by an impassable limit, this limit *touches* history and reveals the possibility of re-predication.

For Rosenzweig as well as Barth, I would like to emphasize, the figure of *Umkehrung* is an eschatological figure insofar as it marks a limit of history that poses a radical challenge to historical concepts. For Rosenzweig, such reversal constitutes an eternal life that takes place apart from historical time. For Barth, the reversal or re-predication that points to a new humanity in resurrection marks a limit of what can be conceived as history: “die Offenbarung und Anschauung dieser Umkehrung ist als solche die Grenze menschlich anschaulicher Geschichte,” he writes. Both Rosenzweig and Barth, therefore, are invested in overcoming history through a dialectical reversal that depends on eschatology. Each conceives of an “end of time and history” in which humanity is given a new, redeemed determination. The inversion of this “eschatological end” into a new beginning, as the transformation of *Endgeschichte* into *Urgeschichte*, precisely by exposing the limit of historical and temporal concepts, embodies a new approach to history characteristic of German modernism in the early twentieth century. By bringing the “end of the days” into the purview of the present, Rosenzweig’s eschatological reversal proposes that the figure of death can be a starting point for life. Calling into question the deferment of the “end of the days” into a distant future or remote *Jenseits*, Rosenzweig’s reversal of beginning and end suggests that the threshold of a redeemed humanity can a point of departure for history. Rosenzweig’s radical critique of the temporality of history produces a modernist concept of history whose temporal relations are inverted.


195 Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)*, 200.
In the final analysis, then, Rosenzweig’s concept of *Umkehrung* appropriates the figure of resurrection for a new form of historical understanding. In this way he shows how eschatology can inform a new set of temporal and historical relations. The theological notion of *Auferstehung*, admittedly, receives short shrift in *Der Stern der Erlösung*. It appears once in the discussion of the Christian holidays, in relation to Easter as a fest of revelation, and then once more following the critique of the doctrine of the last things, where Christianity is described as having resurrected the pagan myth, hero, and cosmos in its notions of spirit, crucifix, and kingdom. However, there is also a third, unspoken sense of resurrection in Rosenzweig’s work, one that exceeds its cultural-historical and comparative-religious significance. This theoretical, reflective and figural sense of *Auferstehung* is present in the greatest arc traced by *Der Stern der Erlösung*, from its very beginning to its very end. Indeed, the book begins with an invocation of the beginning of philosophy in the figure of death (“Vom Tode, von der Furcht des Todes, hebt alles Erkennen des All an.”196) and concludes with the return from philosophical reflection to a concrete experience of life: “Einfältig wandeln mit deinem Gott – die Worte stehen über dem Tor . . . . Wohinaus aber öffnen sich die Flügel des Tors? Du weißt es nicht? Ins Leben.”197 The arc that Rosenzweig’s work follows thus leads “vom Tode . . . ins Leben,”198 an arc that embodies the very concept of the *Umkehrung* of beginning and end.

Yet whereas for Barth the concept of resurrection remains a liminal phenomenon, one whose re-predication of humanity exceeds historical representation, Rosenzweig conceives of resurrection in temporal and historical terms. For he claims, provocatively, that the Jewish people are already in possession of the end and thus in possession of eternally new life. What for

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196 *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 3.
197 *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 472.
198 This trajectory has not escaped the notice of the Rosenzweig scholarship. See, for example, Myers, 103.
Barth marks a turning-point, a highly concentrated potential of resurrection in the figure of Christ, is for Rosenzweig the matter of a lifetime, a time invested with eternity, a life that opens to new life, not in a beyond, but in the here and now. In Rosenzweig’s heterodox understanding of Judaism, one need not “wait” for the coming of the Messiah, because humanity, in the infinite space between death and life, in the eternal moment of resurrection, is “already with God.” For Rosenzweig, one might say, the figure of resurrection is not restricted to the moment of the eschatological now, but encompasses the entirety of history. In this way, death, through the figure of the eschatological end, guides a new approach to historical life. In this understanding of history, each moment is in “the end of the days” and is therefore presented with the task of finding a new beginning. Rosenzweig’s eschatological reading of history transforms its temporal dynamic: it is no longer tenable as process of development but rather confronted with a critical moment, one in which the end in redemption is already at hand and must be grasped as an opportunity for a beginning in life.

4. *Eschatological Crisis versus Messianic Fulfillment: Towards a Modernist Concept of History*

The full critical potential of eschatology for the concept of history, I argue, can be seen by way of a comparison with the messianic understanding of history. Messianism, as developed by Rosenzweig’s teacher and neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen, represents the highest potential of the historicist narrative: for Cohen, the messianic “end of the days” embody the ideal

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199 This heterodox position leads Dana Hollander to question whether the traditional concept of messianism has a place in Rosenzweig’s understanding of Judaism. “On the Significance of the Messianic Idea in Rosenzweig,” 561–62.
goal towards which all historical development strives. The inner-historical potential of messianism, in this account, as a representation of the coming unification of humanity, is set off in stark contrast to the other-worldly—and hence historically impotent—promise of eschatological fulfillment. Yet for Rosenzweig, as I have argued, the notion of eschatology as other-worldly completion has been abandoned in favor of a figure of eschatology as the confrontation of history with its outside. This modernist concept of eschatology is interested precisely in the potential of the figure of the “last days” to induce a crisis and re-thinking of history. The new concept of eschatology that Rosenzweig advances criticizes the messianic deferment of the “end of the days” as the culmination of a steady historical development. The dialectical reversal of beginning and end brings the destructive potential of the figure of death in relation to the present. In doing so, it represents not a messianic ideal of history but rather a step “outside” of history, or, one might say, a form of historical experience defined by its confrontation with the other of history. It is in this sense that Der Stern der Erlösung produces an eschatological crisis of history and turns against the historicist idealism of the tradition of messianism.

A look at Hermann Cohen’s concept of messianism will therefore help to bring Rosenzweig’s departure from Jewish messianism into sharper focus and point to the critical potential of eschatology vis-à-vis historical understanding. Cohen’s late work, as the scholarly literature has shown in detail, brought his systematic philosophy to a close by turning to Judaism. Upon giving up his Professorship in Marburg, Cohen moved to Berlin where he established the “Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums” and began working on the posthumously published Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums (1919). Key chapters of this work, along with essays including “Monotheismus und Messianismus” and “Die Messiasidee,”
set into motion a revival of Jewish messianic thought, one that both nurtured Rosenzweig’s work and stood in contrast to it. Rosenzweig took part in Cohen’s seminars and was familiar with draft material from *Die Religion der Vernunft* when he began writing *Der Stern der Erlösung*. His work therefore stands in productive dialogue with Cohen, not least on the question of history.

Like Rosenzweig, Cohen rethinks of the concept of history and the nature of temporality. Messianism provides the key to Cohen’s strong concept of universal history as *Weltgeschichte*. The idea of the Messiah, whose original form is that of a “person,” undergoes a temporalization in Cohen’s thought: it comes to stand for a coming epoch in which humanity is unified. Accordingly, the concepts of history and time are defined in terms of the futurity of the messianic age. Cohen’s commitment to a future history of messianic fulfillment thus stands in contrast to Rosenzweig’s claim that the Jewish people are “outside of history” and “already with God.” Whereas for Rosenzweig the “eternal life” of the Jewish people constitutes a moment of presence that surpasses history, Cohen conceives of history as the development towards the messianic ideal, an ideal that has its origin in Jewish monotheistic religion but comes to encompass all humanity. Hence for Cohen the “suspension” of humanity takes place not in the “eschatological now,” but in relation to a concept of history defined by the future:


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200 My interest, it should be clear, is not in establishing the relationship between Rosenzweig and Cohen—this has been thoroughly recognized by the scholarship on these authors—but rather in bringing into ever further clarity the affinity of Barth and Rosenzweig by demonstrating how Rosenzweig departs from Cohen on the question of messianism.

Rosenzweig, it is worth recalling, conceives of the future as the possibility and place of redemption, yet for him it is not a historical futurity but the eternity of the future that is decisive. For Rosenzweig, the presence of redemption is evident in that eschatological now (the “today”) in which all future is contained and graspable. For Cohen, by contrast, the messianic idea pulls together and concentrates the temporal moments of past and present in a strong sense of the future, yet it does so as an ideal of history. In the former the presence of eternity in time is a decisive step outside of history; in the latter the constitution of the time and history in its relation to the future first gives a decisive ground to “history.” Both figures place a strong emphasis on the futurity of redemption, yet the implications of eschatology, on the one hand, and messianism, on the other, oscillate between a radical critique of history and its idealization.

The divergent stakes of Geschichte in the work of Cohen and Rosenzweig are reflected, moreover, in their differing concepts of the “calendar” in Judaism. Whereas for Rosenzweig the cyclical nature of the calendar expresses the eternity of the Jewish people in time without their taking part in history, for Cohen the calendar has a teleological determination in which the messianic idea signifies a “historical period” at the “end of the days.” In his essay “Die Messiasidee,” Cohen describes the development of the idea of the messiah from a person (from ‘the Anointed One’ as priest, to king, to prophet, to a ‘people’) to a historical idea, indeed, to a

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203 Rosenzweig, it is worth noting, seeks to bend Cohen’s conception to fit his own. In his introduction to Cohen’s posthumously published “Jüdische Schriften,” he writes that “Ewigkeit ist nämlich für Cohen eben grade nicht die Summe aller Zeit; grade er hat schon in der Logik den Begriff der Zeit so bestimmt, daß er keine solche Aufsummierung zuläßt; das Konstituierende der Zeit ist die Zukunft, und Ewigkeit ist auf den Augenblick bezogene, in seiner ‘Nußschale’ ‘vollzogene’ fernste Zukunft.” *Hermann Cohens Jüdische Schriften. Mit einer Einleitung von Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Bruno Strauß (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke & Sohn, 1924), xxxiv. In other words, Rosenzweig takes the essential futurity of time that he finds in Cohen and applies it to the eternity of the moment.
**Leitbegriff** of history: “Der Messias wird, schroff ausgedrückt, zu einem Kalenderbegriff. Anstatt der Person des Messias heißt es später: ‘die Tage des Messias’. Der Gesalbte wird zur Idee einer geschichtlichen Periode des Menschengeschlechts idealisiert.”

In Cohen’s view, messianism involves a historical period, even if it is one still to come, whereas eschatology, as articulated by Barth and Rosenzweig, depends upon a suspension of history. The new concept of eschatology that arises in the 1920s in Germany, I have argued, de-temporalizes eschatology by emphasizing its limit character and denying that it can be realized within human history. The teleological concept of eschatology, whose “end” is a terminal point of history, loses force in interwar Germany. Cohen’s messianism, by contrast, maintains the hope of fulfillment in history; it embodies an inner-historical force with “this-worldly” character, one that embodies the ideal of a history of development.

Eschatology, in other words, has a destructive, revolutionary moment (conceived, albeit, in dialectical fashion) that is lacking in Cohen’s messianism. The destructive potential of eschatology to suspend and reinvigorate historical understanding stands in contrast to a messianism that promises progress and development towards a historical ideal. Eschatology and

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[^205]: Gershom Scholem directs a similar critique at Franz Rosenzweig, arguing that he domesticates the destructive force of messianism: “[Rosenzweig] opposed the theory of catastrophes contained in messianic apocalypticism which might be considered the point at which even today theocratic and bourgeois modes of life stand irreconcilably opposed. The deep-seated tendency to remove the apocalyptic thorn from the organism of Judaism makes Rosenzweig the last and certainly one of the most vigorous exponents of a very old and very powerful movement in Judaism, which crystallized in a variety of forms. . . . A thinker of Rosenzweig’s rank could never remain oblivious to the truth that redemption possesses not only a liberating but also a destructive force. [...] If it be true that the lightning of redemption directs the universe of Judaism, then in Rosenzweig’s work the life of the Jew must be seen as the lightning rod whose task it is to render harmless its destructive power.” *Frankfurter Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt* 10 (1931), 15–17; republished in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 272.
messianism offer two competing models of history based on divergent concepts of the “end” in the “end of history” and the “end of the days.” This split in religious thought on the question of history is all the more striking given that Cohen and Barth both draw on Chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation for their interpretations. Cohen, reflecting further on the futurity of the messianic age, writes:


In this passage, Cohen extends the Kantian philosophy of history, for which the slow march of history towards an ideal society is guided by the hand of providence, by grounding its theodicy in the theological notion of new creation. In doing so, he gives the secular concepts of Entwicklung and Fortschritt, which derive from the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century philosophies of history, a theological grounding. The teleological narrative of history as development and progress towards a goal is buttressed, according to Cohen, by the theological concept of futurity inherent in “new creation.”

For the younger generation of theological figures around Barth and Rosenzweig, the continuity of Cohen’s historicist narrative of progress towards a “New Jerusalem” is replaced by a disruptive, dialectical articulation of the eschatological moment. Barth gives a more complete citation of the passage from Chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation: “Ich sah einen neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde; denn der erste Himmel und die erste Erde verging.” The Vergehen of the first heaven and first earth is essential for Barth’s reading, since it implies a radical

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206 Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums, 294.
transformation and overturning of the world in the *eschatological crisis*. The vision of a new world, for Barth, is tied to the dialectical suspension and overcoming of the old world, such that the prospect of new creation is not the culmination of historical development but a threshold that defines of the situation of each present; as Barth writes in his *Römerbriefkommentar*: “Wir stehen vor einer umfassenden und unwiderstehlichen Aufhebung der Welt der Zeit, der Dinge und der Menschen, vor einer durchdringenden, aufs Letzte gehenden Krisis, vor einer Aufrollung alles Seins durch sein [Gottes] überlegenes Nicht-Sein.” Similar dialectical energies, which predicate new creation on a disruptive moment of sudden reversal, I argue, are also at work in Rosenzweig’s concept of the *Umkehrung* of beginning and end.

The metamorphosis of the concept of the end as teleological *Ziel* in Cohen to a concept of end as *Grenze* and *Ursprung* in Barth and Rosenzweig is at the heart of the new narrative of history that arises in the 1920s. For Cohen this end is still temporal in form; it is not the repetition of the origin but a future inception of a unified humanity, a messianic epoch that defines the goal of world history: “Das Ende der Tage, die Zukunft der Menschheit, das ist der Ertrag des Völkerlebens, das ist das Zeitalter des Messias. Das Ende liegt weder in der Nähe, noch in blauer Ferne; es ist das Ziel der Weltgeschichte. Es ist die Idee der Geschichte oder die Idee der sittlichen Weltordnung.” Cohen mediates between an end that is *neither* immediately present (hence still to come: futural) *nor* at an unbridgeable distance (hence inner-historical, not other-worldly). Barth, by contrast, replaces this *neither ... nor* with a relation of *both ... and*:

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207 *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)*, 72.
208 “Die Messiasidee,” 117.
209 Indeed, for Cohen messianism is defined by its very contrast to the non-historical character of eschatology. The danger of eschatology, in his view, is that it negates the historical character of the messianic future: “Es ist dadurch der Irrtum bestärkt worden, als ob der Messianismus gleichbedeutend wäre mit der Eschatologie, und da diese gar nicht in geschichtlichem Sinne gedacht wurde, so mußte auch für die messianische Zukunft die Gefahr entstehen, ihres
the eschatological end is both infinitely close ("nahe herbeigekommen": in proximity to each present) and infinitely distant and other (because it is incommensurable with historical temporality). Cohen’s mediation of a utopian future that is still to come yet a decidedly inner-historical possibility is countered by Barth’s juxtaposition of history with its dialectical opposite, with an end that both limits and grounds historical experience. In this sense, the new concept of eschatology in Barth and Rosenzweig de-temporalizes the end: the end of history is no longer conceived as a historical period itself, or its terminal cessation, but as a suspension and rethinking of history in relation to the “eschatological now.” The futurity of the messianic epoch is brought into the present, but its historical realization is called into question. The new narrative of history, as Rosenzweig suggests, does not strive towards an ideal at the end, but begins from the situation of the end, from the dialectical reversal of beginning and end.

The eschatological concept of history challenges not only the developmental logic of the messianic narrative but also the continuity with which the “end” marks a transition to a “new beginning.” Cohen’s understanding of messianism is consistent with the historicist schema of a passage that connects the end of one epoch to the beginning of the next. In his 1930 treatise on Das Geschichtsproblem in der Philosophie Hermann Cohens, Simon Kaplan explains how for Cohen the messianic era is not the end of time as such but the beginning of a new era:

210 My interpretation thus differs from Stéphane Mosès reading of Rosenzweig, for whom utopia and messianism, the present and the end of time, are taken as mutually exclusive oppositions: “Hier stelle ich also Utopie und Messianismus in Gegensatz. Utopie bezeichnet das, was ganz am Schlüß der Zeit steht, wogegen die messianische Hoffnung das ist, was schon jetzt eintreten kann.” “Von der Zeit zur Ewigkeit. Erlösung – eine problematische Kategorie bei Franz Rosenzweig,” in Zeitgewinn. Messianisches Denken nach Franz Rosenzweig, ed. Gotthard Fuchs and Hans Hermann Henrix (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1987), 155. Mosès’ interpretation is fitting for Cohen’s concept of messianism, but Rosenzweig’s position, I argue, is closer to that of Barth.

This account of the “end of the days” as the beginning of a new history is the idealist counterpart to the apocalyptic narrative associated with the traditional concept of eschatology: in place of ultimate destruction, one has an image of the preservation of nature in eternal peace. The modernist concept of eschatology in Barth in Rosenzweig turns decisively against both of these historical models, both the idealist and the pessimistic variants.212 It confronts history with a liminal, de-temporalized end, one that inheres in each present and marks not a transition to a new beginning but a radical reversal of death into new life. For Barth and Rosenzweig, the beginning is never a continuation of where the end left off; it is the inversion, the dialectical reversal of the end. The modernist concept of history therefore stands in the shadow of eschatology; it is a concept of history that, bereft of all continuity and confronted with its other, can no longer be conceived as a narrative.

The eschatological account of history, in other words, is one in which the temporality of the present supplants the developmental logic of historicism. Barth’s “eschatological now” and Rosenzweig’s “today” are attempts to define such a temporality of the present that cannot be mapped onto historical time. Yet even Cohen’s work, despite its commitment to nineteenth-century historical idealism, points in this direction. For the messianic future, in its concrete, inner-historical character, is not merely futural, according to Cohen, but has a permanent

212 Barth’s polemic against the idea of a “new history” could not be stronger: “Aber das Gericht Gottes ist das Ende der Geschichte, nicht der Anfang einer neuen zweiten Geschichte. Die Geschichte ist erledigt, sie wird nicht fortgesetzt.” Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung), 56.
presence that bears upon each moment in life. Like Barth and Rosenzweig, Cohen too suggests a symbiotic relationship of the future and the present, each of which contains and figures elements of the other:

    Da die messianische Zuversicht durchaus zusammenhängt mit dem Monotheismus, so wird sie dadurch identisch mit der Pflicht der Gottesverehrung. Diese aber wartet nicht auf die Zukunft, sondern sie erfüllt mein ganzes Leben und jeden Moment meines Daseins. So muß es auch mit der messianischen Zukunft sich verhalten. Und dies ist der Vorteil, daß sie als Gottesreich gedacht wird. **Für meinen persönlichen Gottesdienst darf das Gottesreich nicht nur Zukunft, sondern es muß beständige Gegenwart sein.**

The difference here between Cohen’s “messianic confidence” and the “fear and trembling” associated with Protestant theology from Kierkegaard to Barth is considerable, but they are united in thinking of the present as a temporal space that provides an alternative to the historicist narrative of history. Just as for Rosenzweig the “today” is always more than just the present but anticipates the future, so too does Cohen’s understanding of religious practice bring the messianic future into the temporal mode of the present. Just as for Barth the present of the “eschatological now” determines an ethical stance, so too does Cohen conceive the presence of the messianic future as a function of an ethical disposition. The answer to the question “Wann kommt der Messias?”, according to a story from the Talmud that Cohen cites, is “Heute.” The absence of the messiah does not make this answer a lie, but points to the ethical dimension of

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213 *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, 365.
214 One could expound upon this tension in a number of ways. The function of doubt and uncertainty in producing an ethical stance of readiness in the face of perpetual crisis is fundamental to Barth’s theology of history, and it defines the disposition of hope and persistence in the present. Cohen, by contrast, writes that “Die messianische Zukunft wird so dem Gebiete der Hoffnung entrückt, weil sie unmittelbar zum Gottesgläuben selbst gehört. Die messianische Zuversicht wird dem Schwanken und der Ungewißheit enthoben, mit denen Hoffen und Harren nun einmal verbunden scheinen.” *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, 368. Cohen, moreover, argues for a “Verwirklichung und Vergegenwärtigung der messianischen Zukunft.” Ibid., 365. For Barth, on the other hand, the actualization of the “eschatological now”—as much as it inflects the present—is problematic because of the destructive power of eschatology. The realization of the eschatological now would shatter the limit that sustains the historical world.
this notion of the present, as Cohen concludes: “‘Heute’ hat er nach dem Psalm verstanden: Heute, wenn ihr auf seine Stimme höret.’ (Sanh. 98a) Die Tugend also macht den Unterschied zwischen Einst und Heute. Und es ist wirklich die Tugend, die reine Sittlichkeit, die in solchen Stellen des Talmud als Inhalt der messianischen Religiosität gedacht wird.”  

Cohen, Rosenzweig, Barth, and Tillich each bring to bear theological and religious concepts in order to challenge the narrative of history and its temporal structure. The explosion of the historical frame depends upon thinking of history in relation to its eschatological other, in relation, that is, to a temporality that eludes any isomorphism with historical time. Yet the “end of history”—as conceived by these writers—does not stand in strict opposition to historical time, but determines a new historiography that provides an alternative construction of the present moment. The following chapter will go on to show how such constructivism struck a chord with developments in secular historiography and art in the 1920s. For now it suffices to conclude that Rosenzweig’s work provides a second prominent example, in addition to Dialectical Theology, of the way in which theological discourse decentered, disturbed, and reformed the construction of history in the 1920s in Germany.

Rosenzweig’s revision of historical understanding hinges, as I have argued, on a confrontation of eschatology and history, one that sets up a field of tension that is never fully resolved. It is for this reason that Rosenzweig’s thought pulls in competing, at times irreconcilable directions. The closed totality of the Hegelian circle is rejected in favor of an open eschatological arc, yet the cyclical constitution of the calendar is necessary for the approximation of eternity in time. The alterity of eschatological time, in its eternal beginning and eternal end, between which history is suspended, disturbs the notion of a continuous and linear history of

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215 “Die Messiasidee,” 120.
development, yet the eschatological cannot be purely transcendent, lest it represent an
otherworldly beyond inaccessible to historical experience. The reversal of beginning and end
brings eschatology in relation to the present, suggesting the possibility of new life out of death,
yet the destructive potential of such Umkehrung calls into question the inauguration of a new
history. The thought of a people “outside of history,” for whom the power of history and time is
overcome, comes hand in hand with a “new thinking” in which the temporality of past, present,
and future are re-thought.

Ultimately, for Rosenzweig, an eschatological engagement with history is necessary in
order to grasp both its heterogeneous, discontinuous character and its potential to appear as a
metaphor for a moment of moments. In an undated letter to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy,
Rosenzweig writes: “Without (historical) scholarship each generation would run away from the
preceding one, and history would seem to be a discontinuous series (as in fact it really is) and not
(as it ought to appear) the parable of a single point, a nunc stans (as history really is in the final
moment, but thanks to scholarship, as I have said, appears to be already in advance, here and
now).” These remarks do not merely suggest an ambivalence towards history on Rosenzweig’s
part, but moreover an insight that the perspective of eschatology gives history a double
determination: it at once reveals the crisis of history, disrupting the illusions of continuity,
coherence, and teleological development; and at the same time allows history to appear in
relation to an eschatological moment, a “today” in which past, present, and future are interwoven

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216 Cited in Myers, 86. See the “Letter from Franz Rosenzweig to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy,
undated,” in Judaism Despite Christianity: The "Letters on Christianity and Judaism" between
Eugen Rosenstock-Huessey and Franz Rosenzweig, ed. Eugen Rosenstock-Heussy, trans. Dorothy
in an anticipation of eternity.\textsuperscript{217} For Rosenzweig, eschatology is both the overcoming of history and the postulation of a “moment” with the potential to reinvigorate historical experience.

\textsuperscript{217} Myers reads this passage as evidence that “Rosenzweig maintained a deep ambivalence toward history. . . . On one hand, he recognized the epistemic unavoidability of ordering the world in historical terms; on the other hand, he recognized the epistemic artifice involved in such an ordering” (86). Myers is certainly right to note the “double-edged quality” of Rosenzweig’s reflections on history, but the key point, I think, is that this dual concept of history is the result of his investment in eschatological thought.
CHAPTER THREE

A History of the Present: Constructivist Historiography in Germany in the 1920s

Describing the situation of historiography in the early 1920s, Ernst Troeltsch notes the emergence of “daring new constructions” (verwegene Neukonstruktionen) and concludes: “Es ist Hochkonjunktur für Geschichtsphilosophie geworden.” This new direction in historiography emerged out of a crisis of historicism whose manifestations were varied: on the one hand there was a marked subjectivization of the perspective of the historiographer, who now sought to write history in the present and for the present; at the same time there was a recognition of the difficulty of constituting the historical object because it could no longer be conceived as a stable, complete entity. The historicization of thought in the late nineteenth century in the work of Johann Gustav Droysen and Leopold von Ranke, for whom it was possible to write history objectively, as it in fact took place, now had to reckon with its gaps, inadequacies, and failures. Karl Mannheim, Karl Heussi, C. H. Becker, and Ernst Troeltsch each attend to the death of historicism and plot strategies for its overcoming. Yet since the process of the historicization of Western thought could by no means be reversed, the linear historicist narrative of development was instead succeeded by more radical historical constructions whose impulse was taken from a renascent philosophy of history. “Constructivism”—which insisted not only on the constructed nature of the historical object but also on the formation of a historical architecture—was therefore the driving force in the theory of historiography in the 1920s in Germany, but its precondition was a critical moment in which the inherited structure of history as narrative was unsettled and opened up for new formulations.

218 “Die Krisis des Historismus,” Die Neue Rundschau 33.6 (1922), 576.
The new philosophies of history, unlike their predecessors in the Idealism of Kant and Hegel, were not dependent upon the concept of a totality of history oriented towards an end or goal (Ziel) towards which humanity steadily progresses. Instead, figures like Mannheim and Troeltsch drew upon the self-reflective moment in the Lebensphilosophie of Wilhelm Dilthey to articulate philosophies of history grounded in the material life of the present. This chapter will trace the ways in which both secular historiography and the theology of history engaged with the crisis of the historicist narrative by seeking ways to construct history in the present. Theology’s own “daring new construction” consisted in placing history in relation to an “eschatological now” that qualifies the present moment; it used the crisis of historicism to probe the limits of historiography and construct the present as a time at the limit of history. In treating each moment in terms of such a constructive possibility, theology too underscored the urgency and potential of the present historical moment. In this way both the theological formulation of an eschatological moment in history and the self-reflective, materialist philosophy of history in secular historiography employed constructivist modes of thought in order to rethink their place in history.

The cultural problem at stake in such constructivism had two faces, one turned away from historicism in a critical moment, and one turned towards the philosophy of history in a productive moment. The present had to be set free of the bonds of history in order for self-reflection to be possible, but this self-reflection in turn required the construction of the present in

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its relation to history. In secular historiography, therefore, the historical narrative became more refined and dynamic: writers like Karl Mannheim, Oswald Spengler, and Ernst Troeltsch began to pave the way for a non-reductionist, anti-historicist account of historiography in which progress and decline are two recurring moments in a perpetually self-reflective historical consciousness. History was thought of as a recursive process and therefore was not to be reconstructed but first given form in the historiographical construction. This marked a speculative turn in intellectual history of the 1920s in Germany but by no means a return to metaphysics; indeed, the legacy of historical thinking was carried forth, but no longer in terms of an ideal ground. For the secular figures mentioned above, the present functions rather as a negative ground for historical construction: it is the only available starting point for historical self-reflection, yet its limited perspective does not allow for complete historiographical representation.\(^{220}\) The construction of history therefore proceeded from a moment that did not have access to the totality of history.

The articulation of the *Standortsgebundenheit* of the historian and the lack of a fixed structure of the historical object, the dual consequences of the crisis of historicism, also informed the constructivism of the theology of history in Germany in the 1920s. Once history was loosened from a rigid historicist structure, it opened itself up to numerous constructivist possibilities. Theology worked with this situation by locating the historical construct as itself a

part of an even larger structure, one in which history comes into contact with its eschatological limit case. The construction of history therefore becomes the construction of the present in relation to an “eschatological now” that stands in proximity to each moment in time. If history has no stable objective content, if the historiographical circle cannot form a closed totality, theology wagers, then the historical construct can be articulated in relation to that which exceeds history. The self-reflection on the present moment in theology takes into account an outside of historical consciousness, and accordingly it begins to construct history in relation to the temporality of an “eschatological now.” In doing so, however, theology broaches a construct in which historiography is no longer possible. The danger in such constructivism is apparent: the closer theology comes to articulating an “event” irreducible to history, the more it is thrown back into the history of the present without any stable footing. For both the theology of history and secular historiography, constructivism holds a potential but ultimately cannot resolve the aporias of the crisis of historicism.

In what follows I will analyze the cultural products of secular intellectuals such as Karl Mannheim, Oswald Spengler, Karl Heussi, C. H. Becker, and Ernst Troeltsch, along with theological figures including Karl Barth, Franz Rosenzweig, and Paul Tillich, and read their contributions to the culture of 1920s Germany as post-historicist documents whose foundation is a peculiar form of constructivism. These writers are united in their refusal to occupy a stable “standpoint” and in their negotiation of a history without a fixed structure, as varied as their constructions may be. From Mannheim’s dynamic philosophy of history, to Troeltsch’s construction or “Aufbau” of a European cultural history, to theological forms of the eschatological construct, constructivism provides a lens through which the centrality of the present moment in German intellectual history in the 1920s comes into sharper focus.
1. Dynamic “Geschichtsphilosophie” and the Crisis of Historicism

The secular intellectual Karl Mannheim, best known for his “sociology of knowledge,” made an important contribution to the theory of historiography in his 1924 essay “Historismus,” published in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik. For Mannheim the so-called “crisis of historicism” does not register as an explicit problem because the concept of historicism has itself undergone a transformation. By arguing for a self-reflexive turn in historicism in which it becomes “Geschichtsphilosophie,” Mannheim points indirectly to the problem of nineteenth-century historicism—namely its illusion of objectivity—by arguing for a dynamic philosophy of history in which this methodological difficulty has been addressed. Although the rhetoric of constructivism is not prominent in Mannheim, his materialist historiography is a prime example of the construction of history in and for the present. Even if such a historiography is only provisional, it serves as a constructivist means of coming to terms with the place of the present in history. I begin with Mannheim because his theory of historiography provides a sense of the principles of historicism that underwent a crisis in the 1920s in Germany, but also because his reworking of historicism as “Geschichtsphilosophie” can be read as a constructivist attempt to work from the very situation of crisis.

Mannheim’s self-reflexive historiography is no longer concerned with describing the past “as it was” but rather with reflecting critically on the historicity of its own concepts and its own history. It represents a productive extension of historicism in which the historical material itself—and not any ideal vantage point—forms the basis for a dynamic philosophy of history. If the movement of history provides the ground for a dialectical becoming of concepts, then the

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danger of static philosophical totalities might be warded off. In this way Mannheim seeks to carry forth Hegel’s historicization of Enlightenment philosophy with a more rigorous materialism. It is not just that concepts have a historical grounding, but moreover that this ground is ever shifting and can only be localized provisionally in the present. The philosophy of history is given a historicist reformulation in which its orientation is materialist instead of idealist. Hence the distinction between the static, timeless concepts of Enlightenment philosophy and the dynamic, historically charged concepts of Lebensphilosophie. The latter, Mannheim argues, is the result of a fundamental shift in cultural history in which the Enlightenment concept of a timeless reason suspends itself (sich selbst aufheben) and a thorough-going historicization of thought and consciousness takes its place.222 “Der Historismus ist also kein Einfall, er ist keine Mode, er ist nicht einmal eine Strömung, er ist das Fundament, von dem aus wir die gesellschaftlich-kulturelle Wirklichkeit betrachten,”223 he writes, making clear that historicism was not merely a tendency in historiography but rather a form of thought that had penetrated all aspects of life and become dominant in the sciences, in epistemology (Erkenntnistheorie), and in ontology.224

In constructing a historical narrative, historicism’s recognition that history is perpetually in movement, that even the world of Geist is riveted by a process of becoming, is but a starting point; its object, moreover, consists in deriving the organizing principle (Prinzip der Ordnung) that best brings to light the innermost structure of such historical becoming. In other words, historicism is concerned with working out the structure of a mobile totality from out of the manifold of historical material. By placing the historical fact in relation to a dynamic totality,

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222 “Historismus,” 2.
223 “Historismus,” 2.
historicism introduces a philosophical mode of questioning into historiography. In Mannheim’s telling formulation:

    Der Historismus wird zur Geschichtsphilosophie, indem er die in der Geschichtsschreibung eingebettete Philosophie heraushebt und die in ihr liegenden und wirkenden Probleme reflexiv durchdenkt. Dadurch aber tritt das Leben, das den Historismus erzeugt, die Geschichtsschreibung, die in dessen Zeichen geschaffen hatte, in das Stadium der Selbstreflexion, der systematischen Selbstvollendung; es entstehen jene philosophischen Probleme, die in existentieller Wirksamkeit die Spannungen der lebendigen Weltanschauung bereits konstituiert hatten.\(^{225}\)

For Mannheim, while the speculative moment in German Idealism’s philosophy of history has been transformed by historicism, that is, placed in a dynamic relationship to historical experience, it has not been lost entirely. Historiography, in turn, far from being relegated to singular studies of particular historical moments, is raised by historicism to the level of self-reflection. Historiography thus begins to recognize that the tensions that constitute its experience of life are reflected in a dynamic totality of which its particular historical narratives form a part. In Mannheim’s view, this becoming self-reflexive of historiography has given the writing of history a “geschichtsphilosophische” orientation and has moreover changed the way that the present is experienced. Accordingly, the becoming of concepts (Begriffswandel) takes place dialectically: each thinker changes the force and direction of the historically inherited philosophical systems by imposing upon them the presuppositions latent in the “life” of the present. The “system” is thus never complete but ever organizing itself into further incomplete totalities.

    In such a self-reflexive historicism, there is nevertheless a moment of transcendence and a figure of an ultimate ground that allow the construction of a historical perspective. Herein lies its philosophical orientation. For Mannheim, historicism makes a legitimate claim to totality in its historiography because the final ground of its representation is not a universal principle of reason but rather an insight drawn from the historical material itself:

\(^{225}\) “Historismus,” 6.
Er [der Historismus] vollzieht aber seinen wesentlichen philosophischen Schritt dadurch, daß er die historischen Einzelergebnisse insofern transzendiert, als er mit Hilfe der Kategorie der Totalität die tiefere Einheit des Wandels zu erfassen versucht. Dadurch wird aber die Reihe der Kausalketten (die innerhalb der einzelwissenschaftlichen Einstellung entweder zu einem unendlichen Regreß führte oder aber den Forscher zwang, sich auf die sog. “unmittelbarsten Ursachen” zu beschränken und dadurch willkürlich an einem Punkte die Verfolgung des Zusammenhangs abzubrechen) durch einen Rekurs auf das sich entfaltende letzte Substrat, dessen “Tendenz” der Geschichtsphilosoph erfaßt, überschritten. Nur wird dieser Versuch, dieses letzte dynamische Substrat zu erfassen, nun nicht mehr irgendwie a priori aus einem Prinzip deduktiv, sondern im unmittelbaren Kontakt mit dem geschichtlichen Material selbst vollzogen.\(^\text{226}\)

Instead of transcendental idealism we have a transcendental historicism whose transcendence is made possible by the postulation of a totality that serves as the ground and unity of historical change. The language of this historicism is decidedly metaphysical, but it seeks to give a different account of its metaphysical concepts by forging them in direct contact with history. The totality, unity, substrate, and ground that arise are thus not universal, eternal principles of reason, but dynamic, forever unfolding substrates whose “tendency” is grasped by the philosophy of history. That the attempt to grasp the ultimate dynamic substrate might take place in “immediate contact with the historical material itself” is the operating fiction that sustains such historicism. It is a fiction that allows historiography to break out of the infinite regress of the causal chain by giving history a final, if historically provisional, ground. This is a decisive step for historiography after the nineteenth century, for it is now able to free itself from its boundless immersion in an excess of historical material and find the traction necessary to develop a perspective on history. History becomes philosophical insofar as it can be transcended and expressed in a dynamic substrate; but likewise, philosophy becomes historical by articulating the ground of transcendence in relationship to a historical material.

If a dynamic philosophy of history has its ground in the historical material, the necessary consequence is a perspectivism in which history can be constructed only from the “standpoint”

\(^{226}\) “Historismus,” 53–54.
of the present. The “Standortsgebundenheit” of Mannheim’s historiography makes a claim for a historically contingent absolute that expresses a totality of history from the perspective of the present. Yet the dynamism of such historiography acknowledges the provisional nature of such a construction of history. History is overcome insofar as its structure is articulated, but the movement of history at once surpasses the finality of any such construction. For Mannheim the structure of the historiographical construct becomes legible in what he calls a “Querschichtung” or “cross-section”:

Für die Lebensproblematik bedeuten aber diese prinzipiellen Auseinandersetzungen so viel, daß es keine für alle Zeiten, ein für allemal gültige Forderungen gibt, sondern das Absolute sich in jedem Zeitalter anders konkretisiert, daß man aber, indem man die ”Forderungen des Tages”, den „nächsten Schritt”, erfüllt, zugleich das „bloß Zeitliche” insofern transzendiert, als die ganze Bewegung selbst ihre Wahrheit hat. Diese Wahrheit ist aber in ihrem bis zu unserem Standorte führenden Emporwachsen, für uns, von unseren Wollungen aus, perspektivisch sichtbar (durch die Geschichte und die ihr Rückgrat bildende Geschichtsphilosophie). Aus unseren Ahnungen, instinktmäßigen Wollungen heraus wird für uns die Geschichte in einer Querschichtung erfaßbar, und umgekehrt erhalten wir in den aus der Geschichte herausgearbeiteten konkreten Werten, die wir bis zu unserem Standort sich entwickeln sehen, auch inhaltlich explizierbare Erfüllungen für unser zunächst ungeklärt dumpfes Wollen. So gewinnt man aus der Geschichte die konkret-inhaltlich erfüllten Forderungsmaßstäbe, und man gewinnt sie nur insofern, als man sie instinktmäßig (weil getragen vom Gesamtgeist) bereits hat. Dies ist wohl der letzte Sinn der Forderung Troeltsch’s, die Geschichte durch die Geschichte zu überwinden, und die zur Ueberwindung notwendigen Werte aus der Geschichte selbst zu gewinnen.  

There is a subtle dialectic at work in Mannheim’s confrontation with history: on the one hand the life of the present provides the basis for the “cross-section” of history in which the historiographer has an optic with which to view the past; on the other hand, however, the interest of the historiographer in discovering values in the past that confirm the desires of the present is itself historically pre-determined. The construction of the past from the perspective of the present is the articulation of an architecture that itself helped to define this perspective. A dynamic historicism therefore seeks to uncover the forces in history that push beyond themselves, that

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open up demands for change that enact and fulfill themselves. History overcomes history by fulfilling the demands of the epoch and thus opening up the space for new demands, for new articulations of the absolute. The historicist is able to see this dialectic of historical development and self-overcoming in a perspective that leads up to the present.

For Mannheim historical self-overcoming is always an overcoming within history that can be grasped from a fuller totality of the present. The past and its values no longer present themselves as absolute but rather give way to new forms of the absolute. Hence Mannheim’s commitment to a dynamic historicism that draws its strength from the materiality of history:

“Der Historismus ist also u. E. die einzige Lösung des Gesamtbestrebens, für eine dynamisch gewordene Weltansicht materiale inhaltlich erfüllte Maßstäbe, Normen zu finden.”

The new centers of dialectically evolving philosophical systems are in each case grounded in a material history and find their sublation in a historically successive period, whose ultimate position is that of the present.

The resurgence of “Geschichtsphilosophie” in the 1920s, for which Mannheim serves as a prominent example, was at once a response to and an enactment of a more fundamental crisis

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228 Karl Mannheim, “Historismus,” 59.
of historicism. The source of the crisis was by no means limited to historiography but had to do with a more general upheaval in historical thinking that cut across disciplines. The cultural field as a whole was left to reckon with the results of what Ernst Troeltsch called the thoroughgoing “Historisierung unseres ganzen Wissens und Empfindens der geistigen Welt, wie sie im Laufe des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts geworden ist.”\textsuperscript{230} The trembling of the regime of historicism had definite consequences for the theory of historiography, which was compelled to come to terms with the limited nature of its subjective perspective and the overwhelming fullness of history. The result was the recognition of the difficulty in constructing a historical “object” because of the inaccessibility of a concept of unity or totality (Mannheim sought to validate the concept of “totality” by acknowledging its dynamism and historical specificity, but this itself is an acknowledgement of its ultimate inaccessibility). The vantage point from which an overview of history could be taken in was no longer available in the aftermath of the crisis of historicism. While in part this situation was met with subjective and expressionistic forms of historiography in which the attempt to reconstruct the past was abandoned in favor of an account of its reception in the present, the broader impact of the crisis was to call into question the stability of the historical “structure” or “Aufbau” that since Dilthey had been the crowning achievement of the “Geisteswissenschaften.” Yet if the historical “construct” or “Aufbau” could no longer be grounded in an inductively generated history of development, the crisis of historicism revealed the necessity of another kind of “Aufbau” that might respond to the crisis and address the void that it left in its wake. In this way the crisis of historicism provides a key to understanding the emergence of constructivism in Germany in the 1920s.

\textsuperscript{230} Ernst Troeltsch, “Die Krisis des Historismus,” 573.
Historicism can be thought of as the mode of historiography that was predominant in the late nineteenth century and around 1900, but also as a more general historicization of thought and consciousness. A delimitation of the concept provides challenges because the term itself did not become frequent until the 1920s. But in a general sense historicism can be understood as that force that put an end to the speculative philosophies of history of German Idealism and focused instead on the historical material itself, promoting a historiography that writes history for its own sake (l’histoire pour l’histoire) and believes in the possibility of an “‘objektiver’ Wiedergabe der Wirklichkeit.”\(^{231}\) At the same time, historicism is a product of the empirical sciences in the late nineteenth century and is driven by the idea of a history of development in which humanity progresses towards more enlightened social forms. Karl Heussi’s 1932 monograph *Die Krisis des Historismus* stands at the tail end of the turbulent Weimar Republic and attempts to navigate these terminological icy waters. His concept of historicism is at once “die Geschichtsschreibung der Zeit um 1900,”\(^{232}\) which, in the spirit of Ranke, wrote history “wie es gewesen ist” by culling the historical force of an epoch from the material of that time alone, but also a negative concept or “Feindbild” developed by philosophical and theological systems in the 1920s to limit the reach of history, that is, a mode of historical thinking that approaches history without reflecting its own epistemological presuppositions. Finally, Heussi points to a third, more neutral and thus more ambiguous, sense of Historicism as the general historicization of thought and knowledge that goes beyond historiography as such. The crisis of historicism as “die Krisis des historischen Denkens in den Jahren nach dem Weltkriege”\(^{233}\) therefore implies a productive ambiguity because it shows that intellectuals were not able to extricate themselves simply from historical


\(^{233}\) Karl Heussi, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, 21.
thinking, but were compelled to reflect upon their historical situation and their historical perspective in new ways.

The crisis of historicism characteristic of the 1920s, according to Heussi, involves the disruption of historicist historiography by a certain philosophical skepticism. The roots of this skepticism concern problems with the historiographical method that were by no means unknown to nineteenth-century historians: an overwhelming abundance of historical material that cannot be digested and sorted out without increasing specialization, and the difficulty of achieving an objective perspective on the historical material that is not colored by the subjective position of the historian and his historical present. Whereas these difficulties represent a challenge and a task for nineteenth-century historiography, in the 1920s they become acute problems that hinder historicist historiography and necessitate a renewed self-reflection on history. The crisis therefore lies in the dawning recognition of the historian’s total powerlessness before the terrifying magnitude of history and its sheer size, a powerlessness that results not only from the magnitude of the object as such, but also from the limited perspective of its perceiving subject:

Die ungeheure Fülle des Geschehens, auch bestimmter zeitlich-örtlicher Abschnitte wie der Schlacht bei Leipzig, vermag kein Mensch zu fassen. Das, was in jedem Augenblick auf der Erde geschieht, und vollends was in der geschichtliche überblickbaren Vergangenheit bis zu diesem Augenblick von Menschen erlebt worden ist, ist eine so ungeheuerliche, jedes menschliche Vorstellen übersteigende Größe, daß der Mensch davon nicht anders sprechen kann als so, daß er bestimmte Momente in oder an dieser Größe aufsucht und heraushebt, und auch diese Momente nur in solchen vertretenden Gedanken denken kann. Das rätselhafte “Gegenüber” ist also nicht eigentlich faßbar, es bleibt ewig “gegenüber”; nur an einer Stelle ist es uns unmittelbar zugänglich und damit hell und deutlich, nämlich innerhalb der Grenzen unseres eigenen bewußten Lebens. In seiner Totalität ist es, bildlich gesprochen, der ungeheure, ewig rätselhafte Strom des Wirklichen, der durch die “Zeit” sich dahinwälzt.  

Heussi’s rhetoric makes a comparison with Kant’s aesthetic of the sublime immediately plausible: history itself becomes that awe-inspiring sublime object that exceeds the powers of

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human perception, indeed that throws the very confidence in such powers of perception into question. The overwhelming magnitude of history, and thus the impossibility of grasping the historical object, makes the limitedness of historical perception and thought manifest; the crisis, then, is not just a crisis of the historiographical method but moreover a crisis of the very heart of modern thought and its triumphant proclamation of a thorough-going historicization of thought. Such historicized thinking is able, of course, to isolate significant moments in history that stand out of the unfathomable depths of the fullness of history, but these moments only “stand in” (vertreten) for the fullness of history; whether they are truly able to “represent” the manifold nature of the historical event is questionable. Heussi’s use of the term “Gegenüber” instead of the more usual “Gegenstand” emphasizes this point: the historical “counterpart” cannot be fully constituted as an “object” by the history writing subject; the “Gegenüber” is rather, as Heussi explains in a footnote, a limit concept (Grenzbegriff), one which emphasizes the problematic process by which the historian produces historical objects. The crisis of historicism lies for Heussi in the loss of faith in the ability to construct historical objects given the sublimity and unfathomability of the historical process.

Finally, Heussi’s diagnosis of a crisis of historicism calls into question Mannheim’s category of a totality that is able to grasp the deeper unity of historical change (“[Der Historismus] vollzieht aber seinen wesentlichen philosophischen Schritt dadurch, daß er die historischen Einzelergebnisse insofern transzendiert, als er mit Hilfe der Kategorie der Totalität die tiefere Einheit des Wandels zu erfassen versucht.”); for Heussi the totality of the “counterpart” is precisely that which cannot be brought together and formulated as a unity, for its totality is that “tremendous current of reality” that overwhelms and exceeds historical perception. Heussi takes
the dynamism of Mannheim’s concept of totality to its extreme: to the point where it cannot be conceived by the limited nature of historicist concepts.

The consequence of this crisis of objective history is, according to Heussi, an understanding of the subjective construction of history peculiar to the 1920s. The innovation in such historiography lies not in the discovery of the perspectivism and subjectivism of the historian as such but rather in the recognition that the “counterpart” itself is not determined by any finality of form or significance. In this vein, Heussi writes:

Das eigentlich Entscheidende für unsere Betrachtung des Problems liegt nicht in der Tatsache der Standortsgebundenheit, sondern in dem Unterschied zwischen der hier vorgetragenen Auffassung und der um 1900 üblichen Behandlung des Problems der historischen Erkenntnis. Damals war es so, daß man den “subjektiven” Anteil an aller historischen Erkenntnis sehr stark betonte, ihn aber nur für eine unvermeidliche, mehr oder minder starke Trübung der Auffassung eines an sich fest gegebenen, ein für allemal eindeutig strukturierten Gegenüber betrachtete. Danach wandeln sich die Anschauungen der Menschen, es bleiben die Dinge. Nach der von uns vertretenen Auffassung sind die so strukturierten Dinge nur im Denken der Menschen . . . ; das Gegenüber ist nicht eindeutig und fertig strukturiert, keine starre Größe, sondern unerschöpflicher Anreiz zu immer neuen historischen Auffassungen.235

Not just the subjective perspective of the historian is given over to change but also the perspective of the historical counterpart. Heussi’s argument goes a step further than Mannheim’s dynamic account of historicism: it is not only that the absolute concretizes itself in different ways in different historical epochs; the historical counterpart, moreover, has no final and equivocal structure as a historical reality. Insofar as the structure given to historical material is a structure worked out in thought, the historical counterpart is an “inexhaustible stimulus to ever new historical readings.” The relativism of historical phenomena, which Heussi wants to understand in terms of an understanding of “relative” as meaning “having relations,” is thus given a powerful formulation: the historical object comes into existence only in the particular

235 Karl Heussi, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, 56.
constellation in which it is given a historical reading, that is, always in relation to a concrete present that posits a historical relation.\textsuperscript{236}

The multiplicity of possible historical relations leads Heussi to consider a potential theological perspective from which these relations could be grasped in their entirety, perhaps with some intimation of contemporary theological currents. His gesture towards an eschatological account of history seeks to provide additional support for his historiography:

\begin{quote}
Erst am Ende aller Tage wäre die ideale Möglichkeit gegeben, alle Relationen von Größen, die jetzt längst der Vergangenheit angehören, zu überblicken. Vergangene Größen, die wir vielleicht gar nicht für sonderlich wichtig halten, können unter Umständen in der Zeit, die für uns Zukunft ist, noch zu bedeutenden Nachwirkungen gelangen. So angesehen, ist die Vergangenheit nichts Starres, sondern etwas Lebendiges, stetig sich Wandelndes und Wachsendes.\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

The gesture, however, is marked by an inner contradiction: while Heussi argues for the liveliness of history in taking on changing forms for the future, the ideal vantage point at the “end of the days” that might permit an overview of all historical relations would represent a finality of the historical perspective, such that it can no longer be conceived as being given over to change and growth. But the very impossibility of this vantage point is precisely what prevents the past from becoming rigid and petrified. For Heussi the figure of an eschatological end serves primarily as a means of looking back and recognizing that the final word on the past and the form that it will take has yet to be spoken. Nevertheless, the figure is suggestive for the direction of secular historiography in the 1920s in Germany: it writes a provisional history that is aware that the future may very well entirely rewrite its narrative.

Whereas Heussi articulates the crisis of historicism primarily in terms of its effects on the constitution of the historical object, that is, in terms of the way that the historical “counterpart” is

\textsuperscript{236} Heussi’s formulation of the historiography that proceeds from the crisis of historicism also provides an apt conceptual basis for understanding Walter Benjamin’s theory of historiography in contrast to Ranke’s historicism.

\textsuperscript{237} Karl Heussi, \textit{Die Krisis des Historismus}, 69.
given an open determination, C. H. Becker analyses what he too sees as a crisis in terms of the methodology of historiography, that is, in terms of the revolution of the approach to history by his contemporaries. Heussi marks the crisis of historical objectivity; Becker concentrates on the liberation of historical subjectivity. For Becker too the crisis takes place not so much within the discipline of “Geschichtswissenschaft” as in the broader cultural field. The epoch of historicism is over, he pronounces, and a new “Zeitbewußtsein” has taken its place:

Das Zeitalter des Historismus ist vorüber. Ein Zeitalter der Geschichtsmüdigkeit scheint angebrochen. . . . Das früher so brennende Interesse am Inhaltlichen der Historie, der Glaube an die objektive Geschichtsbetrachtung ist verschwunden; dafür hat das früher so verachtete Subjektive, Konstruierte, Philosophische, Künstlerische, Religiöse eine ungeahnte, fast ausschließliche Wertung, ja Überbewertung erfahren. . . . Das Zeitbewußtsein hat sich in seiner Stellung zur Geschichte gewandelt. 238

In part the crisis was that the science of history no longer finds any resonance in German culture in the 1920s. The interest in the detailed and scientifically rigorous accounts of history that was prevalent before the First World War was no longer able to sustain itself; the appeal of an objective consideration of the past gave way to a search for values that still might hold weight in the present. The new “Zeitbewußtsein” took instead a rather different approach to history; it valued the “subjective, constructed, philosophical, artistic, and religious” approach to the past. The result was that the coherence of historical reality and historical truth began to come undone; the modern subjectivism of the new historiography merged the interest in the historical with an artistic impulse.

At stake in this historiography, then, is not just a depiction and representation of the past, but moreover an account of how the past is experienced and related to in the present, thus an account of the effects of the past on the subjectivity of the artistically inclined historian.

According to Becker, historiography in the 1920s is characterized by its entanglement with the artistic currents of the time:


Such historiography takes the hermeneutic principle of reading to its subjective extreme: not only does the present’s subjective understanding of the past color its interpretation and reading of the past, but its subjective experience of the past is taken as part of the “afterlife” or “Nachempfinden” of that past and thus as a legitimate starting point for the historical narrative. History becomes its reception; historiography becomes the expressionistic account of this reception. The literary element of history contained in the double meaning of the word “Geschichte” comes to the fore, while the subjective element that historicism was well aware of is taken not as a limiting factor in historiography but rather as its driving force.240 The writing of history from a neutral perspective gives way to an avowedly subjective evaluation of history from the point of view of the present.

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Whether one considers the crisis of historicism from the side of the historical “object” or that of the subject who writes history, the result is a vacuum left in the place of the historicist narrative of development. The goal of writing an objective history of the past was thwarted both by the impossibility of constituting a stable historical object and by the boundless subjectivization of the perspective of the historiographer. Each of these conditions, I will go on to argue, informed a turn towards constructivism in historiography in the wake of the crisis of historicism.

2. The Revaluation of “Aufbau” and the Constructivist Turn in Historiography

The constructivist turn in historiography in the 1920s in Germany, however, was not without precedent. Already in 1910 Wilhelm Dilthey’s *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* argued for the construction of the historical world via the hermeneutic relationship between the “Erlebnis” of the historical subject and the objectified forms that historical knowledge assumes in its reflection by the subject. By providing a philosophical perspective from which the relationship of the individual to the manifold of history could be articulated, Dilthey played a crucial role not only for Mannheim’s dynamic philosophy of history but also for constructivist historiography more broadly conceived. Dilthey’s notion of “Aufbau,” however, presumes a “history of development or “Entwicklungsgeschichte” that the crisis of historicism made untenable. Indeed, Dilthey remained bound to historicism, such that his articulation of the concept of “Aufbau” was unable to avert its necessary and productive crisis. In what follows, I will argue that the constructivist turn in historiography undertook a revaluation of the concept of the “construct” or “Aufbau” in light of the crisis of historicism discussed above.
This revaluation, however, can only be fully understood if one takes into account the legacy of Dilthey’s theory of historiography.

Dilthey’s concept of “Entwicklungsgeschichte” is related to its Hegelian predecessor but works with a more rigorous historicism and severs the connection, still decisive for Hegel, to the metaphysical absolute.\textsuperscript{241} In clarifying that “Dies geschichtliche Denken selbst will erkenntnistheoretisch begründet und durch Begriffe verdeutlicht, nicht aber durch irgendeine Beziehung auf ein Unbedingtes, Absolutes ins Transzendentale oder Metaphysische umgewandelt werden,”\textsuperscript{242} Dilthey made clear that in his view the historical world can be given a systematic, scientific account without recourse to a metaphysical foundation. The structure of the historical world arises instead entirely out of the concrete historical context that gives rise to a spiritual object (\textit{ein geistiges Objekt}) in the understanding (\textit{im Verstehen}). The structure or “Aufbau” of history is grasped insofar as it is constructed as a history of development (\textit{Entwicklungsgeschichte}), and the carrying out of such construction is the task of the “Geisteswissenschaften,” according to Dilthey. Following up on the Hegelian historical model, Dilthey notes that “[D]er Aufgang des geschichtlichen Bewußtseins . . . . erfaßt alle Phänomene der geistigen Welt als Produkte der geschichtlichen Entwicklung.” Yet in contrast to the Hegelian notion of development, for Dilthey the history of development is immanent to the “life” that constitutes “Lebensphilosophie,” and for this reason history is the accretion of its objective forms:

\textsuperscript{241} See Fulvio Tessitore, \textit{Kritischer Historismus. Gesammelte Aufsätze} (Köl: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 26ff. As Tessitore notes, Dilthey upholds the historicist notion of historical development as a “process,” yet in contrast to Hegel, he thinks that historical development is grounded not in an abstract principle, but in the concrete “Zusammenhänge” that structure the experience of temporality.

\textsuperscript{242} Wilhelm Dilthey, \textit{Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften} (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910), 33.

The life of the spirit, as a productive force, gives its life an objective form that takes on a petrified form as “history,” which in turn forms the substance upon which future spiritual life is grounded. The “Geisteswissenschaften” give this inner-historical dialectic a structural foundation in the understanding by working out the “Entwicklungsgeschichte” in which the spirit is enthralled.

Dilthey’s historicist tendency, in contrast to nineteenth-century philosophies of history, is also apparent in the absence of a “universalgeschichtliche Bewegung” that for Hegel provides an overall direction to the various “Wirkungszusammenhänge” present in the historical world. For Dilthey there is no goal (Ziel) of history that might serve as an anchor for the philosophy of history, as it did for Kant and Hegel. The “Sinn” of history, that is, both its “meaning,” and, taken more literally, its “direction” is rather to be derived inductively from that which is immanent to the present, from the smallest context of activity (Wirkungszusammenhang) to the structures that organize these contexts:

Der offenbare Sinn der Geschichte muß zuerst in dem immer Vorhandenen, immer Wiederkehrenden in den Strukturbeziehungen, in den Wirkungszusammenhängen, der Ausbildung von Werten und Zwecken in ihnen, der inneren Ordnung, in der dieselben sich zueinander verhalten, gesucht werden – von der Struktur des Einzellebens ab bis zu der letzten allumfassenden Einheit: das ist der Sinn, den sie immer und überall hat, der auf der Struktur des Einzeldaseins beruht und der in der Struktur der zusammengesetzten Wirkungszusammenhänge an der Objektivation des Lebens sich offenbart. Diese Regelmäßigkeit bestimmte auch die bisherige Entwicklung, und ihr ist die Zukunft

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243 Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, 78.
244 See Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, 105.
For Dilthey the “construction” (Aufbau) of the historical world amounts to its formation as a “spiritual world” in which history is given an objective form in which it reveals the forces of life that drive development. History is that edifice that emerges when the structures that define the regularities of the historical world are defined by the understanding in an act of objectification. The historical construct is therefore the concretization of spiritual life that sustains a history of development in the absence of a metaphysical ground. Dilthey’s construction of a historical world in relation to the immanence of life in the present, and not in relation to an idealist or metaphysical foundation, is still at work in Karl Mannheim’s philosophy of history and is an important touchstone for secular historiography in the 1920s in Germany more generally. However, the latter was no longer convinced that such a historical construct could be derived from structures revealed in the “objectification” of life. As Karl Heussi pointed out, the crisis of historicism called into question whether history could be constituted as an “object” of understanding. The basis for constructivism in historiography would have to be sought elsewhere.

In a further complication of Dilthey’s “Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt”, the crisis of historicism sharply criticized the notion of a history of development and therefore also the historical construct that had sustained it. The First World War brought the inner crisis of historicism to a tipping point and demolished the forms and structures that the “Geisteswissenschaften” had produced: as Troeltsch put it, “Dazu kommt, daß der Weltkrieg eine große historische Periode allem Anschein nach wesentlich beschlossen, alle bisherigen selbstverständlichen Maßstäben erschüttert und damit alle Entwicklungsbilder ihrer

The collapse of these historicist values spelled the end for an “Aufbau” whose impetus is a historicist engagement with the objective forms of spiritual life. And yet the “Hochkonjunktur [‘boom times’] für Geschichtsphilosophie” in the 1920s in Germany brought with it a constructivism that sought to recuperate the “construct” or “Aufbau” in other, non-historicist terms. Because historicism was no longer in a position to speak to contemporary culture, the lacunae that it left were filled by a diverse range of cultural forces, each of which supplied some form of “Geschichtsphilosophie” in order to manage the crisis of historicism. Constructivism, I will go on to argue, was the most sustained if contradictory effort to engage with the lack of historicist orientation: both among secular and theological intellectuals it provided the framework for an “Aufbau” in which the crisis of historicism was not so much overcome as taken as the starting point for new cultural forms.

The constructivist moment in historiography was conditioned by the crisis of historicism in two central ways: first, once the historical object was understood as a “counterpart” with no fixed structure, the structure of history was opened up for new forms of construction; and second, the collapse of the historicist “Aufbau” and its history of development made it necessary to articulate new historical relations and new relations of the present to history as such. In what follows, I will trace the constructivist turn in the theories of historiography of Ernst Troeltsch and Oswald Spengler and show how their work manifests the contradictions of their historical situation and offers a conflicted hope of “overcoming” history.

For Ernst Troeltsch, whose late work is devoted to a philosophical articulation of problems in contemporary culture, in which his background as a Theologian no longer played a defining role, constructivism provided a way out of the crisis of historicism by supplementing
historical criticism with philosophical synthesis; the resulting symbiotic relationship would provide historicism with ideas and philosophy with life.\(^{247}\) Troeltsch therefore envisioned a union of “Kritik, konstruierender Darstellung und geschichtsphilosophischer Synthese”\(^{248}\) that would be capable of renewing and enlivening the past by dispelling its petrified images and freeing it from dogmas and myths. It was at once a question of escaping the grip of history and of awakening history to new life, or, as he later put it, of overcoming history through history. Whereas historicism pictured an every-changing current (\textit{Strom}) of historical reality without being able to articulate its driving principle, Troeltsch’s philosophy of history and its accompanying “historische Bildung”\(^{249}\) finds itself rather immersed in an “ocean of historical critique and reconstruction.” This formulation makes a break with the linear metaphor of the “Strom” that progresses continuously through historical time and instead gives expression to the vastness of the historical field that is potentially an object of “konstruierende Darstellung” and “geschichtsphilosophische Synthese”:

> Um uns von der Historie zu befreien und souveräne Herrschaft über sie zu bekommen, stürzen wir uns in einen Ozean historischer Kritik und Rekonstruktion. Aber aus dieser Arbeit, die in Wirklichkeit die Vergangenheit von uns abrückt, beleben wir sie doch zugleich wieder und wecken ihre Geister frischer, ursprünglicher, lebendiger und wirksamer, als sie in den Verkleidungen der bisherigen historischen Konventionen gewesen waren.\(^{250}\)

Troeltsch can thus been seen as a threshold figure: on the one hand he embodies a continued faith in historical research that had begun to be called into question in his time; but on the other hand he articulates his project in terms that locate him squarely in the contradictions of the


\(^{249}\) Ernst Troeltsch, “Der Historismus und seine Probleme,” 757.

\(^{250}\) Ernst Troeltsch, “Der Historismus und seine Probleme,” 723.
At stake is a distancing of the past ("eine Arbeit, die in Wirklichkeit die Vergangenheit von uns abrückt"); one is tempted to even read: an estrangement of the past’s reality) that enlivens the historical forces of the past, letting their originary force become active again. The historical image must be destroyed so that a new image may arise in its place: “diese Zerstörung ist zugleich Wiederbelebung und Erneuerung eines tieferen, neu geschauten, von der Einstellung der Gegenwart und der Verbreiterung des Forschungsfeldes aus erfaßten Bildes der gewesenen Dinge.”

In this way the crisis of historicism entails a necessary destruction of historical relations; the moment of crisis, moreover, is an integral methodological component of Troeltsch’s concept of “historical critique and reconstruction.” The construction of history in terms of the cultural problems of the present is conceived by way of metaphors of resurrection ("beleben", “wecken”, “Wiederbelebung”, “Erneuerung”, etc.), but first the historical image must be brought to the threshold of death by estranging its conventional representation. The more radical a form historical criticism takes, the more revolutionary the constructivist moment of reconstruction becomes.

The emphasis on the destructive side of historical critique that allows the past to enter into new relationships with the present places Troeltsch clearly within the anti-historicist strand of historiography, as much as he tries to distance himself from a purely subjective, expressionist historiography. It places him in a relation of affinity both to Karl Barth’s theology of history and to Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegory. Each of these figures pursues a destabilization of the past as historical past so that its energies can be won for the present. For Barth the historical past

251 As Fulvio Tessitore notes, “Troeltsch exorziert diese Krise nicht, sondern nimmt eine neue, letzte Rationalisierungsaufgabe in Angriff und vertraut dabei auf die Geschichtsphilosophie.” Kritischer Historismus. Gesammelte Aufsätze, 53. Troeltsch’s return to “Geschichtsphilosophie” does not resolve the crisis of historicism but rather intensifies the crisis in order to make possible new constructions of history.

falls under the “Nein” of divine judgment but it also enters into a direct relationship to the present in its “Gleichzeitigkeit.” Despite his fervent anti-historicism, Barth is still invested, I argue, in writing a history of the present, a present, however, that encompasses all of time since the coming of Christ and departs from historical time so as to constitute a qualified moment. Benjamin too, both in the theory of allegory articulated in his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* and in his “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” argues for a practice of citation of the past that tears the historical object out of its context and places it in direct relationship to the present.  

Likewise, for Troeltsch the philosophy of history is charged with the task of perpetually shattering the composition of history in order to recover its autochthonous and originary potential:


The historiographical process at stake involves a dialectic of concept building and the breaking thereof to pieces. “Geschichte” as such is not the object of such historiography but rather that material ground out of which history arises; each recovery of an original force in history carries with it its own particular residue and burden that must be shed in order to tap new energy. A history that has been written no longer takes part in the creative moment in which the historical image is shattered to be born anew. For this reason Troeltsch places emphasis on the process of

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254 Ernst Troeltsch, “Der Historismus und seine Probleme,” 724.
historiography rather than on the result, so that the liveliness of history concentrates itself in the moment of historical synthesizing. Similarly, in Benjamin’s theory of allegory each allegorical image is itself subject to be taken from its context and mobilized for a new present. Both the reference to the myth of the giant Antaeus and the formulation “[u]m uns von der Historie zu befreien und souveräne Herrschaft über sie zu bekommen” suggest that the historiographical dialectic is never able to gain the upper hand over history. In each instance that the historiographical Antaeus regains contact with the nourishing strength of its historical ground, it is again torn away by the building of concepts; and each instance of sovereign mastery over history produces yet another historical object from which the philosopher of history must free himself. The resulting “Teufelskreis” is both an indication of the vibrancy and potential of constructivist historiography, which again and again concentrated its energies in the creative moment of historiographical production while ceaselessly discarding all finished products of history; yet it is also an indication of the fraught nature of this historiography and its fruitless search for a stable ground of historical representation. For there could be no final ground but that of the present moment, hence the tension of such historiography in relation to its own historical moment.

In this way the present moment becomes the site of a historical construction, of a temporally specific historical architecture whose crowning moment is the present. Troeltsch’s “Geschichtsphilosophie” culminates in a “construction of European cultural history” (Aufbau der europäischen Kulturgeschichte). The structure of the “Aufbau” emerges out of the destructive moment of historical critique but also contains a positive moment of construction in which the afterlives of certain forces from the past play a role in the present. Troeltsch is interested in a
stratification (*Schichtung*) of historical layers, each of which is still at work in the present.\(^{255}\) The composition of the “Aufbau” does not require the exactitude of scientific historical research but only the isolation and selection of the historical impulses that exercise a decisive force in the present:

Die Idee des Aufbaus, wie er vom Standort der Gegenwart sich darstellt, verlangt, daß wir nur diejenigen großen Perioden herausnehmen und betonen, in denen entscheidende Elemente unseres heutigen Lebens erwachsen sind. Die entscheidenden und kämpfenden Kräfte der Gegenwart sind ja nicht einzelne verzettelte historische Erbstücke oder etwa die Gesamtheit ihrer, sondern die großen Gesamtgeister ganzer Perioden. Die letzteren gilt es als lebenbestimmend herauszuholen und ihre im Laufe der Zeiten bewirkte Verschmelzung und Verflechtung sich klar zu machen. Alles übrige gehört lediglich der gelehrten-historischen Forschung und Erklärung, der Ermittlung der einst gewesenen Zusammenhänge und Uebergänge und Vorbereitungen an. Es gehört zur exakten historischen Wissenschaft, nicht zu dem menschlich bedeutsamen und jeden anziehenden Bilde der Geschichte, durch das wir uns selbst verstehen.\(^{256}\)

In this way, Troeltsch’s “geschichtsphilosophischer” anti-historicism initiates a movement away from the historical research of the past and its causal relations towards a functional understanding of history in which insight into the past enables a more precise self-understanding. The past is therefore no longer connected temporally with the present through the mediation of time but rather in terms of past forces that can be retrieved and extracted from their integration in the present. In this way Troeltsch articulates a non-temporal constructivism that builds up the past from the ground of the present rather than seeking to reconstruct historical causalities. This is why Troeltsch’s idea of “Aufbau” can be represented only “vom Standort der Gegenwart” and in relation to the life of the present. Historiographical construction in the 1920s could only be conceived as a construction of the present moment.

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\(^{255}\) Hence the title of one of sections of the fourth chapter of Troeltsch’s work: “Die Schichtung des Aufbaus.” The archeological metaphor recalls Karl Mannheim’s “Querschichtung” through which the historiographer has knowledge of history. Yet for each of these writers the archeological recovery of the past is but a preliminary step towards the construction of a historical architecture in and for the present.

\(^{256}\) Ernst Troeltsch, “Der Historismus und seine Probleme,” 757.
This, then, is the decisive difference between Troeltsch’s notion of “Aufbau” and that of Dilthey: Troeltsch does not presuppose an “Entwicklungsgeschichte” grounded in a linear causality. The crisis of historicism for Troeltsch involves the collapse of the consciousness of such a history of development and the loss of a universalism that connects European society with its history. He therefore seeks to make his philosophy of history relevant for a historical situation defined by a loss of faith in the historical narrative. His focus is on isolating the “basic forces” (Grundgewalten) of the past that are active in constituting the modern world in their relation to one another:

Diese Welt hat einen außerordentlich reichen und bunten geistigen Inhalt, der nicht bloß aus ihr selbst, sondern zum größten Teil aus unserer ganzen Geschichte seit den Griechen stammt. Damit erweitert sich unvermeidlich der Horizont bis zur Einbefassung der ganzen darauf hinführenden universalgeschichtlichen Entwicklung. Aber der Gedanke des Aufbaues verlangt nur, daß wir daraus die großen elementaren Grundgewalten herausholen, die unmittelbar, nicht bloß für das gelehrte historische Wissen und einen von ihm erfüllten Schulunterricht, bedeutungsvoll, wirksam und anschaulich sind. Diese Grundgewalten in ihrem ursprünglichen Sinn und ihrem Herauswachsen aus der historischen Bewegung verständlich zu machen, damit unserer geschichtlichen Erinnerung die entscheidenden Akzente aufzusetzen und sie in Hinsicht auf die Gegenwart zu gliedern, schließlich das in der modernen Welt sich herausbildende Verhältnis dieser Grundgewalten zueinander und zu dem modernen Leben zu erfassen: das ist die Idee eines Aufbaues der europäischen Kulturgeschichte.257

Troeltsch at once acknowledges a continuity of the modern world with its history and the vision of a universal historical development and at the same time argues that the thought of an “Aufbau” does not require such an “Entwicklungsgeschichte.” Troeltsch’s construct is therefore decoupled from nineteenth-century historicism. Again it is a matter of retrieving (herausholen) the elemental basic forces of the past that play an immediate role in the constitution of the present, a role not mediated by historical knowledge. Troeltsch sees no contradiction in articulating these basic forces in their originary sense and also showing how they have “grown out” (herauswachsen) of the historical movement in which they are embedded. The originary

257 Ernst Troeltsch, “Der Historismus und seine Probleme,” 765.
potential of these forces, one could argue, is not tied to their historical moment but exceeds that
historical specificity so as to figure an “afterlife.” Historical memory would then consist in
“arranging” (gliedern) the elemental historical forces in their relation they take to one another in
the present. For such a constructivist historiography, the question of causality and development
falls by the wayside; the aftershocks of historical forces may arrest the present across the greatest
historical discontinuity. But Troeltsch’s philosophy of history is not interested in registering
these shocks, nor in deepening the historical knowledge of how the present arose out of the past,
but rather in constructing, forming, composing, and synthesizing a relation of forces that
constitutes the present. These forces are taken from history, but in forming a part of the structure,
they are more than historical.

Oswald Spengler’s theory of historiography likewise breaks with Dilthey’s idea of
“Entwicklungsgeschichte,” although it works with a somewhat different concept of
constructivism than that of Troeltsch. Spengler draws on Dilthey’s argument that the recognition
of historical phenomena bears a different structure than that of the knowledge of natural
phenomena, but he is interested rather in the formal, morphological, symbolic, and figurative
qualities of history than in a developmental structure. Spengler’s philosophy of the future
proceeds from the assumption that history can be conceived in terms of a morphological order as
opposed to a developmental order; in this way, he articulates a constructivism focused not on the
past and death, but on the future and life; such a philosophy of the future entails an “Idee einer
Morphologie der Weltgeschichte, der Welt als Geschichte, die im Gegensatz zur Morphologie
der Natur, bisher fast dem einzigen Thema der Philosophie, alle Gestalten und Bewegungen der
Welt in ihrer tiefsten und letzten Bedeutung noch einmal, aber in einer ganz andern Ordnung,
nicht zum Gesamtbilde alles Erkannten, sondern zu einem Bilde des Lebens, nicht des
Spengler not only initiates a shift in focus to the future, in contrast to Troeltsch’s investment in the present, but his constructivist historiography also moves away from the notion of “Aufbau” to a construction of morphological relations between “figures” or “Gestalten.” This concept of historiography, then, is not only non-linear and non-developmental; it also does without the footing of a stable ground or “Standort” which for Troeltsch provides the basis of the “Aufbau.”

Spengler’s criticizes the historicist “Aufbau” of history because it assumes a continuous historical development and an optimistic belief in progress; in considering the “Formensprache der Geschichte” and articulating the relationship between “Gestalt und Wirklichkeit,” by contrast, Spengler argues that history is characterized by a discontinuous collection of figures and forms that, as living entities, are determined by a necessary mortality. The “construction” of a history of development therefore ignores not only the plurality of historical forms but also the insistent modulation and decline of these forms:

Der Geschichte des höhern Menschentums gegenüber aber herrscht ein zügelloser, alle historische und also organische Erfahrung verachtender Optimismus in bezug auf den Gang der Zukunft, so daß jedermann im zufällig Gegenwärtigen die “Ansätze” zu einer ganz besonders hervorragenden linienhaften “Weiterentwicklung” feststellt, nicht weil sie wissenschaftlich bewiesen ist, sondern weil er sie wünscht. Hier wird mit schrankenlosen Möglichkeiten – nie mit einem natürlichen Ende – gerechnet und aus der Lage jedes Augenblicks heraus eine völlig naive Konstruktion der Fortsetzung entworfen.... Ich sehe statt jenes öden Bildes einer linienförmigen Weltgeschichte, das man nur aufrecht erhält, wenn man vor der überwiegenden Menge der Tatsachen das Auge schließt, das Schauspiel einer Vielzahl mächtiger Kulturen, die mit urweltlicher Kraft aus dem Schoße einer mütterlichen Landschaft, an die jede von ihnen im ganzen Verlauf ihres Daseins streng gebunden ist, aufblühen, von denen jede ihren Stoff, dem Menschenentum, ihre eigne Form aufprägt, von denen jede ihre eigne Idee, ihre eigenen Leidenschaften, ihr eigenes Leben, Wollen, Fühlen, ihren eignen Tod hat.... Ich sehe in der Weltgeschichte

259 Spengler, Der Untergang des Abendlandes, 6.
260 The title of the first volume of Spengler’s widely read Untergang des Abendlandes.
Whereas for Troeltsch and Dilthey the construction (Aufbau) of history has a synthetic function that explicates the concretization of the history of the past in the life of the present, articulating the structure in which the past continues to inform the spiritual constitution of the present, Spengler’s criticism is directed against the ideology of progress that extends this historical construction into the future. The underlying assumption of such an understanding of history is not merely a continuity of historical development but moreover a notion of a unified subject of history, that is, a unified historical construction to which epoch upon epoch is added. Spengler, by contrast, sees a plurality of historical cultures, each of which has its own unique forms and a finite lifespan. World history, then, is the story of perpetual figuration and transfiguration: the historical figures do not permit a synthetic construction but rather represent singular historical forms.

Nevertheless, Spengler’s historiography too is part of the constructivist turn in historiography; he too brings a philosophical mode of thinking to his consideration of history. But for Spengler the object to be constructed is not an edifice of history in which different epochs or different “elemental forces”—to use Troeltsch’s term—provide the structural supports. History is rather understood to itself produce a plurality of forms that the constructivist historiographer articulates as “Gestalten.” The “Gestaltung” and “Umgestaltung” of historical forms and the recognition of the formal and morphological characteristics of historical entities are the methodological tools of Spengler’s historiography. The decisive insight of his work is that even a single historical moment or a transient historical form can become an object of constructivist figuration, even in light of the crisis of historicism.
Spengler, then, does not maintain any illusions about overcoming the crisis of historicism; he is rather content in intensifying this crisis and shifting the focus from a global to a micrological constructivism. Troeltsch, by contrast, maintained a hope for a renaissance of European culture through an overcoming of history. His historiography is driven by the effort to restructure history in order to overcome the past and to mobilize the basic forces of the past into a contemporary cultural synthesis: “Die Aufgabe selbst aber, die immer für jede Epoche bewußt und unbewußt bestand, ist für unseren Lebensmoment ganz besonders dringend. Die Idee des Aufbaues heißt Geschichte durch Geschichte überwinden und die Plattform neuen Schaffens ebnen. Auf ihr muß die gegenwärtige Kultursynthese beruhen, die das Ziel der Geschichtsphilosophie ist.”

The rhetoric of “overcoming history through history” not only underscores Troeltsch’s entanglement in a dialectic of destructive and constructive historiography; its connection with the concept of “Aufbau” also points to his interest in a temporal structure located in the present in which forces of material history coalesce in an extra-historical sensibility.

Yet the destruction of the historicist image for the sake of a “geschichtsphilosophischen” construct—whether in Spengler or in Troeltsch—runs up against a constitutive limit, one which makes the project of overcoming history, historicism, and historical thinking a fraught enterprise. This limit lies in secular historiography’s inability to occupy a standpoint outside of history, as much as the 1920s may seem to have been detached from history by the crisis of historicism. The theologian Paul Tillich drew attention to the fact that Troeltsch’s historiographical construct was unable to overcome historicism because he sought to do so with history itself: “Geschichte durch

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262 Ernst Troeltsch, “Der Historismus und seine Probleme,” 772.
Geschichte überwinden,\textsuperscript{263} as Troeltsch put it. “Es kann kein Zweifel sein,” Tillich claims, “Trölltsch, und das heißt die Zeit, deren Ausdruck er war, hat den Historismus nicht überwunden, hat den Ort nicht genannt, von dem aus er überwunden ist.”\textsuperscript{264} Troeltsch himself would say that the present, “unserer Lebensmoment,” is the “Standort” from which a “construction of history” overcomes the power of history, for it is a synthetic construction for contemporary culture and not for the sake of historical thinking. But the present, too, is merely one historical standpoint among others and therefore cannot provide the ground for yet another historical construction that itself must be overcome. This limit of historiographical construction is apparent in the theology of history, which works from the situation of crisis to articulate a standpoint that cannot be occupied, yet which shakes and unsettles all historical constructions; as Tillich writes:

Denn wenn ein Ort gefunden werden soll, der über dem höchsten Ort liegt, auf dem ein Künder der Gegenwart stehen kann, so darf dieses kein Ort sein, auf dem es möglich wäre zu stehen. Denn wäre es wieder nur ein Standpunkt, dem ein anderer Standpunkt gegenüberstellt werden könnte. Dann wäre also nichts erreicht. Nur ein solcher Standpunkt kann also gemeint sein, der jeden Standpunkt erschüttert, aufhebt, zur Verantwortung zieht. Das aber wäre, bildlich gesprochen, ein Punkt, eine Richtung, woher und wohin, eine Höhe über jeder möglichen Höhe, also die absolute, für jeden Vergleich unzugängliche Höhe. Nur das schlechthin Unzugängliche, Unvergleichliche, Unbedingte befreit vom Historismus und stellt die Zeitbetrachtung unter die unentrinnbare Verantwortung.\textsuperscript{265}

This standpoint that cannot be occupied and that shakes, suspends, and calls every standpoint to responsibility, I would argue, is the eschatological standpoint that defines the limit of historical construction. For the theology of history the historiographical construct gives way to the construction of eschatological time, the figurative, metaphorical, and geometric representation of eternity as a temporal vector that touches upon historical time without being identified with it,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[263] My emphasis.
\end{footnotes}
without entering it. It is a construct that brings historical time to its threshold, to a limit that energizes historical time even though it cannot be crossed. The theology of history therefore embodies the outermost extreme of the return to “Geschichtsphilosophie”: for it articulates history, even that of the present moment, in relation to a construction of eschatological time.

3. **Eschatological Constructivism and the Ends of Historiography**

The constructivist moment in the 1920s is finally at work in the theologies of history of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Franz Rosenzweig. These writers not only articulate a dynamic philosophy of history and proceed from an open structure of history enabled by the crisis of historicism, they also follow up on the constructivist tendency in Troeltsch and Spengler. Yet in doing so, they appropriate history for the construction of an eschatological moment, one which does not provide a structure with which to organize history, but is rather to be thought of as a construct of a temporality at the limit of history. The ultimate thrust of eschatological constructivism is therefore to figure an event that cannot be subsumed in history and in this way to broach an impossible historiography.

While the crisis of historicism entails a relativism of historical phenomena, it also opens up the possibility of constructing the historical object in multiple ways. The move that separates the historical “counterpart” from a fixed historical structure opens it up to a more generalized series of relations, including the possibility of a relation to that which is outside of history. Karl Barth’s thesis, drawing on Nietzsche, that the use of history lies in discovering moments of history that point beyond history towards something unhistorical has as a condition of possibility the crisis of historicism as diagnosed by Heussi. The difference, however, is that Barth does not
see the historical relation as such as a fruitful source of ever new historical readings but rather as a potential to be read in relation to another history and to be grasped in relation to another time. Nevertheless, the perspectivism of historiography in the 1920s, with its emphasis on new views of history that open up in relation to the present and its attention to the inexhaustible alterity of the historical object, is at the heart of Barth’s concept of the alterity of the present moment, which is at once a historical moment and simultaneously the potential to be a qualified moment of all moments. The open structure of history therefore serves as a springboard for Barth’s theology of history and its eschatological constructivism.

Troeltsch’s aim of overcoming history, even if it ultimately remained tied to historicism, was a goal pursued by both Barth and Rosenzweig; all three figures were committed to an overcoming of linear history for the sake of an extra-historical construction. For Barth history points to moments of revelation that enable a consciousness of the eschatological now in the present; for Rosenzweig the parabolic suspension of history between the eternity of beginning and end enables a life “outside of history”; and for Troeltsch, finally, history contains vital forces that can be retrieved in order to inaugurate a new cultural synthesis in a constructivist historiography. At issue is the composition of a temporal structure in which forces of material history coalesce in an extra-historical sensibility, one in which the historicist image is destroyed for the sake of a “geschichtsphilosophischen” construct. The metaphoricity of these constructs, their emergence from the ashes of a shattered historical world, express the contradictions and potential of historiography in the wake of the renaissance of “Geschichtsphilosophie.”

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266 The temporal dynamics of Dialectical Theology’s concept of the “eschatological now,” which stands in proximity to each historical moment in a relation of potential, but which can never be actualized in history, are worked out in detail in Chapter One.
A comparative look at the history of art in the 1920s may illuminate this argument: just as secular historiography turned against the abstraction and speculative optimism of German Idealism and the historicism of Ranke and Droysen, so too did the “Neue Sachlichkeit” react against the creative utopias of expressionism, focusing instead on a more concrete representation of reality in the aftermath of the First World War; the theology of history, in turn, might be likened to the “konstruktivistische Gestaltungsprinzip” of the Bauhaus movement and Russian Constructivism: in Rosenzweig and Barth this constructivist principle of figuration is evident in their use of geometric metaphors to describe in spatial terms their theories of temporality and eternity.  

1920s Germany is driven by both of these tendencies in its historiography: on the one hand towards a more concrete, sober understanding of history free from the century ideology of progress and development; on the other hand a renewed tendency towards the abstract, to the construction of speculative metaphors of time and eternity at the limit of historical consciousness.  

Constructivist movements in art—from Gropius, Kandinsky, Klee, Moholy-Nagy, and others in the Bauhaus to Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Russian Constructivism and Suprematism—provide a productive counterpoint to the figures considered in this chapter not only in the metaphorical register of terms like “Aufbau”, “Konstruktion”, and “Gestaltung”, but also more concretely in their aims, motivations, and cultural significance. Whereas the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism were concerned with re-envisioning space (Raum) and its construction, Troeltsch, Barth, and Rosenzweig accomplished something similar with time and history. Artists like Malevich and El Lissitzky experimented with new constructions of space in which objects

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267 Barth, for example, describes the relation of primal history or “Urgeschichte” to the historical world as that of a tangent that touches a circle without touching it. The relation is further defined in terms of lines of intersection between planes, fractures, and hollow spaces (See Chapter One). Rosenzweig, in turn, thinks of the relationship between time and eternity in terms of an arc or hyperbola spanned between an infinite beginning and an infinite end without a stable reference point that would allow the construction of a line (See Chapter Two).
are neither tied to a horizon nor weighted to a center; likewise Gropius saw the foundation of architecture in the construction of space (den Raum gestalten). The former express constructivism’s tango with nihilistic visions of modernity, where there is no orientation for the construct since the viewer must carry out the construction; the latter represents a positive moment in which architecture expresses the unity and totality of the finite experience of space.

In his *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, T. J. Clark analyzes the competing tendencies in Malevich and El Lissitzky toward an unhinged pictorial and spatial construction of objects that approaches an unbound geometry of space, on the one hand, and towards an architecturally oriented constructivism in which spatial forms interact and stand in relations of tension, balance, and stress:

[T]he key to a Malevich painting is not geometry in general, but a geometry that “expresses the dynamic condition of forms.” “We can only be aware of space,” says Malevich at one point, “if we break away from the earth, if the fulcrum disappears.” Now it seems to me that El Lissitzky was thoroughly in two minds about just this side of Suprematism. . . . [H]is conception of architecture was a metaphorical one. It was utopian. It meant a reunification of the arts, but it also meant their re-materialization. It meant the expression of specific weights and stresses, a bridging and balancing of parts. . . . The last thing that happens in an El Lissitzky painting is that the fulcrum disappears. No doubt the perceptual sums we are invited to do in order to discover where the fulcrum is are often mindboggling. Spaces are undecidable, solids and voids convert into one another at the drop of a hat. But the whole construction is tensed and stable. Architecture equals forces finally contained. And architecture in this sense is the ruling metaphor of El Lissitzky’s art.”

Constructivism in historiography, I would argue, falls under the shadow of an analogous tension. The crisis of historicism reveals the absence of a fixed structure of the historical object and as such opens up the possibility of a temporal geometry in which the interaction of forces is no longer bound to a linear model of development. At the same time, however, constructivist historiography (as in Troeltsch) as well as various expressionist theories of historiography (as

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diagnosed by Becker) seek to pull the weightless and suddenly undetermined basic forces (or “Grundgewalten,” to use Troeltsch’s term) into the orbit of a constructivist foundation. The present becomes the ground upon which a new historical architecture can be constructed. It provides the fulcrum for the “Aufbau” of a European cultural history; it allows a realignment of historical forces in terms of this orienting historiographical architecture. As was the case for El Lissitzky’s art, the precise interplay of historical forces in the historical construction is not always easy to determine, but only those forces that can be contained by the “Aufbau” enter into the picture. This kind of constructivism without a doubt provides a way out of the excess of historical material, for it brings only those historical moments into the structure that bear and express a weight in the present.

The theologies of history of Barth and Rosenzweig come closer, I think, to the geometry of the dynamic conditions of forms that Clark points to in Malevich. Malevich’s interest in a kind of space not bound by a pivotal orienting force, one that breaks away from the earth, has its counterpart in the theological articulation of the eschatological now, whose potentiality is not centered on any given historical moment. The notion of eternity provides the basis for a dynamic condition of temporal forms, yet it cannot exercise the function of a fulcrum because its infinity cannot command a presence in history. Eschatological time exercises the same kind of liminal force as does Malevich’s space of dynamic geometric forms. Eschatological constructivism thus adopts a temporal geometry that does not depend upon a historical-temporal horizon, for the eschatological limit functions as an absent or negative ground for history.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Compare to Clark’s verdict about Malevich’s painting: “My judgement, you will gather, is that the best Maleviches really do not turn on the relation of their parts to a built-in horizon, drawn or implied, or even to the picture’s overall shape conceived as a finite, generative entity, having a top and bottom, and ultimately dictating the behavior and gravity of the forms within it.” *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, 285.
In Clark’s reading, the tug of war between Malevich and El Lissitzky expresses an undecidable tension in modernist art, one in which it is not altogether clear who is the materialist and who the idealist. El Lissitzky’s constructivist architecture, which aims for a re-materialization of the world, might be read as the materialist strand in Russian Constructivism, while Malevich’s search for a non-centered, unbound dynamic geometry of space could play the part of the idealist. In a similar fashion the theology of history, despite its use of spatial and geometric rhetoric, falls easily under the charge of occupying an idealist position that speculates about eschatological time and leaves behind the materialist ground of history. But the matter could also be turned around. El Lissitzky’s seemingly more materialist architectural forms are also more utopian, more beholden to the idea that a certain arrangement of these forms that brings their potential to bear might give rise to an ideal. Malevich, in turn, recognizes that the condition of an unbound geometry is not as such within our means, and that the ideal of space can therefore only be approximated within the constraints of material art. As Clark concludes, “Therefore the last thing a Malevich wants to be, or be read as, is as an image of some possible loss of gravity, some ‘breakaway from earth.’ We do not have the means as yet to make such an image. The means will only be found on the picture surface, in the actual, material place where forms can be made to negate their usual connotations – of uprightness, density, scale, self-support, interdependence, equilibrium, imminent collapse.”

A similar undecidability exists between historical constructivism and eschatological constructivism. Mannheim and Troeltsch each seek to produce their constructions in close contact with the material ground of history, yet the positivist element in their concept of an “Aufbau,” tied as it is to the history of the “Geisteswissenschaften,” also contains an idealist

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tendency. Dialectical Theology, by contrast, on the one hand submits materialist history to a profound negation under the sign of eschatology, yet to the extent that the eschatological now represents an idealist figure of another “time,” it is one that remains a limit phenomenon and cannot be fully realized in history. The material of history therefore provides the source for moments of revelation that intimate the temporality of eschatology, even if only in approximation. (The materialist basis of such eschatological thought, I argue below, is even more pronounced in Tillich). If Malevich and El Lissitzky represent competing tendencies in modernist art, then Barth, Rosenzweig, Troeltsch, and Mannheim serve to illustrate the tensions in modernist thought about time and history. The question of the stability, foundation, materiality, and reality of constructivist forms is one of central contention for these writers in their attempt to articulate figures of time in the wake of the crisis of historicism.

The theoretical writings of Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, also suggest that constructivism was concerned not only with the material side of construction and the pragmatic necessities of architectural building but also with a process of formation, design, and figuration (Gestaltungsprozess) that might serve to articulate a “new spatial vision”: “Viel wesentlicher als die funktionsbetonte Ökonomie ist die geistige Leistung einer neuen räumlichen Vision im baulichen Schaffensprozeß. Während als die Praxis des Bauens Problem der Konstruktion und des Materials ist, beruht das Wesen der Architektur auf der Beherrschung der Raumproblematik.”

271 Just as architecture exceeds mere construction (Bauen) by addressing the problem of space (Raumproblematik) more generally, so too does the eschatological construct exceed the construction of a particular historical moment or formation in order to rethink the

problem of history and time as such. In his 1923 text “Idee und Aufbau des staatlichen Bauhauses,” Gropius goes further in defining his concept of architectural “space”:

Wir erleben wohl den unendlichen Raum kraft unserer Zugehörigkeit zum All, aber wir vermögen Raum nur mit endlichen Mitteln zu gestalten. . . . Der Mensch erfindet durch seine Intuition, durch seine metaphysische Kraft, die er aus dem All saugt, den stofflosen Raum des Scheins und der inneren Schauung, der Visionen und Einfälle . . . . Aber dieser Raum der Schauung drängt zur Verwirklichung in der stofflichen Welt; mit Geist – und Handwerk wird der Stoff bezwungen.272

Gropius at once acknowledges the spiritual component of the “new spatial vision,” the inner perception (innere Schauung) of which depends upon an experience of infinite space (unendlicher Raum); yet he also emphasizes that the artist can only construct (gestalten) space with finite means. It is therefore a question of the realization (Verwirklichung) of the space of perception (Raum der Schauung) in the material world. Gropius too cannot be defined clearly as either a materialist or an idealist. Nevertheless his version of constructivism sheds light on the problem of constructivism in historiography and in the theology of history. The construct itself, regardless of the terms of its structure or the means with which it is figured, is always a material approximation of an “infinite space,” “an “infinite history,” or an “infinite time.” The construct cannot enact the inner space of perception, nor the eschatological now, nor a cultural history of the present, but it can give material form to these limit phenomena.

The investment of writers like Mannheim, Troeltsch, Spengler, Barth, and Rosenzweig in various forms of constructivism points to their more general significance in the cultural and intellectual history of the 1920s. Just as the Bauhaus and Russian Suprematism and Constructivism used constructivist techniques to articulate new configurations and relations of space and its materiality, so too did constructivist historiography and the theology of history engage with geometric forms of figuration to address different ways of relating to time and

272 Die neue Architektur und das Bauhaus. Grundzüge und Entwicklung einer Konzeption, 35. The 1923 text “Idee und Aufbau des staatlichen Bauhauses” is reproduced here.
history. What Gropius, Malevich, and El Lissitzky do with space, Barth and Rosenzweig do for
the philosophy of history. The construction of time is liberated from the constraints of history
and becomes invested with the materiality of the eschatological. The foundation of historical
development no longer provides a ground for eschatological constructivism.

The theology of history, then, articulates a non-temporal construction that is even more
sharply anti-historicist than Troeltsch’s “Aufbau der europäischen Kulturgeschichte.” Theology
makes use of such non-temporal construction in articulating the contemporaneity or
“Gleichzeitigkeit” of historical moments, but the nature of the construction involves not the
constellation of moments as such, but their extra-historical substrate. The eschatological moment
at once requires an ultimate historical construction, in which all vital forces of the past are
concentrated in a final potency, but then again the “last things” shatter all historical constructions
and nullify all historical images by placing them before an extra-temporal architecture. The
thought of the last things is both the “Aufbau” of a non-historical vector of eternity, in its liminal
intersection with historical time, and the “Rückbau” of all historical construction, whether linear
or non-linear.

In this way the theology of history puts a definitive end to Dilthey’s project of a
“Lebensphilosophie” that self-reflectively constructs the “Aufbau” of the historical world. The
Hegelian notion that the absolute comes to itself in history, an idea that still animated Dilthey’s
thinking, is likewise put to rest. The notion of “Aufbau” is appropriated for an extra-historical,
eschatological constructivism; “Aufhebung” is no longer a part of the historical dialectic but a
dialectical moment in which history is put in relation to eschatology; the absolute is no longer
realized in history, for history shows only its absence. The objectification of life in the history of
development recedes, indeed, in the moment in which history is placed in relation to eternity; in
the contemporaneous moment of “Gleichzeitigkeit” the epistemological object at stake is not a historical object, nor does it have an object character at all. For it is humanity itself that is at stake in the light of the last things, and the knowledge that arises at this juncture in which history is taken up into eternity is a knowledge that cannot said to be either subjective or objective. The figure constructed by the theologian of the “last things,” to put the matter pointedly, is not an object at all, for the object lies at the limit of knowledge and at the limit of objectivity; it is what cannot be construed as an object. In shifting the focus of scientific knowledge in this way, the theology of history lays bear the negative ground of historicization, that is, through a critique of the conditions of possibility of “history as such.” The un-building of history takes place under the sign of the figuration of the last things.

By moving away from constructions of history towards a figuration or “Gestaltung” of eschatology, the theological variant of constructivism draws upon and extends Spengler’s philosophy of the future. Their affinity lies not, as one might expect, in a pessimistic account of the decline of history with apocalyptic notions of an end of history, but rather in the rhetorical, metaphorical, and conceptual use of “figures” in their thinking. But whereas for Spengler these “Gestalten” are those of history, of the world as history, for theology the object of figuration is an “event” that cannot be subsumed among historical phenomena. Just as Spengler was committed to writing a philosophy of the future, so too did Barth see the eschatological figure as fundamentally futural. The eschatological possibility, which Barth thought was exemplified in art, is that of the re-figuration of reality in which the world of creation appears as a redeemed reality. Barth therefore borrows from Spengler’s metaphors of the “Gestalt und Wirklichkeit” and applies them not to a morphological account of historical plurality, but to a future of anticipated completion, in the figure of a redeemed reality in which the last, final, and actual
nature of the world as creation is given form. The eschatological figure therefore concerns both the historical present and a “new heaven and new earth” that verge on the figuration of the impossible:

Das wagt doch der Mensch in der Kunst: die gegenwärtige Wirklichkeit in ihrem schöpfungsmäßigen Das-Sein, aber auch in ihrem So-Sein als Welt des Sündenfalls und der Versöhnung nicht letztlich ernstzunehmen, sondern neben sie eine zweite, als Gegenwart nur höchst paradoxer Weise mögliche Wirklichkeit zu schaffen, ohne von jener loszukommen – künstlerisches Schaffen wird freilich immer die Tendenz zum Unerhörten, noch nie Dagewesenen, zur Gestaltung des Unmöglichen und zu unmöglichen Gestaltungen haben; alles künstlerische Schaffen ist im Prinzip futuristisch; es wird aber auch immer wieder auf die Wirklichkeit zurückkommen, sie neu zu gestalten, sie verwandelt zu sehen und zu zeigen, die von Gott geschaffene, die mit Gott versöhnte Wirklichkeit, aber nun diese als erlöst Wirklichkeit, in ihrer geahnten, vorweggenommenen Vollendung, insofern eine verklärte, gereinigte Wirklichkeit, wobei es doch fraglos um viel mehr geht als bloß um Verklärung, sofern darunter nicht ausdrücklich die Herausarbeitung des Eigentlichen, Letzten, Endgültigen in der Wirklichkeit verstanden wird.273

The figuration of a possible reality—that is, the eschatological figuration of a new reality that represents the redemption and completion of the world of creation—at stake in Barth’s understanding of aesthetic creation is itself a kind of “Formsprache,” as Spengler would put it, but its object is not history nor the extension of history into the future but rather a “reality” that can never be fully present.274 Dialectical Theology therefore at once belongs to the constructivist tendency in historiography in its language and conceptual metaphors, and yet takes leave of the historical construction, in which the past and future emerge as structure in the present, in favor of an eschatological figure of a reality whose possibility belongs to every present, yet which is unable to be realized as actualized presence. Whereas the historical construct is put together,


274 In the pages preceding this passage, Barth makes explicit that he thinks that art is of significance for a theological ethics “in den Zusammenhang eschatologischer Betrachtung.” He goes on to discuss the “eschatologische Möglichkeit” of poetry and music. See *Ethik II. Vorlesung Münster Wintersemester 1928/29, wiederholt in Bonn, Wintersemester 1930/31*, 437, 441.
built up, and synthesized from out of a historical material, the eschatological figure has the shape and structure of an event that cannot fully become history. Barth’s theology of history is therefore concerned with an impossible historiography, that is, with a history that cannot be written.

Such are the ends of historiography in eschatological constructivism: the historical event provides an impetus for the figuration of an eschatological moment, but in doing so, it is not part of a historiographical narrative but rather points to a temporality that exceeds history. While for Karl Barth and Dialectical Theology the eschatological moment is articulated dialectically in the rupture of the continuum of history, for Paul Tillich, the historical moments that point to eschatology are taken up into the eschatological moment while remaining concretely historical. In each case, history is used to generate a figure of the eschatological moment, but even Tillich is less interested in writing history as such than in capturing those moments of history that are invested with eschatological meaning. Still, he argues for a necessary and mutual relationship between eschatology and history: “Alle eschatologischen Begriffe werden sinnlos, wenn die strenge Korrelation zur Geschichte aufhört, wenn sie eine selbständige Objektsphäre darstellen sollen, die ihren realen Grund verloren hat und an lauter unlöslichen Widersprüchen diese ihre Realitätslosigkeit zeigt.” It is not a question, therefore, of overcoming history but rather one of working out a correlation between history and eschatological concepts, the former of which provide the real ground for the latter. In this way Tillich provides a unique case of the radicalized understanding of history at stake in the theology of history: history is the site for the realization of the *Eschaton*; history itself is the scene in which historical beings represent the last things.

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If for Barth the figuration of eschatology implies an impossible historiography, for Tillich the writing of history becomes devoted entirely to eschatological construction. Tillich is not interested in historiography as such but only in those moments of history in which the *Eschaton* is at stake. Still, even with this qualification, the claim that “Im Eschaton ist nichts, was nicht in der Geschichte ist”\(^{276}\) is startling. It suggests that the *Eschaton* is not that which remains when history is complete but rather that it consists of those moments of history that, by way of their initiating a leap of fulfillment or decision, are taken up into eternity. The last things, then, are not otherworldly; they are the residue of this world, the remainder of this world when all that is not decisive, all that is not fulfilled, has passed away. Tillich’s affirmation of a certain potential in history is consonant with the more general rethinking of historiography in the 1920s; he at once argues for the fulfillment of history in the *Eschaton* and at the same time makes clear that there can be no eschatology without history. He is therefore not invested in a synthetic historical construction but rather in discovering in history, in its concrete reality, eschatological figures. Barth’s formulation of the dialectical potential of history to point to the *Eschaton* as its other has its counterpart in Tillich’s claim for a historical ground of eschatology. In each case the theory of historiography moves beyond historical construction towards a figuration of eschatology.

Whereas secular historiography, especially that of Karl Mannheim and Ernst Troeltsch, sought to instill new life into historiography by working out philosophies of history that argued for new constructions of history in relation to the life of the present, the constructivism of the theology of history was bound to have a different emphasis because of its interrogation of the limit of life and death in the figure of resurrection. Theology projects the figure of resurrection as the ground of its non-historical construct: at the limit of life and death, the eschatological thought

forms the basis for a different sort of constructivism, one that departs from the conventions of
historiography. In this construct, time is not simply historical time but contains moments on the
threshold of death and life. The contested ground of such a construct is precisely how to
represent and picture this extra-historical time, since it withdraws from historical-temporal
depiction. Theology understood the tension of life and death not through expressionist
subjectivity but through its own characteristic constructivism. Instead of articulating an ecstatic
experience of the transcendence of the self, it produced post-Hegelian, non-totalizing systems
that argue for the urgency of eschatological time in the present.

Far from seeking to escape the reality of the 1920s, the eschatological construct grappled
with the central cultural problems of its time. The challenge of theology, considered here as an
intellectual experiment, was to work from the situation of failed modern experiments, to build
something productive for the present out of the ruins of the metaphysical landscape by retrieving
the energies of the past, by redeeming their value in new constructions that are open to the
outside and to the eschatological moment. Theology argued for a paradoxical pervasion of the
eternal in the material despite its radical negation of the material. The construct was therefore
conflicted and torn in its allegiances, but nevertheless contained a potential. Its contradictions are
those of a fractured historical consciousness, which endeavored to put together the shards of
historical experience by breaking apart its last remains. As such, eschatology was a cultural
product of the 1920s, a product that arose in the midst of turmoil and crisis, but did not seek to
resolve the crisis but rather to intensify its energies. Thought of as a last resort of historiography
in the midst of a crisis of historicism, the eschatological construct figured a trembling present
verging on its opposite. The theology of history therefore both recognized the potential of the
*Eschaton* and stumbled before the reality of its presence, and in this way it pointed to the
uncertain nature of eschatological constructivism. At issue is the status of the “event”
(Geschehen or Ereignis) at the heart of the eschatological construct, to which I shall turn in the
next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

Eschatology and the Emergence of a New Realism in German Culture

If empirical reality does not accord with the system of thought produced by the spirit, Hegel famously asserted, then “Umso schlimmer für die Tatsachen!” Such idealist contempt for “facts” had a long career, yet the 1920s in Germany saw a renewed interest in concrete reality, in things, and in the facticity of lived experience. Across the cultural field, from literature, to the visual arts, to philosophy and theology, one can observe the emergence of a “new realism,” one decisively different from nineteenth-century forms of naturalism and representational realism. The argument for a convergence of modernist experimentation and neo-realist poetics typically focuses on artists like George Grosz and Otto Dix (and the “Neue Sachlichkeit” more generally) or writers such as Alfred Döblin and Bertolt Brecht. Yet there are also crucial theological manifestations of this new realism, especially in the work of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann, that interacted with and impacted the larger cultural field in ways that have not been fully understood. The concept of eschatology, I will argue, plays a central role in theology’s engagement with realism in the 1920s and 1930s, and eschatological thought itself, moreover, is transformed in this encounter with realism.

The new realism is worked out, broadly speaking, between two general poles. First, it is no longer indebted to naturalism and breaks with the historicist concept of objective reality. Its concepts of “fact” and “facticity” are not accessible to historical knowledge in a straightforward way, nor is the “real” for the new realism an unmediated perception that can be imitated and

reproduced. Second, the new realism turns against the subjectivism of expressionism (and, in the theological context, against mysticism): it contests the notion that reality is “produced” by the subject in the immediacy of its experience, and likewise rejects expressionism’s understanding of the transcendence of reality arrived at through the ecstatic overcoming of the self.

The new realism takes instead a middle path, insisting on the immanence of the real against its transcendence in “truth,” and yet also arguing for the necessary mediation of reality and the impossibility of immediacy. The new realism thus begins with a return to objects, to things, to the concreteness of reality, but it also recognizes the ways in which the real is concealed. The poetics of the new realism is therefore dedicated to unearthing, opening up, and revealing reality. Yet it seeks neither to uncover historical facts in their objectivity, nor to reproduce reality in its appearance, but to articulate the real as a mode of facticity in which reality is in the strongest sense possibility. In the theological context, the new realism therefore works with an eschatological event that embodies not the real as such, but a new mode of relating to the real: through a process, through consummation, through the mediation of a revelation that is “fact” only in the act of its communication.

Theology is part of a broader negotiation of realism between the extremes of subjectivism and objectivism in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. The problem of realism, in turn, had implications for the theology’s engagement with history, dictating a renewed reflection on the historicity of humanity in a fallen world and prompting a new concept of eschatology no longer tied to a model of transcendent fulfillment and completion in the apocalyptic inception of the end of time. Instead, eschatology was related in a concrete, realist fashion to the facticity of human life in the present. It defined a presence that, while never becoming fully present in the manner
of a historical event, nevertheless marked a space for the eschatological possibility of new
creation within the immanence of history.²⁷⁸

My argument will proceed as follows: First, I will examine the famous debate between
Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch concerning expressionism and realism in order to better
demarcate the cultural field within which the “new realism” of the 1920s and 1930s moved.
Second, I will take a closer look at the Neue Sachlichkeit and Bloch’s theory of utopia and
examine how such secular cultural formations represent and confront the “real.” Finally, I will
turn to the work of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann in order to show how eschatology
played a decisive role in the articulation of a “new realism” in Germany. I will consider
Heidegger’s concept of “facticity” in his early lectures on religion and in Sein und Zeit, explore
Bultmann’s theory of “Kerygma” (“announcement”) and his articulation of an “eschatological
fact” in the medium of communication, and finally examine the realist poetics of revelation in
Heidegger’s concept of the “Ereignis.”

²⁷⁸ The realist relation of eschatology to immanence that one finds in Bultmann and Heidegger
cannot, however, be identified with the “immanentization of the eschaton” that Eric Voegelin
diagnoses in neo-agnostic thought. See The New Science of Politics (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1952), 110, 123. Bultmann and Heidegger do not analyze a secularization of
eschatology in which it is brought within history as a goal of politics. Rather eschatology bears a
realist relation to immanence only in the moment of its communication, which has no extension
in history and is present only insofar as it is re-activated at each moment. It structures a mode of
facticity not through its presence but through the possibility to which it points. At stake is a
concept of immanence marked by the absence of eschatological completion. To the extent that
there is a dialectic of secularization at work here, it is, to quote Hans Blumenberg, a
“secularization through eschatology rather than the secularization of eschatology.” See Hans
Blumenberg, “Verweltlichung durch Eschatologie statt Verweltlichung der Eschatologie,”
Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 46–63.
1. **Lukács versus Bloch on the Status of Reality**

The field of tension in German culture constituted by the poles of realism and expressionism was highly productive in literature, the arts, and intellectual history in the 1920s and 1930s. The so-called ‘expressionism debate’ between Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács, which took place in the exile journal *Das Wort* in 1938, is exemplary in pointing to the divergence of different concepts of reality among intellectuals and the larger cultural significance of the problem. The conflict of these cultural formations, however, has for the most part been framed in political terms. That is, the debate has been read as an exchange on the question of what kind of literary practice would best serve Marxist political aims. While both Bloch and Lukács argue for a Marxist standpoint that could oppose fascism, the story goes, they disagree upon the literary means that would be best suited to this purpose. However, the crux of their disagreement concerns not politics per se, but rather the constitution of reality and the means with which literature can interact with this reality. In what follows, therefore, I will set aside the political implications of the exchange and focus on the aesthetic forms and philosophical modalities at work in the articulation of reality between realism and expressionism.

Ernst Bloch leads out the exchange by criticizing realism’s faith in an “objective” reality that constitutes a totality of social relations, defending, in turn, expressionism’s interest in transforming reality, rather than merely representing it. In his essay “Diskussionen über Expressionismus,” Bloch defends the legacy of a maligned expressionism, which had been

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279 *Das Wort* was published in Moscow from 1936-1939 and featured contributions by a number of prominent German intellectuals in exile. See Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973). This volume reprints the most significant articles surrounding the so-called ‘expressionism debate’.
criticized for failing to oppose fascism, but which, in his view, had not yet had the full opportunity to unfold its potential. Trying to make sense of Lukács’ objection to the expressionist attempt to critique reality under capitalism through a literary strategy that reveals its gaps and inadequacies, Bloch concludes that Lukács claim is based on a concept of reality that is unduly ‘objective’ and ‘closed,’ and that, moreover, inherits from classicism an ideal of reality as ‘totality.’ In the face of expressionist experimentation and critique, Bloch argues, Lukács holds all the more strongly to the ideal of classicism and a corresponding form of realism:

Lukács setzt überall eine geschlossen zusammenhängende Wirklichkeit voraus, dazu eine, in der zwar der subjektive Faktor des Idealismus keinen Platz hat, dafür aber die ununterbrochene “Totalität”, die in idealistischen Systemen, und so auch in denen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie, am besten gediehen ist. Ob das Realität ist, steht zur Frage; wenn sie es ist, dann sind allerdings die expressionistischen Zerbrechungs- und Interpolationsversuche, ebenso die neueren Intermittierungs- und Montageversuche, leeres Spiel. Aber vielleicht ist Lukács’ Realität, die des unendlich vermittelten Totalitätszusammenhangs, gar nicht so – objektiv; vielleicht enthält Lukács’ Realitätsbegriff selber noch klassisch-systemhafte Züge; vielleicht ist die echte Wirklichkeit auch Unterbrechung. Weil Lukács einen objektivistisch-geschlossenen Realitätsbegriff hat, darum wendet er sich, bei Gelegenheit des Expressionismus, gegen jeden künstlerischen Versuch, ein Weltbild zu zerräumen (auch wenn das Weltbild das des Kapitalismus ist). Darum sieht er in einer Kunst, die Zersetzungen des Oberflächenzusammenhangs auswertet und Neues in den Hohlräumen zu entdecken versucht, selbst nur subjektivistische Zersetzung; darum setzt er das Experiment des Zerfalls mit dem Zustand des Verfalls gleich.280

In Bloch’s view, Lukács can only consider expressionism to be a degenerate formation, to an even greater extent than Romanticism, because he celebrates an “objective realism” characteristic of classicism. For Lukács, realism has the task of representing objective social conditions, and it is for this reason that he has reservations about the excessive subjectivism of expressionism. If one assumes a closed, coherent reality, as Bloch thinks Lukács does, then the

whole of reality is a “continuous totality” in which there is no place for subjective impressions. Bloch, however, as the passage cited above makes clear, questions whether this is truly reality; if reality is more than an infinitely mediated totality, if indeed true reality also contains interruptions, then it becomes difficult to maintain the objective character of the real. But if this is the case, then expressionism’s attempt to disrupt the surface effects of reality and uncover alternative possibilities in its hollows and lacunae cannot be reduced to mere subjectivism, to a phenomenon of decadence and decline. For Bloch, expressionism’s use of montage and techniques of fragmentation, that is, its aim of rupturing the capitalist order, cannot be considered degenerate simply because it does not aspire to the classical ideal of order and beauty; rather, he challenges the imperative of representing reality in favor of the need to transform reality, and the literary aims of expressionism, according of Bloch, are well-suited to open up a space for such transformation. In doing so, they are not merely subjective, for they critique a concrete reality, but they do unsettle the idea that reality is purely objective. Bloch thereby refuses the terms of the distinction between subjective and objective; the discontinuities of the real, he claims, are not merely a function of the expressionist imagination, but are apparent beneath the surface effects of a seemingly continuous totality.

In Lukács response to Bloch in the same issue of Das Wort, an essay entitled “Es geht um den Realismus,” he points out that Bloch himself locates the “subject” as the source of expressionism’s “explosion of the image” or “Bildsprengung.”281 In Lukács understanding, moreover, this kind of expressionism necessarily abstracts from its context, separates itself from the mediation of the real, and finally isolates itself. He concludes: “Der konsequente

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Expressionismus leugnet jede Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit, sagt allen Inhalten der Wirklichkeit einen subjektivistischen Krieg an. What is lacking in such a sweeping denial of any relation to reality, for Lukács, is a consideration of the objective relations between society and human action. By taking its own “Attitüde zur Wirklichkeit” as reality itself and uncritically translating this attitude into a colorful language of concepts, expressionism, according to Lukács, fails to take note of and ignores the objective reality of social relations. Realism, he argues, offers more effective means for avant-garde social change because such change will come not from subversive, subjective attacks from the margins, but from changes in the objective relations of individuals and society itself. Realist literature, according to Lukács, is able to promote this kind of social change by representing it in its embryonic forms, for realism is engaged in a figuration of reality “Gestaltung der Wirklichkeit” in which the contours of the future first become apparent. Realism is not just a representation of reality “as it is” but also “as it will become.” In this sense, Lukács writes:

Im großen wird also eine nicht unmittelbar evident e, aber objektiv desto wichtigere dauerhafte Tendenz der Wirklichkeit gestaltet. Nämlich der Mensch in seinen sehr vielfältigen Beziehungen zur Wirklichkeit, und zwar gerade das Dauernde in dieser reichen Vielfältigkeit. Und es wird darüber hinaus eine solche Tendenz der Entwicklung erkannt und gestaltet, die zur Zeit ihrer Gestaltung erst im Keim existierte und noch nicht alle ihre objektiven und subjektiven Bestimmungen gesellschaftlich und menschlich entfalten konnte. Solche Tendenzen zu erfassen und zu gestalten ist die große historische Sendung der wirklichen Avantgarde in der Literatur. Es bedarf nach den bisherigen Ausführungen hoffentlich keiner erneuten Argumentation, daß eine solche wirkliche Avantgarde der Literatur nur die bedeutenden Realisten bilden können.

The pantheon of contemporary writers who fit this bill is significant for its brevity; Lukács says that it suffices to mention Maxim Gorki, Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann, and Romain Rolland.

Realism, as an avant-garde formation, according to Lukács, has the task not just of representing

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282 Lukács, “Es geht um den Realismus,” 207.
“reality” in its immediate evidence—as though it were a static entity—but moreover in giving form to its enduring “tendency.” The most accomplished realists, in this view, are able to recognize the developments that objective reality is undergoing and figure this development proleptically, in a moment in which its future potential exists only as a “seed” (“Keim”), that is, in which its coming objective and social manifestation has yet to unfold. Realism for Lukács is connected in a strange way to a form of prophetic vision; or at least, the best realists are avant-garde for recognizing the immanent developments of reality in a moment in which they are still precarious.

My aim here is not to resolve the dispute around these competing concepts of reality, but rather to suggest that the disagreement is characteristic of the way in which “realism” marked a field of tension in relation to which writers, artists, theologians, and philosophers sought to situate themselves. Indeed, the alternatives presented here need not be seen as mutually exclusive oppositions; rather, they are relations to the real that were in dialogue with one another in various cultural formations in the 1920s and 1930s. The painting of the “Neue Sachlichkeit,” for example, which I will consider in detail in the following section, sought to provide a cool, detached representation of the reality of everyday life, yet its interaction with reality was more complex than mimetic naturalism, since “showing” the real was always at once a way of confronting reality and taking a stance towards the present historical moment. That is, there were neo-realist cultural formations that took interest in immanent, concrete confrontations with reality—and thereby grappled with some form of representational realism—while maintaining a dialogue with modernist experimentation.285

285 See Esther Leslie, “Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: ‘The fact of new forms of life, already born and active.’”
In what follows, I will concentrate on the art of the “Neue Sachlichkeit” or New Objectivity as an embodiment of a “new realism” that arose out of a dialectic of expressionism and realism. One could of course also point to corresponding literary examples, such as the realism of Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which used elements of montage and the documentary, employing contemporary newspaper clippings and reproducing spoken idiom in order to provide a direct portrayal of life in the urban metropolis. The critic W. E. Süskind has argued that “The Neue Sachlichkeit as a school, or more correctly as ‘schooling’, had already, in the years and days preceding, been proclaimed and demonstrated by Döblin; Döblin himself brought forth its most significant realization.” Indeed, the “Neue Sachlichkeit” was far from a unitary movement and encompassed figures ranging from post-expressionist artists like Georg Schrimpf, Carlo Mense, and Alexander Kanoldt, to better-known Verists including Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Rudolf Schlichter. The subject matter of this art included urban and industrial landscapes, as in Carl Grossberg and Franz Radziwill, and meticulously realistic portraits like those of Christian Schad. The story of the “Neue Sachlichkeit” in Weimar Art has by now been well-rehearsed: in contrast to the ecstatic visions of expressionism, which focused on the dynamism of the subject, the “Neue Sachlichkeit” was understood as a return to a cooler, detached, more objective representation of “reality.” It sought to portray with sobriety the forms

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and scenes of the modern world, as one critic put it, through a “return to a tangible objective reality.”

The Neue Sachlichkeit’s abandonment of expressionism, to put aside for the moment the question of the nature of its objectivity, was part of a more general turn away from the transcendent, the mystical, and the inner life of subjectivity and towards more earthly, immanent, concrete confrontations with reality. The New Objectivity may have returned to things in a detached way, but it nevertheless shifted the focus from the abstract utopias of expressionism to the grim realities of everyday life in the 1920s. Indeed, it is a common trope in art historical criticism that the New Objectivity was above all a reaction against expressionism, indeed, a thorough rejection of expressionism. According to the critic Wieland Schmied, this rejection of expressionism was widespread and universal in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, and could be found in movements as diverse as Dadaism, the Bauhaus, Constructivism, and the new realism; however, “Keine Richtung . . . stand so diametral gegen den Expressionismus wie die Neue Sachlichkeit, wie der Magische Realismus, keine Richtung war so sehr ‘Anti-Expressionismus’.”

Schmied goes on to clarify the grounds for this opposition:


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287 Irene Guenther, “Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic,” 45. Guenther’s essay provides a good introduction to the “Neue Sachlichkeit” in the context of Germany in the 1920s. The term “Neue Sachlichkeit” was first used as the title of an art exhibition curated by Gustav Hartlaub.

richten auf das Hier und Heute, darum ging es, den Blick aus dem Fenster und auf den Alltag . . .  

A series of binary oppositions mark the departure of “magic realism”—to use Franz Roh’s term for the Neue Sachlichkeit—from its expressionist predecessors: ecstasy vs. sobriety; cosmic dreams vs. daily life; the stars above vs. the ground beneath one’s feet. Schmied’s point about the loss of interest in the apocalyptic pathos is of relevance not only for German art in the 1920s, but also for eschatological discourse. In theology, too, the view was directed not towards a future end of history or terminal apocalypse, but towards the present as a moment of crisis bearing possibilities for self-reflection. But the contrast between expressionism and the Neue Sachlichkeit is not just a matter of dwelling in the future versus living in the present; it hinges, moreover, on the relative weight of subjective experience and the exteriority of the world. Expressionism too could be said to be interested in a “moment” with a special character. But for expressionism this is a moment of “self-overcoming,” a moment outside of time, a moment in which the self exceeds the self in intoxication, one in which the depths of the unconscious come to light. By contrast, the realism of the Neue Sachlichkeit avoided the extremes of such subjectivism and sought a perspective not determined by the excesses of the self and its imagination. The view was no longer turned inward but towards the circumstances of everyday life all around. The Neue Sachlichkeit was invested in coming to terms with the present moment as it presented itself from the outside, against the boundless depths of interiority.

The orientation of the Neue Sachlichkeit towards the tangible reality of the external world, however, should not be mistaken for a mimetic naturalism that merely reproduces reality. For as much as the new realism reflected the urgency or “Aktualität” of its historical moment, as

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289 Schmied, Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933, 13.
much as this art put to canvas the material of its present moment, its representation of reality was always colored by an effort to engage with and change its contours:


Attuned to the currents of its present historical moment, the new realism interacted with “reality” in a more complex way than that of mimetic naturalism. By taking up a position in relation to the present (“Stellung beziehen zur Gegenwart”), the art of Dix and Grosz does not just “show” reality, it situates itself in relation to its historical moment and in this way confronts reality. ²⁹¹

Realism in the 1920s meant this kind of politically engaged confrontation with the present: bearing witness to the present, giving expression to its face, but also criticizing and intervening in this present. Hence the potent “Aktualität” of the Neue Sachlichkeit, which dictated an engagement with everyday life first and foremost, and a consideration of aesthetics and the world of the imagination only in terms of this primary engagement.

And yet the new realism does have a distinctive aesthetic, notwithstanding the persistent tendency in art criticism to politicize the Neue Sachlichkeit: namely, an aesthetic of the world in its fragmentary immanence, as fallen nature, an aesthetic of the ugly in contrast to the classical

²⁹¹ See Chapter One, which analyzes an analogous engagement with the present moment in Dialectical Theology. Karl Barth’s early essays, in particular, are invested in the “present” as a site of perpetual theological crisis. I will go on to show that in the theology of Barth and Bultmann, this present is theorized as an eschatological now that is conceived as an “event” of revelation.
ideal of transcendent beauty. In other words, the new realism renounces expressionism’s longing for another world and recovers a sensibility for the earthly materiality of this world, finding aesthetic potential in the very corruptness of its state. Franz Roh, a contemporary critic of the Neue Sachlichkeit, makes a compelling case that the expressionism and realism of the first decades of the twentieth century occupy the extremes of a more general aesthetic spectrum. Art, in his understanding, is always moving between the articulation of new worlds, in the realm of dreams and imagination, and a more concrete, realist focus on the world in its facticity:


The Neue Sachlichkeit, according to Roh, eschews the dreams images of expressionism, relinquishing its fascination with religious and transcendental themes. Instead of an unruly transzendentalism, characterized by a daemonic yearning to leave the confines of the earth and overcome the self, the new realism recovers an insatiable desire for the world in its narrow, fragmentary character. Allegories of the beyond, a yearning for another, redeemed world, give way in the 1920s to a more pressing consciousness of the fallenness of this world. The art of the

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Neue Sachlichkeit expresses this fallenness with a new clarity, having done away with the myths and cosmic speculations of expressionism.

Yet the Neue Sachlichkeit, as a manifestation of the new realism, has a significance that goes beyond its political intervention and any imperative of aesthetic experimentation for its own sake. That is, by recovering a sense for the immanence of the world, it unfolds a new relation to things and uncovers something like an original condition of thingness. This “neue Hinwendung zur Welt der Objekte” and “neue Auseinandersetzung mit den Dingen”\(^{294}\) sought to come to terms with reality in the things themselves, and these things, in their concrete facticity, provided what Wieland Schmied has called the vocabulary of the artistic language of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Reversing the excessive subjectivism of expressionism, the artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit painted “von außen nach innen.”\(^{295}\) In a reversal of Nietzschen perspectivism, the painters of the Neue Sachlichkeit sought to presents things as they appear, as they show themselves, without the addition of ideational or conceptual content. In this way, the new realism charted a course between the extremes of naturalism and subjectivism, not merely imitating nature but rather taking up a position in relation to the reality of the present, yet doing so without imposing a subjective vision upon the world. At stake was a new relation to things not colored by inherited notions, hence a return to the originary condition of thingness:

Um dieses neue Verhältnis zu den Dingen zu erlangen, galt es, zunächst alles, was wir von ihnen wissen, zu vergessen, im Sinne des Wortes des Chiricos, “jede Idee und jedes Symbol sei in der Malerei” beiseitezustellen. Dann erst, wenn vom Blick des Malers als des ersten Betrachters nichts hinzugefügt, nichts in sie hineingesehen wurde, konnten sich die Dinge in ihrem eigentlichen Charakter zeigen, neue “wie am ersten Schöpfungstag”, so wie Henri Rousseau sie gesehen hat. Das auf Rousseau gemünzte Wort Kandinskys von der “großen Realistik”, öfters im Zusammenhang mit der Neuen Sachlichkeit zitiert, darf wirklich auf sie angewendet werden, denn im letzten und in

\(^{294}\) See Schmied, Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933, 28.

\(^{295}\) This is the formulation of Ernst Thoms. Quoted in Schmied, Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933, 28.
ihren hervorragendsten Ergebnissen ging es ihr gerade in der Darstellung der kleinsten Gegenstände um das “große Reale”, wie oft oder wie selten immer sie es tatsächlich zu fassen bekam.296

This project, in which ingrained perceptual schemata are put aside so that things can show themselves in their actual character (so “konnten sich die Dinge in ihrem eigentlichen Charakter zeigen.”), is rife with theological significance. For the “new” appearance of things in such realism is at once a return to the origin in creation. The Neue Sachlichkeit thus at once shows things in their condition of fallenness, yet in doing so, in allowing the real to appear without the complications of the expressionist imaginary, “things” are at once released from this fallenness and appear in a new light.

The project of allowing the things to show themselves in their original condition of “thingness” is in this way connected to the theological concept of a “Neuschöpfung” in which the fallenness and corruption of nature is overcome. “New creation” or “recreation,” for Protestant Theology, signifies a moment that goes beyond the creation of Genesis and beyond the idea that creation is renewed and carried forward in each moment. “Neuschöpfung” is conceived rather in terms of the idea of resurrection, but “Auferstehung” is not only the moment of ἀποκάλυψις in which the possibility of redemption is revealed, but also the moment of ἀποκατάστασις in which a fallen nature is restored to an uncorrupted state before the fall. The Protestant Theologian Edmund Schlink, in a 1936 essay, argues for such new creation as the “eschatological fact of creation,” a fact whose reality involves a contestation of the “real” of visual perception.297 Schlink describes such eschatological creation, the work of a “Schöpfer

296 Schmied, Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933, 29.
Geist,” as follows: “... dann wird ja der Schöpfer Geist bekannt, der den neuen Leib schenken wird und dieses dem irdischen Blick verborgene, eschatologische Faktum der Schöpfung jetzt schon gewisser und gegenwärtiger macht, als die verstümmelte sichtbare Wirklichkeit dieser Welt der Sünde und des Todes.”

The concealed presence of the eschatological fact of creation, in which nature is restored to uncorrupted origin, is comparable to the elusive “große Reale” that defined the horizon of the new realism. Both the recovery of an original condition of thingness by painting things “as they appear” in the Neue Sachlichkeit and Schlink’s concept of “Neuschöpfung” as the “eschatologisches Faktum der Schöpfung” involve a complication of reality, a contestation of that in which “Wirklichkeit” in fact consists. The new realism, in this way, struggles with something real, something present (“gegenwärtig”) at the limit of perception. The aesthetic of the fallen world, the realism of the world in its immanence, then, effects a certain estrangement that releases things to their origin in creation. An apocalyptic moment of revelation – that is, the revelation of nature in a renewed, uncorrupted state – appears here not as the work of a phantasmatic imagination, but rather in the very immanence of things.

In this way, both the new realism and expressionism were interested in coming to terms with something real beyond the contours of an inherited visible perception, yet the Neue Sachlichkeit saw the means to such a redeemed reality in a confrontation with the concrete facticity of everyday life. A key fault line between expressionism and the Neue Sachlichkeit therefore lies in their disagreement about the status of utopia and the terms in which its “reality” can be conceived. Expressionist writers like Ernst Bloch denounced “the new objectivity as art which could be called ‘hatred of imagination’ and ‘hostility to utopia,’ and added, ‘the

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fascination of the formal rigidity still corresponds to the delight of capital when it is establishing itself.  

But the case could also be made that the Neue Sachlichkeit was critical less of the goal of utopia as such than of the means with which expressionism sought to achieve it. Whereas expressionism produced utopian visions of the world by exploring the depths of subjective imagination, the Neue Sachlichkeit focused less on the abstract, formal qualities of color and shape and more on the concrete reality of things. The critic Emilio Bertonati, drawing on G. F. Hartlaub, the organizer of the Neue Sachlichkeit exhibition in 1925 in Mannheim, points out that the

Neue Sachlichkeit represented not a completely contrary point of view to expressionism, but rather opposition to its degenerate forms. The remedy for this was seen as being a less utopian vision, put into a concrete form and made more realistic from a pictorial point of view, but without total abandonment of the earlier art, as might be thought, through a “return to the object.” Basically it would seem that in order to link up with the objectives of the original expressionist movement it was necessary to strip the latter of its formalistic superstructures, by means of a cold and deeply mediated, but only apparently impassible, vision.  

There is a tension here, I want to argue, that bears the terms of the conflict between eschatology and history: namely, the question as to the extent to which the eschatological moment can enter history is in fact a corollary of the question as to what extent utopia can become reality. To flesh this out: the Neue Sachlichkeit reacts against the utopian gesture of expressionism because it places its emphasis too strongly on religious themes of transcendence, on the ecstatic overcoming of the self, and therefore neglects historical reality. Expressionism, in this argument, is able to articulate a concept of utopia in terms of a “Selbstbegegnung” (to use Bloch’s term from Geist der Utopie), but it does so in purely formal terms, without a necessary historical embodiment. The new realism neither seeks to establish the transcendent in history, nor does it


forswear the goal of utopia altogether; rather, it works with the material of the immanent world in order to arrive at the threshold of transcendence (painting, as the artist Ernst Thoms put it, “von außen nach innen”). Instead of the immediacy of expressionist ecstasy and self-overcoming, the Neue Sachlichkeit offers a glimpse of reality mediated by the cold, deathly character of things. If there is to be utopia for the new realism, it is not to be had through an escape from the materiality of the real, but on the contrary through a renewed confrontation with reality.

3. **Bloch’s Expressionist Eschatology and Utopian Reality**

The alternative approaches to the problem of utopia in Expressionism and the New Objectivity mark a point of tension in German culture in the early twentieth century: namely, how best to negotiate between material reality and the ideality of utopia. The “new realism” of the Neue Sachlichkeit, I argue, is set off from the way in which Ernst Bloch’s expressionist theory of utopia represents and confronts the “real.” For Bloch, everyday life does not provide a window onto reality but merely onto a false appearance; the “real” is rather to be had in overcoming of the self in a utopian moment. As we saw above, for Bloch the “real” is not “objective reality” but rather its transformation. Bloch’s expressionism, therefore, constructs the real in terms of an apocalyptic moment of self-encounter; eschatology, in turn, defines the ultimate utopian moment of the real.\(^{302}\)

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\(^{301}\) Quoted in Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933*, 28.

Bloch’s expressionist eschatology, therefore, is of a different sort than the eschatological thought of the other writers considered in this study (Barth, Rosenzweig, Tillich, Bultmann, Heidegger). For Bloch, eschatology is not a limit concept that informs each moment in the present, but concerns rather an actual “end of history,” at which each individual will be present by virtue of his theory of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls. His Geist der Utopie (1918 / 1923), which brings an expressionist, stream of consciousness style to his philosophical ruminations on the subject of “Gestalten der universalen Selbstbegegnung oder Eschatologie” (the title of the final chapter of the work), belongs in the tradition of “Endzeit” apocalypticism, insofar as it develops an apocalyptic narrative of the end of time. For Bloch, this apocalyptic eschatology takes on cosmological dimensions, such that the end of the world coincides with the complete entropy of material. However, as much as Bloch’s work addresses theological topics from the margins of philosophy, it cannot be reduced to a theological position, and even as it draws on Judaism and Christianity, it remains atheistic at its core. Indeed, as the critic Heinz Kimmerle has argued, Bloch’s consideration of eschatology takes place in the context of his more general commitment to a philosophy of utopia:

emphasizes the “geschichtswirksamen Aspekt der Eschatologie” in his understanding of utopia. Ultimately, Bloch’s concept of eschatology reproduces its secularized, Marxist form.

Was im theologischen Sprachgebrauch Eschatologie heißt, fällt für ihn [Bloch] unter diese umfangreiche Kategorie des Utopischen. Die Eschatologie ließe sich in seinem Sinn als eine besondere Art von Utopie auffassen, und zwar als eine Utopie, die nicht nur auf eine “bessere Welt” und ein “besseres Leben” zielt, sondern auf die Vollendung der Welt und des Lebens, auf die letzte Erfüllung alles menschlichen Strebens, aller menschlichen Sehnsucht.

Like the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen, Bloch insists that the ideal of politics is to be achieved in history, on earth, and not in the beyond. His vision of utopia, therefore, drawing on Marxism, is one of a better world and better life on earth. In this sense he belongs in the tradition of Jewish messianism that argues for the coming inception of a messianic era in historical time. However, Bloch also has a place for eschatology in his theory of utopia, and it defines the ultimate vantage point from which all partial realizations of utopia draw their energy. Whatever Marxist politics can achieve provisionally in historical time is vouched for in a final fulfillment that completes the world and releases human yearning. In this way Bloch both claims that utopia can be realized in historical time and at once figures its ultimate arrival in an apocalyptic moment at the end of time and history. In this way Bloch belongs to the tradition of teleological eschatology for which the spectacle of apocalyptic revelation and fulfillment is still driven by a futural concept of “Endzeit.”

This unique brand of apocalyptic eschatology, which is not merely theological but informs a more general theory of utopia, uses an expressionist language in order to deform reality and produce alternatives to it. The use of eschatological discourse in order to confront prevailing forms of “reality” gives Bloch’s expressionism a distinctly political character. The

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305 This is not surprising given his investment in Marxism; it places him closer to Christian religious socialism than to Dialectical Theology and its concept of present eschatology. Bloch’s eschatology, therefore, is more heavily indebted to Jewish apocalypticism than to the Pauline notion of καιρός.
The expressionist orientation of Bloch’s eschatology is evident not only in the Dionysian metaphor of music, but also in the figuration of the apocalyptic moment as one of a “Selbstbegegnung,” an encounter of the self in which the world of the ‘I’ is unlocked or opened up (“aufschließen”). His formulation of humanity’s waiting for parousia contains a moment of Sturm und Drang: the inception of the parousia in a moment of καιρός is figured in terms of a pathos of an active intervention (“tätig eingreifen”) and insistent inevitability (“der Morgen einer neuen Parusie will erscheinen”). It is humanity itself, according to Bloch, through politics, that grasps the chalice of self-encounter in Dionysian ecstasy and carries it to the end, hastening the apocalyptic moment. The elixir of self-encounter—as a form of “Rausch”—is described as having an explosive power that raises humanity up to God. Beneath the unruly metaphorics of this conceptual landscape, it is clear that Bloch subscribes to a political eschatology in which the
spirit of utopia—that is, the political will to bring about utopia in Marxist terms—drives and hasten the inception of apocalyptic fulfillment. That an expressionist language and style provides the means with which to articulate this movement is no coincidence, for the formal qualities of expressionism, according to Bloch, are uniquely suited to the task of overcoming reality and producing alternatives to it.

In particular, in Bloch’s work the moment of self-encounter produces a mystical reality in which the revelation of the self is externalized in the world. Whereas the Neue Sachlichkeit attempted to paint “von außen nach innen” and to uncover the “real” in a new confrontation with things, Bloch’s expressionism defines reality as the pure interiority of the self. The language and pathos of self-encounter allow for the articulation of a mystical experience in which self and world are one, yet not because the self is “in” a world that maintains no boundary of separation, but because the self imprints itself on the world. The critic Heinz Kimmerle describes the mystical implications of the event of self-encounter in Bloch’s work as follows:


The expressionist revelation of a concealed interiority and its externalization in the world has as its consequence an anthropomorphism of the world; objects, things, the visible world become a

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mirror of the self; humanity and world become identical. (Nothing could be further, incidentally, from Franz Rosenzweig’s insistence of the irreducible non-identity of humanity, world, and God.) Whereas the Neue Sachlichkeit sought to recover a sense of reality by letting things appear in an originary light, without the intervention of the subject and its perspective, for Bloch the event of the self-encounter comes to define reality (“Das Ereignis der ‘Selbstbegegung’ . . . wird Wirklichkeit”). This event, moreover, through which the subject is revealed to itself and becomes reality, is synonymous, in Kimmerle’s interpretation, with the eschatological end of history.

For Bloch, reality is therefore not concrete historical reality but rather a non-historical, transcendent, mystical “now:” the “now” of the event of self-encounter. The reality to which the Neue Sachlichkeit returns, that is, the reality of everyday life, the reality of the lived historical moment, is for Bloch ephemeral. Mystical reality, by contrast, lays claim to permanence, the permanence of the self as it is revealed at the end of history. Here too, as in Dialectical Theology, we have a “now” at the limit of history, a Jetzt that claims to exceed history in an eternal moment. But in considering these eschatological tropes, it is decisive to pay attention to the smallest nuance, to the slightest change in emphasis that places what appears to be most near at a great distance. There is indeed something like a “nunc stans” in Dialectical Theology and in Franz Rosenzweig’s philosophy. But this “zeitlose Jetzt” is for the latter figures a limit phenomenon, a potential that qualitatively inflects historical time; it is that presence that can never fully become present, a limit that can be recognized by not crossed. For Bloch, by contrast, the eschatological now is transparent (“durchsichtig”)—that is, fully revealed—and becomes “social reality” (“Das Nunc stans der Mystik wird gesellschaftliche Realität”). This all goes to show that while expressionism ran counter to the ‘new realism’ of the 1920s in its pathos of the subjectivist destruction of ‘objective reality’, it too, in its own way, was invested in a concept of reality.
Reality for expressionism, however, is the transcendent reality of a mystical now, and hence enacted only at the end of history.

In other words, the concrete materiality of the world, whose potential the new realism of the Neue Sachlichkeit recovered, did not even signify as the “real” for expressionism. The difference between the extremes of realism and expressionism is therefore sharper than has hitherto been understood: it is not just that the Neue Sachlichkeit worked with a less utopian vision that uncovered the factual reality of things; for expressionism, moreover, the only reality is utopian reality, that is, eschatological reality; everything else is mere appearance, *Schein.* Bloch’s formula for this determination of utopian reality is a *Geschichtsphilosophie* that combines “Goethe plus Jesaja, die neugeborene, konstitutive Geschichte in dieser Geschichtsphilosophie.” In other words: a philosophy of history in which the prophetic image of history (born anew, reconstituted) becomes the nature of historical reality. That is, for Bloch, nature is negated as false appearance and has a moment of truth only in relation to utopian reality:

*Denn das, was ist, kann nicht wahr sein, aber es will durch die Menschen zur Heimkehr gelangen. Was also darin wirkt und arbeitet, fortarbeitet, nach dem Grundsatz aller kategorialen Anwendung und transzendentalen Beziehung: “begonnen ist der Weg, vollende die Reisel”, ist nicht mehr die Frage, was die Dinge im jeweils Gegenwärtigen seien, in ihrer empirischen Verhaltungsregel und deren einzelwissenschaftlicher Kodifizierung, sondern es ist, anders betont und mit dem nicht Entsagenwollen religiöser Art, die Frage, was die Dinge, Menschen und Werke in *Wahrheit* seien, nach dem Stern ihres utopischen Schicksals, ihrer utopischen Wirklichkeit gesehen.*

Empirical reality, the world of things in their facticity, is for Bloch nothing more than false appearance; the truth of things, by contrast, depends upon a transcendent relation (“transzendentalen Beziehung”) to their utopian reality. One can hardly conceive a more stringent anti-realism, given Bloch’s strict separation between truth and the presence of things.

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Whereas for Dialectical Theology and indeed much of secular historiography in the 1920s the present provides the vantage point from which history is constituted, for Bloch history attains the status of truth only by being referred to a utopian reality that exceeds the present. Bloch’s expressionism is therefore even more radical than the subjectivism of the “present historiographers,” for whom the past is nothing more than its reception, reflection, and expression in the present. Bloch’s position combines subjectivism and a utopian disavowal of the present in a unique way.311 His utopian eschatology does not deny reality as such, but locates it in an eschatological realm beyond this world. He is content, in a way not altogether dissimilar from that of Tillich, to recognize in the historical world utopian moments that point to eschatological reality. Yet there is no reality or facticity in “things” for Bloch; they can at best bear the concealed potential of another reality.

Ultimately, however, the motor of the production of “real,” for Bloch, is not the recognition of a utopian potential in things, but rather the subject’s concentration on the dream potential of its own interiority. Indeed, *Geist der Utopie* contains a persistent anthropocentrism that places the subject before the world: “nur in uns selber brennt noch Licht, nicht in der Welt.”312 The true source of reality, for Bloch, can only be the self:

> Der Wunsch baut auf und schafft Wirkliches, wir allein sind die Gärtner des geheimnisvollsten Baums, der wachsen soll. Es hilft dazu die andauernde Traumkonzentration auf sich selbst, auf sein reineres, höheres Leben, auf das innere Hellwerden, auf die Erlösung von Bosheit, Leere, Tod und Rätsel, auf die Gemeinschaft

311 One should be careful, however, not to overstate Bloch’s claim. The philosopher is clearly aware of the dangers and limitations of his argument. In particular, he senses that the subjectivist consideration of ephemeral reality only in terms of its utopian component can easily become a farce in which the subject’s own illusion of illumination replaces any genuine sense of utopia: “Zu ahnen, daß man eher abstellen als begreifen sollte, und daß sich das vorüberliegend Wirkliche ohne utopische Bestandteile überhaupt nicht erfassen läßt, dieses allertiefste Gewissen entartet freilich leicht zur Posse seiner eigenen, in ihm angelegten Erleuchtung und Weltverbesserung.” Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie. Faksimile der Ausgabe von 1918*, 339. 312 Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie. Faksimile der Ausgabe von 1918*, 341.
If the apocalypse is the apriori of politics and culture for Bloch, it is an apocalypse whose origin is the subject itself, and not the third position of a divine agent: “die andauernde Traumkonzentration auf sich selbst” is for Bloch the source of higher life, redemption, and ultimately the creation and construction of reality. Indeed, what Bloch glosses as the “complete crystal of renewed reality” is said to have its origin in the “thinking dream wish” of the apocalyptic subject, which produces the real by searching the depths of itself and authorizing itself. The “word” for which the apocalyptic self waits is not the word of God, but rather the word that arises out of its own self-reflection and illumination. In this way, Bloch’s expressionism understands reality as a construction of the self: the self produces and constructs reality as a mirror of its own interiority. There is no sense here for the reality of things in their historical embodiment. Indeed, reality, for Bloch, is only fully enacted in a utopian moment, and therefore has no concrete, historical index, but only the transcendental referent of a self-relation. His political eschatology is an auto-poetic apocalypticism that forsakes facticity and reality in favor of the production of alternative utopias that embody a higher reality. His expressionism therefore provides a striking counterpoint to the realist orientation of theology in the 1920s, to which I will now turn.

4. *Theological Realism: the Temporality of Eschatology in Heidegger’s Facticity*

The phenomenon of realism in German culture in the 1920s and 1930s unfolded not only in literature and the arts but also in philosophy and theology. Indeed, the work of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann maintains a dialogue with more general, secular problem of realism discussed above. Both Heidegger’s phenomenology of religious life and Bultmann’s theology of announcement (“Kerygma”) shed light on the rise of new forms of realism in Germany that negotiate a path between naturalism (that is, straightforward representational realism) and expressionism. In this way, they are part of a larger contestation of the function of the “real” in German culture. Theology makes a unique contribution to the ongoing debate about realism, moreover, by way of its new concept of eschatology, one that diverges from Bloch’s concept of a utopian reality that commences at the end of history. Eschatology, for Heidegger and Bultmann, is not transcendent but rather immanent in factual life experience and in the mediality of the communication of the “eschatological fact.” While theology and phenomenology operate at a higher level of abstraction than the more concrete realism of the Neue Sachlichkeit, the impact of the Neue Sachlichkeit in visual culture is analogous to that of the discourse of facticity in philosophical and theological debates.

My argument here will emphasize the continuities between realism in theology and the ‘new realism’ of the Neue Sachlichkeit, yet also show how theology ultimately moves beyond the objectivity of “things” to arrive at a concept of reality as possibility. However, the turn to

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314 Benjamin D. Crowe notes an affinity between Heidegger and his contemporaries Barth, Gogarten, and Bultmann insofar as each criticized liberal Protestantism and sought to recover the spirit of early Christianity. Crowe’s work considers Heidegger in relation to realism in philosophy and theology, but not in relation to a more general return to realism in modernist art and culture. See *Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religion: Realism and Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 37–38.
realism in theology also resists positive formulations of eschatological completion and apocalyptic fulfillment and marks instead a return to realist forms of mediation. In this way, theology too followed a path between expressionism and representational realism, working at this impasse to develop an “eschatological realism.” In what follows, I will turn first to Heidegger’s concept of facticity and its relation to his interest in early Christian eschatology, then consider Bultmann’s articulation of an “eschatological fact” that exceeds historical transmissibility, and conclude by examining the constitution of reality in a poetics of revelation in Heidegger’s Beiträge zur Philosophie.\(^\text{315}\)

Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology, first of all, can be read as realist insofar as it runs counter to the privileging of the subject in the history of philosophy.\(^\text{316}\) Just as the “New Objectivity” responded to expressionism’s representation of psychic states in which subjectivity was equated with limitless possibilities of experimentation, so too did Heidegger re-invent the intentionalist phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, in which the constitution of things proceeds according to the intentionality of the perceiving subject, by reconceiving phenomenology in terms of the middle voice of the Greek φαίνεσθαι. That is, Heidegger interpreted Husserl’s dictum “Zu den Sachen selbst!” (and, indirectly, its literary counterpart in Döblin’s motto “Näher

\(^\text{315}\) There is a long-standing tradition of scholarship on Heidegger’s relation to theology. See Heidegger und die Theologie. Beginn und Fortgang der Diskussion, ed. Gerhard Noller (München: Kaiser, 1967). However, this literature has yet to address the importance of eschatology for Heidegger’s concept of facticity and its larger implications for the return realism in German modernism. More recently, Alberto Anelli has explored structural and analogical connections between Heidegger and twentieth-century theology, including the “Eschatologisierung der Theologie” in Barth, Bultmann, Pannenberg, and Rahner. However, the comparison remains on the level of abstraction and does not consider in concrete terms the importance of eschatology in Heidegger’s early work. See Heidegger und die Theologie: Prolegomena zur zukünftigen theologischen Nutzung des Denkens Martin Heideggers (Würzburg: Ergon, 2008).

\(^\text{316}\) See Benjamin D. Crowe, Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion: Realism and Cultural Criticism, 56: “The aim of his phenomenology of religion is . . . to suggest a new, non-subjectivist, way of conceiving religion.”
an die Wirklichkeit heran”317) as a call for an encounter with things “as they show themselves” or “wie sie sich zeigen”: φαίνεσθαι.318 For Heidegger, phenomenology therefore consists in letting the phenomenon appear, in considering things as they present themselves. Accordingly, the theory of humanity’s existence as “Dasein,” to which Sein und Zeit (1927) is dedicated, is a response to the philosophical tradition of subjectivism in which the perceiving “subject” (subjectum or ὑποκείμενον: that which lies beneath) provides the “ground” for the perceived “object.” Instead, Heidegger sought to articulate the structures with which Dasein interacts with a world without which its existence could not be conceived. The world is not the “object” of the perceiving “subject”; rather, the subject is only subject as “In-der-Welt-sein.” In a similar fashion, the Neue Sachlichkeit contested expressionism’s subjectivism, which figured the real as an externalization of the inner vision of the self. It too, as I have argued above, sought to paint things as they show themselves, without the addition of conceptual schemata originating in the subject. The subject as sovereign ground of the world and the world as mere projection of the subject were cast down in Heidegger’s phenomenology in favor of a consideration of a “real or factual life experience” (“faktische Lebenserfahrung”) that knows no such ultimate ground. In this way, Heidegger’s work in the 1920s is exemplary of a more general complication of realism and the real. Instead of a subject that creates and constructs a reality for itself by forming objects in consciousness, Heidegger conceived Dasein as being “thrown” into a world and in this way bearing a historicity whose factual reality is given in the mode of an “always already.”

Heidegger’s interest in the phenomenon “as it shows itself”—as opposed to all subject-centered constructions of reality—, however, should not be mistaken for a philosophical version

318 See the introductory sections of Sein und Zeit. Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, 18. ed. (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2001).
of naturalism. The realism of Heideggerian phenomenology rather consists in working out the facticity of *Dasein*, and the concept of ‘fact’ at work in this project complicates the idea of “objective reality.” This is to say: Heidegger’s philosophy cuts both ways, undercutting both a subject-centered picture of the world and a historicity of neutral, objective facts. While the New Objectivity portrayed these historical relations in a distanced, detached manner, the notion of “In-der-Welt-sein” short circuits the dichotomy of subject and object, perception and perceived, such that the world is not “detached” as an object any more than it is produced or constructed by the perceiving subject. The historical “thrownness” of Dasein implies rather its embeddedness in a historical reality of which it is a part.

Yet such “reality” is never fully constituted for human Dasein and indeed can never be objectified as such. This is not merely a function of a partial or limited perspective on the world or the lack of an overview of all reality. For just as much as Dasein is “always already” thrown in the world, it is also “not yet” what it is. The concept of the “thrownness” or “Geworfenheit” of Dasein, in this way, implies that the facticity of Dasein manifests a non-objective reality, for this “thrownness” is not complete or finished in the way that historicism considers past events to be completed facts: “Die Geworfenheit,” Heidegger writes, “ist nicht nur nicht eine ‘fertige Tatsache,’ sondern auch nicht ein abgeschlossenes Faktum. Zu dessen Faktizität gehört, daß das Dasein, *solange* es ist, was es ist, im Wurf bleibt und in die Uneigentlichkeit des Man hineingewirbelt wird. Die Geworfenheit, darin sich die Faktizität phänomenal sehen läßt, gehört zum Dasein, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht. Dasein existiert faktisch.”

Whereas a fact as “Tatsache” belongs to the past and can in this way be thought of as “finished,” the “thrownness” of Dasein is not just an original position, but a “facticity” that continues to

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determine Dasein at each moment. The fact of existence cannot be completed or “closed off” because the modality of ‘being thrown’ is ever present. In this way facticity has an adverbial relationship to existence: “Dasein existiert faktisch.” The fact of existence is neither a substance nor a state but rather a temporal relation that is inherently incomplete. The facticity of Dasein, one might say, can never close the circle of reality, as much as it is ever thrown into its midst.

And yet, even if the picture of reality can never be complete, its objectivity never secured as such, the concept of facticity suggests a model of realism as a process of consummation or performance (“Vollzug”). In his 1920/1921 lectures on the “Phenomenology of Religious Life,” Heidegger develops such a realist account of temporality by exploring the connection between eschatology and the “factual life experience” of early Christian religiosity. In this way, Heidegger’s participation in the discourse of facticity, and his interrogation of realism in terms of such facticity, draws on theological concepts and in particular on the new concept of eschatology that began to circulate in the 1920s. While scholars have worked out in detail the way in which formative concepts from the “Phenomenology of Religious Life” later play an important role in Sein und Zeit, my aim here is not to make a claim about the genealogy of Heidegger’s thinking, nor about the status of religion or theology in his philosophical project, but rather to show how the formulation of an eschatological facticity involves a new realism that contests the objectivity of reality and develops the notion of “consummation” as the defining feature of the real.

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320 See, for example, Hent de Vries, “Formal Indications,” MLN 133.3 (1998), 635–88.
321 In a recent essay on Heidegger’s appropriation of eschatological discourse, Judith E. Tonning notes the influence of Franz Overbeck and other Protestant writers and concludes that Heidegger develops an “eschatology without eschaton.” See “‘Hineingehalten in die Nacht’: Heidegger's Early Appropriation of Christian Eschatology,” Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now, ed. Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 134, 138. Unfortunately, the implications of an “eschatology without eschaton” remain ill-defined in Tonning’s text. The implication seems to be that Heidegger appropriates theological discourse
Early Christian religiosity embodies for Heidegger a factual relation to the world that involves a particular kind of temporality; in this way, it holds the key to a concept of “factual life experience” or “faktische Lebenserfahrung” that the subsequent history of the Church is said to have obscured. Realism, in this sense, is less a politics of representation than it is a concrete relation to life in terms of a certain temporality. The phenomenology of religious life articulates this relation of facticity as follows: “1. Urchristliche Religiosität ist in der faktischen Lebenserfahrung. Nachsatz: Sie ist eigentlich solche selbst. 2. Die faktische Lebenserfahrung ist historisch. Nachsatz: Die christliche Erfahrung lebt die Zeit selbst ("leben" als verbum transitivum verstanden).”

What interests Heidegger in early Christianity is not its perspective on any theological question or matter of dogma but rather its relation to its own factual reality in its experience of life. Phenomenology reads such “faktische Lebenserfahrung” as a way of living in the present, that is, a concrete stance towards its own reality rather than any fixation on the “beyond” or what comes after death. Factual life experience, in this argument, is “historical” not because it is past, but because it embodies a specific relation to its own temporal constitution – in the sense of what Heidegger will later call “Geschichtlichkeit.”

This temporality, in turn, is structured by the presence of eschatology, such that the facticity of early Christian religiosity—and by extension, its historicity—is determined by eschatology. Here again eschatology and history enter into a decisive relation. Heidegger draws support for this claim from his reading of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians. In these letters the

but ultimately uses it for philosophical purposes. Tonning does not consider whether the “eschaton” is truly “present” for Paul, Luther, or Augustine.

322 Heidegger, Martin. Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), Gesamtausgabe, vol. 60 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 82.

facticity of early Christian life experience is related to a knowledge of “what they have become” (their “Gewordensein”) in adopting Christianity and placing themselves before God.\textsuperscript{324} At the same time, the Thessalonians are aware of their existence between the two parousias, such that the return of Christ, that is, the inception of the eschatological possibility, determines their facticity just as much as does their “Gewordensein.” The temporality characteristic of factual life experience is for Paul not related to the expectation of a specific moment of parousia in the future. He therefore refuses to answer the question posed by the Thessalonians of “when” Christ will return.\textsuperscript{325} Factual life experience therefore does not live an objective concept of time, Heidegger argues, but rather a particular relation to its own temporality:


In this way Paul directs the question of “when” the parousia will take place, that is, the question of when the possibility of eschatology will become reality, towards a consideration of self-comportment and disposition. The potential reality of eschatology becomes a potential only in the disposition (“Verhalten”) of the self in readiness for its inception; the question “when” structures the unique early Christian experience of temporality precisely by becoming a question of how one’s life takes place (“Vollzug des Lebens” – that is, the consummation or performance of life). As Heidegger goes on to argue: “Paulus denkt gar nicht daran, die Frage nach dem Wann

\textsuperscript{324} István M. Fehér emphasizes the importance of the “Gewordensein” of the Thessalonians in determining their facticity. See “Religion, Theologie und Philosophie auf Heideggers Weg zu Sein und Zeit,” 130–131.

\textsuperscript{325} Compare here my analysis in Chapter One of the temporality of waiting without expectation.

\textsuperscript{326} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921)}, 104.
der Parusie zu beantworten. Das Wann ist bestimmt durch das Wie des Sich-Verhaltens, dies ist bestimmt durch den Vollzug der faktischen Lebenserfahrung in jedem ihrer Momente.”327 The relation to the “when” of the inception of eschatological reality is determined in a concrete fashion in “each moment” in which factual life experience is consummated, namely in terms of “how” such “faktische Lebenserfahrung” relates to its situation. In other words, what the Thessalonians have become and the way they relate to the eschatological moment of parousia is grounded in a factual experience of life in each present. This realist orientation in the present therefore structures the “living” of temporality as such.

And yet, the realism of this “facticity” does not involve an objective concept of time; the “event” that structures the factual relation of temporality—that is, the eschatological event—cannot be objectively determined or located in historical time, and yet it is real in the performance (“Vollzug”) of Christian life. For Heidegger, therefore, eschatology defines the temporality of lived experience in a determinate, realist fashion: the disposition of factual life experience towards the eschatological moment defines a relation of self-comportment, that is, an ethical relation of the self at each moment in time. It is not just that eschatology is shifted from an uncertain future to the present of each moment; Heidegger’s concept of realist eschatological facticity suggests that eschatology only becomes visible insofar as a relation to it is embodied in a kind of factual religiosity first carried out by early Christianity.328

Heidegger’s formulation of an eschatological facticity, then, offers a new form of realism that produces not a representational historicity of objects but a process-oriented historicity of consummation. As such, his rhetoric of facticity is quite different from the realist poetics of

327 Martin Heidegger, Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 106.
328 However, this does not imply, as Crowe suggests, that Heidegger is interested in the immediacy of religious experience in a pre-reflective sense. See Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religion: Realism and Cultural Criticism, 80.
representation of naturalism; indeed, for Heidegger it is not so much a matter of grasping reality in neutral, objective terms, but in coming to a phenomenological understanding of humanity’s factual relation to the world. Whereas the “New Objectivity” returns to reality by representing the cold reality of the life of “things,” phenomenological understanding is not directed towards phenomena that have the character of “objects”: indeed, “[das] zu Verstehende[],” Heidegger insists, “[ist] ja nichts Objektartiges.”

The notion of “factual life experience,” along with early Christianity’s relation to eschatology, therefore, cannot be conceived in terms of a historicity of objects but only through a historicity of consummation, of what is carried out: “Die Umwendung vom Objektgeschichtlichen zum Vollzugsgeschichtlichen liegt in der faktischen Lebenserfahrung selbst. Es ist die Umwendung zur Situation. “Situation” gilt uns hier als phänomenologischer Terminus. Er wird nicht für objektive Zusammenhänge verwandt (auch nicht historisch wie “Lage”: z.B. fatale Situation bzw. Lage).”

Early Christian religiosity is concerned with its “situation” in a phenomenological sense; in a similar way, one might say, the New Objectivity did not seek to represent the “objective context” of the “Lage” in Germany during the Weimar Republic, but rather took up a position in relation to its situation (“sie bezogen Stellung zur Gegenwart”). At stake in each case is a new relation to reality not in terms of objective conditions but rather in terms of a comportment and disposition towards reality. The facticity of the eschatological situation, in this sense, does not depend upon an objective historical fact or concrete event but rather upon the consummation of a new factual relationship towards one’s historical situation.

329 Martin Heidegger, Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 82.
330 Martin Heidegger, Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 90.
331 See Wieland Schmied, Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933, 11.
This phenomenological account of facticity wrests the concept of “Faktum” from its historicist trajectory and appropriates it as a model for the phenomenological understanding of a particular temporality. The problem with considering early Christian religiosity as a “historical fact” is that it becomes merely a singular case among others: “so wird die urchristliche Religiosität Faktum, d. i. Exempel, einzelner Fall in einem Umkreis von Möglichkeiten, von Typen, von möglichen Formen von Religiosität.” By historicizing early Christian religiosity, the philosophy of religion determines its object through a context in which it is just one part of a collection of historical material. By treating manifestations of religion as “historical facts,” Heidegger argues, the history of religion “geht völlig von außen an die Sachen heran;” the phenomenology of religious life, by contrast, sets out to enact of “destruction” of the “historical fact” of early Christian religiosity in order to uncover its underlying “factual life experience” and submit it to phenomenological understanding.

The phenomenological method therefore provides Heidegger with a means of transforming the understanding of the theological notion of eschatology. The phenomenology of eschatology recaptures eschatology from its historicist exegesis and makes it a relevant concept for the realist poetics of the 1920s in Germany. The problem with construing eschatology as a historical object, whose filiation in various religious contexts can be reconstructed, according to Heidegger, is that this fails to recognize eschatology as a “phenomenon” with concrete relations

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332 As it is articulated, for example, in the history of religion that Heidegger criticizes throughout his lectures.
333 Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921)*, 75.
to the facticity of lived experience. Describing the history of religion’s approach to eschatology, Heidegger writes:


In effect, Heidegger is criticizing an analysis of eschatology as part of a “history of ideas” in which the various manifestations of the idea can be explained by the historical circumstances of the time. The semantics of the German term “Vorstellung”—which can mean not only idea, but also representation—underscore this point: as soon as eschatology is cast as a matter of ideational representations of a narrative of the end of the world and “the last things,” it is at once divorced from the real, concrete, factual circumstances in which it dictates an ethical mode of self-relation towards one’s facticity. It is for this reason that Heidegger cautions against the notion of “eschatologische Vorstellungen” and prefers instead to speak of the “eschatological phenomenon,” for the latter term captures the way in which eschatology defines a temporal situation that manifests a distinctive mode of ethical facticity. The eschatological phenomenon therefore entails neither an objective reality nor an objective “idea” or “Vorstellung,” but rather defines a situation of facticity that is historical by virtue of its own relation to temporality, rather than by way of an externalized historical relation applied by historicist exegesis.

As much as Heidegger criticizes the historicist contextualization of historical events and facts, there is however one “fact” that remains decisive for the factual life experience of early Christian religiosity: namely the fact of the coming of Christ and its announcement. Yet even

336 Martin Heidegger, Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921), 110–111.
though this moment exercises an originary force in the beginning of such religiosity, for Heidegger the focus is rather on the way in which the moment of announcement is present in the performance of life.\textsuperscript{337} In an anticipation of the temporal dynamics of Rudolf Bultmann’s theory of Kerygma, Heidegger writes: “Die christliche faktische Lebenserfahrung ist dadurch historisch bestimmt, daß sie entsteht mit der Verkündigung, die den Menschen in einem Moment trifft und dann ständig mitlebendig ist im Vollzug des Lebens. Diese Lebenserfahrung bestimmt weiter ihrerseits die Bezüge, die in ihr vorkommen.”\textsuperscript{338} The communicative structure of the announcement, which is related to the theological theory of revelation, has a distinctive temporal structure that involves a historical origin that is re-activated (or “mitlebendig,” as Heidegger puts it) in each moment of life. It is not the historical fact at the origin itself that grounds Heidegger’s realism, but rather the way in which this fact and its announcement structure the consummation of life as facticity. In this way, the eschatological event, insofar as it is communicated in the moment of “Verkündigung,” cannot be grasped as an object nor pictured in a determinate way; it is not a fact that can be historically reconstructed, but rather determines the facticity of humanity as the communicative moment at the heart of its “Vollzug des Lebens.” Eschatology is therefore never “real” and yet defines a particular form of factual existence as a non-objective, yet temporally charged reality. The fact at stake in the “Verkündigung” is therefore not historical but rather eschatological, and it is at precisely this juncture of historical fact and eschatological fact that the theology of Rudolf Bultmann addresses the problem of realism, to which I shall now turn.


\textsuperscript{338} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens (1920/1921)}, 116–117.
5. "The Mediation of Reality as Communication: Bultmann’s Eschatological Fact"

In turning now to the theology of Rudolf Bultmann, I will show how his concept of the “eschatological fact” makes a contribution to the new realism by articulating an “event” that cannot become an object of historical knowledge and yet produces reality in the immanence of its actualization. Reality emerges here—at the limit of history—as possibility and potential. At the same time, despite Bultmann’s concentration on the immanence of life in the present, his theological realism diverges from the immediacy of expressionism, its historiography, and its mystical tendency. For the immanence of the eschatological fact in the present—as event—is mediated in the modality of its communication, which Bultmann describes in his theory of Kerygma or “Verkündigung” (announcement). What is to be communicated, that is, cannot be separated from the fact of communication, and hence the eschatological fact, even though it is not historical as such, embodies a reality in the very process of its communication. The continuities here between Bultmann’s theology and Heidegger’s phenomenology of religious life are clear: both articulate a concept of eschatology that cannot be treated as a historical object, and both focus instead on the facticity that eschatology produces in defining the reality of life as possibility. Yet my aim here is not to rehearse the intellectual history of the dialogue and interaction of these two figures, who worked closely together on theological and philosophical topics in Marburg in the early 1920s and continued a regular correspondence thereafter.\(^\text{339}\)

\(^{339}\) The secondary literature on this topic is substantial, yet it is for the most part concerned with establishing the compatibility of theology and philosophy in the work of Heidegger and Bultmann, either showing the relevance of Heidegger’s philosophy for theology or how Bultmann’s work helps to bring to light the importance of religion in Heidegger’s development. See Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Heidegger, Briefwechsel, 1925-1975, ed. Andreas Grossmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Otto Pöggeler, Philosophie und hermeneutische Theologie: Heidegger, Bultmann und die Folgen (München: Wilhelm Fink,
Instead, my argument is that both Heidegger and Bultmann, in similar yet non-identical ways, were part of a new realism in German culture in the 1920s and 1930s. While each returned to the concrete situation of the present as the site of an eschatological facticity, Bultmann’s work is worthy of further consideration here because he conceived of this facticity in terms of a medially of communication, which casts the phenomenon of new realism considered in this chapter in a more nuanced light.

While sharing Heidegger and Barth’s general skepticism towards historicist reconstructions of religion, Bultmann does insist on the importance of a particular “historical fact” for theology. Indeed, Bultmann’s theology, which is heavily influenced by the Gospel of John, revolves around the center of the singular event of the historical incarnation of God in the figure of Jesus Christ, which provides the basis for his theory of revelation. As much as this “event” opens up a rupture in the historical continuum, it nevertheless retains for Bultmann the determinate reality of a “historical fact.” Yet despite embodying a historical truth, its fundamental truth-value is one that exceeds the limits of history. Bultmann’s theology thus at once guarantees the historical truth of the event of revelation and simultaneously locates its power of revelation in a mode of communication that differs from the transmission of historical data. For this reason, Bultmann’s work should not be considered “historical realism”—in


340 Bultmann spent much of the late 1920s and 1930s working on a commentary on the Gospel of John, which was eventually published as: Rudolf Bultmann, Das Evangelium des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1941). An early manifestation of this research of interest to this project was the essay “Die Eschatologie des Johannes-Evangeliums,” published in 1928 in the journal of Dialectical Theology, Zwischen den Zeiten. See Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Eschatologie des Johannes-Evangeliums (1928),” Glauben und Verstehen, 7. ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1972), 134–54.
contrast, in many ways, to the realism of the Neue Sachlichkeit and that of Döblin, for whom the concrete historical situation of the Weimar Republic is at stake—but rather “theological realism,” for he argues for the revelation of the divine as a “fact” on the border between a “historical fact” and an “eschatological fact.” This “Faktum,” in turn, is constitutive for the determination (“Bestimmung”) of a historical humanity in its “facticity,” as it was for Heidegger. The difference, one might say, is that for Bultmann the “fact” itself—and not merely the relation of facticity—is foregrounded.

For Bultmann, the “Faktum” at stake, although it is rightly considered a “historical fact,” addresses humanity directly, without the mediation of historical knowledge. The “historical fact” of the coming of Jesus therefore constitutes not a historical event as such but rather a “moment” in which humanity is addressed by this historical fact, the moment, that is, in which the fact is announced:

\[ \text{Die Krisis . . . vollzieht sich vielmehr in einer bestimmten Gegenwart, einem bestimmten Jetzt, als die Stellungnahme zu einem geschichtlichen Faktum. “Das aber ist die Krisis, daß das Licht gekommen ist in die Welt” (3, 19). Wohl vollzieht sich die Krisis in der Gegenwart, wohl gibt der Glaube schon jetzt das Leben, aber nicht in einem beliebigen, sondern in dem durch die Verkündigung jenes Faktums qualifizierten Jetzt. Sie ist streng bezogen nicht auf etwas Allgemeines, sondern auf etwas Spezielles, auf das Gekommensein Jesu.}^{341} \]

Several points in Bultmann’s argument should be emphasized: first, the coming of Jesus, the coming of the light, the becoming flesh of the Word, is considered a “geschichtliches Faktum.” All of Bultmann’s subsequent deliberations and theorizations of the temporality of the announcement of revelation derive from this fundamental axiom. Karl Barth argues for a similar

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341 Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Eschatologie des Johannes-Evangeliums (1928),” 143–145. Bultmann’s emphasis of the perfect “gekommen ist” is consistent with the Greek text: “αὕτη δὲ ἐστιν ἡ κρίσις ὧτι τὸ φῶς ἐλήλυθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον” (ἔληλυθεν is the 3rd person singular perfect indicative of ἔρχομαι, meaning to come or to go). In Greek the perfect tense indicates an action that was completed in the past but whose effect is still present.
point, even when he does not speak explicitly of a “Faktum,” in the opening pages of his *Römerbriefkommentar*, when he says that “Offenbarungszeit” are the years 1-30. The “historical fact” of the becoming flesh of the Word, in turn, constitutes a theological crisis not just for “Urchristentum” but for every present that is qualified by the announcement of this fact. Just as for Barth, for whom every present bears the potential of becoming a “qualified moment,” for Bultmann too the theological crisis is not merely a past, historical event but one to which every present is potentially subject, insofar as it is brought into relation to the historical fact.

In this way the historical ‘Ur-Faktum’ is real, actualized, and present through the word that announces it, such that a correspondence between that “now” of the primal event and the “now” of its communication as “word” is established. The determination of the fact, Bultmann argues, that is, the relations in which it stands, begins to multiply:

Dem Jetzt des Gekommenseins des Offenbarers korrespondiert also genau das Jetzt der Wortverkündigung als eines jeweils geschichtlichen Faktums, das Jetzt der Gelegenheit: *der Augenblick*. D. h. Jesus ist nicht, seit dem “das Wort ward Fleisch”, der Offenbarer in seinen “weltgeschichtlichen Wirkungen”, unter denen jeder selbstverständlich steht, und die beliebig für Urteil und Stellungnahme zur Verfügung steht, sondern in der Predigt des Wortes als einem jeweils konkreten Geschehen. Dies jeweilige Jetzt des Angesprochenseins, dieser Augenblick, ist das eschatologische Jetzt, weil in ihm die Entscheidung zwischen Tod und Leben fällt. Es ist die Stunde, die kommt und im Angesprochensein da ist. Aber es ist dies eschatologische Jetzt nur in strenger Beziehung auf das “das Wort ward Fleisch”; denn das Wort, das anspricht und gehört wird, ist eben das Wort, das jenes Faktum verkündigt. Seit diesem Faktum besteht die Möglichkeit dieses Wortes, so daß dieses Faktum die ganze Geschichte in zwei Hälften, in zwei Äonen teilt.\(^{342}\)

The historical fact of the coming of Jesus repeats itself, according to Bultmann, in the moment in which this fact is announced. The “now” of the coming of Christ corresponds to the “now” of the announcement, the latter of which too is in each case a historical fact. The “now” of the communication of the word and the “now” in which the Word becomes flesh thus both constitute a “qualified moment.” Revelation repeats itself not through historical transmission, not through

\(^{342}\) Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Eschatologie des Johannes-Evangeliums (1928),” 144.
the world-historical effects of the primal historical event, but through the concrete event
(“konkreten Geschehen”) of the sermon in which the historical fact is communicated. Each
moment in which humanity is addressed by its relation to revelation, to the fact of the “Word
becoming flesh” – each such moment, according to Bultmann, is an “eschatological now.” The
primal event of Christianity, the revelation that took place and takes place in “das Wort ward
Fleisch,” therefore constitutes a series of historical facts, each of which is a moment in which
revelation is actualized and communicated to humanity in the mode of address (“im
Angeprochensein”). Each eschatological now, by announcing the historical Ur-Faktum, both
confirms the fact and surpasses its historicity by broaching the eschatological question. Reality is
at stake not so much in the fact itself or in its representation, but rather in the concrete event in
which the fact, as a communicative moment, as word, establishes a mode of address.

Theological realism thus concerns a historical fact that cannot be properly accessed as
historical but whose mode of appropriation always implies an actualization in the present. Even
the language of the Gospel of John that Bultmann cites emphasizes this point: “Das aber ist die
Krise, daß das Licht gekommen ist in die Welt” (3, 19). The perfect “gekommen ist” points not
only to the completeness of what has transpired (“gekommen”) but also underscores that this past
event is still real for the present with its “ist.” For Bultmann the incarnation and the
corresponding theory of revelation do not suggest a metaphysical account of the Word of God
but rather emphasize the concreteness of the Word as a communicative act. It is not the
communication of an essence, nor of an idea, but of a concrete “historical fact,” albeit one whose
significance exceeds the historical world. It is in this sense that one can speak of a theological
realism based not in historicism but in a theory “Verkündigung”: as Bultmann puts it, “Die echte
Form der Vergegenwärtigung des geschichtlichen Faktums Jesus ist also nicht die historische
Erinnerung und Rekonstruktion, sondern die Verkündigung. In ihr wird Jesus gleichsam verdoppelt: er kommt wieder, und er kommt immer wieder.”

Theological realism thus accounts for the emergence of a supra-historical facticity: the realization and actualization of a primal historical moment—a moment in which the eternal breaks into and interrupts the continuum of history—establishes a recurring eschatological moment that can no longer be thought of as historical. The doubling and redoubling of the figure of Jesus brings each historical moment to the limit of history.

It is in this sense that Bultmann can simultaneously speak of the coming of Christ as the “eschatologisches Faktum” without abandoning his theological realism. Revelation embodies an eschatological fact because it points to the reality of “life” as potentiality; that is, it does not establish historical circumstances but rather, insofar as it is communicated, induces a moment of self-reflection and decision. The historical fact relinquishes its historical specificity so as to become an eschatological fact that figures reality, in each moment, as ‘possibility to be seized’ (“ergriffene Möglichkeit”). In other words, a historical fact becomes eschatological so as to initiate a crisis of the historicity of the self. Bultmann describes the implications of the “eschatological fact” as follows, again showing a nearness to Heidegger’s philosophy:


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muß immer neu gewählt werden. Deshalb ist jenes Jetzt des “das Wort ward Fleisch” immer da im Jetzt der Verkündigung, im Augenblick.\textsuperscript{344}

Here, then, is the decisive difference between Bultmann’s theological realism and a historicist objectivity in which historical reality and historical truth converge: Bultmann’s eye is turned not towards the past but towards the future, towards that potential for what humanity could be that arises in each moment that is confronted with the eschatological fact. In this way, the eschatological fact reveals the life of humanity not as a past condition (“Zustand”) but as a potential to be (“Sein-können”). By positing the relation to the self as one of possibility, decision, and futurity, the eschatological fact contests the notion of reality as determined by historical facts and circumstances. Rather, invoking a strong concept of the “real,” Bultmann insists that life is real only as a ‘possibility of my self that has been seized’: “[das Leben ist] immer nur \textit{wirklich} . . . als ergriffene Möglichkeit meiner selbst” (my emphasis). Bultmann’s realism thus works with the concept of historical fact while at once using this realist notion to move beyond a historicist representation of the past, beyond a historically charged account of knowledge. One could speak therefore of an “eschatological realism” in contradistinction to the “historical realism” of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{345}

\textsuperscript{344} Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Eschatologie des Johannes-Evangeliums (1928),” 145.

\textsuperscript{345} A strong case can be made that Karl Barth, despite his criticism of the treatment of historical facts in Historicism biblical criticism, comes to a similar conclusion about the ‘eschatological’ status of reality at stake in the ‘historical fact’ of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. In his commentary to the Epistle to the Romans, Barth argued that the figure of Christ at once enters into history and marks the limit of historical time. In questioning to what extent this event constitutes a “historical fact,” he argues that the “reality” of this fact is only apparent at the “limit of all history”: “Was ist das für ein historisches Faktum, dessen Wirklichkeit oder jedenfalls dessen Erkenntnis in der ausdrücklichsten Weise gebunden wird an die Erkenntnis einer allgemeinen, ja ihrem Wesen nach gerade nicht in der Geschichte, oder sagen wir genauer: nur an der Grenze aller Geschichte, an der Todesgrenze auftauchenden Wahrheit?” Karl Barth, \textit{Die Auferstehung der Toten: eine akademische Vorlesung über 1. Kor. 15} (München: C. Kaiser, 1924), 75. For Barth too, the event of revelation has eschatological dimensions. It is not a historical fact that testifies to a historical circumstance or event but rather a fact that makes
In all of these ways, a strong case can be made that the realism of Bultmann’s account of the “eschatological fact” differs significantly from historical realism, from the objectivism of historical facts, and from the theological account of the transmissibility of the world-historical “effects” of Christianity. Bultmann works against the kind of realism that Lukács champions, which seeks to grasp and represent an emerging tendency in objective social relations. Nor does Bultmann’s realism address the reality of the present historical moment in the way that the Neue Sachlichkeit and Döblin attempt to come to terms with the realities of everyday life in the Weimar Republic. Rather, arguing for the communication of revelation as an “eschatological fact,” Bultmann understands the nature of the “real” as possibility and potentiality. The present moment is accordingly subject to a “realism” in a very different sense. However, one should be careful to distinguish Bultmann’s position from expressionist forms of immediacy such as those in the work of Ernst Bloch. The moment or “Augenblick” as “eschatological now” becomes relevant for Bultmann not in terms of the immediacy of a religious experience, nor as a moment of transcendence or self-overcoming, but rather through the mediation of communication. I will therefore seek to flesh out how the mediality of Bultmann’s theory of Kerygma bears upon his interaction with realism.

The emerging neo-realist practices in the 1920s not only moved beyond a naturalistic representation or imitation of reality, they also did without expressionist forms of interiority and subjective visions. Instead, they worked with the reality “effects” of objects and engaged with real situations by focusing on the mediality with which the real is present and with which it interacts with the reader and viewer. If one considers Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater or Döblin’s use of montage in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, it is clear that the deployment of the real is calculated visible in history the limit of history (“in der Geschichte die Grenze der Geschichte” sichtbar werden lassen). See *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, 76.
to produce “alienation effects” or to capture the fragmented world of the modern metropolis. In a sense, then, their “realism” consists not so much in the object-world that they represent, but in the means and modes of its production.

Now I want to suggest that there is a similar mode of realism at work in Rudolf Bultmann’s theology of the Kerygma. The medial relations of announcement in the theory of Kerygma are such that it is not so much the object of communication that makes a claim to facticity (although this is clearly also the case) as the modality of communication itself that produces reality. The mediation of the announcement itself belongs to the fact that is to be communicated. In other words, the facticity of the announcement is at stake. As Bultmann writes:

Das bedeutet aber: *Jesus Christus begegnet dem Menschen nirgends anders als im Kerygma*, so wie er dem Paulus selbst begegnet ist und ihn zur Entscheidung zwang. Das Kerygma verkündigt nicht allgemeine Wahrheiten, eine zeitlose Idee, sei es eine Gottes oder eine Erlöser-Idee, sondern ein geschichtliches Faktum. Aber das tut es nicht in dem Sinne, daß es sich selbst überflüssig macht, wenn es dem Hörer das Wissen um dies Faktum vermittelt hat, sodaß es nur die Rolle des Vermittlers hätte, sondern es gehört selbst zum Faktum. Ebenso wie es zu Christus gehört, daß er σάρξ [Fleisch, MM] annahm, nicht damit ein Himmelswesen die Möglichkeit habe, Lehren zu bringen und Weihen zu stiften, sondern weil das Daß, das Hier und Jetzt, die Faktizität der Person die Offenbarung konstituiert. Aber eben deshalb ist auch das Kerygma weder Träger zeitloser Ideen, noch Vermittler historischen Wissens, sondern sein Daß, sein Hier und Jetzt, in dem jenes Hier und Jetzt in der Anrede vergegenwärtigt wird, ist das Entscheidende.346

Bultmann distances himself in this way from “mediation theology”: the Kerygma stands for a kind of announcement that is no mere vessel for that which it communicates. The “historical fact” at stake in such communication is not just a simple “Tatsache” — that is, it does not stand for a kind of knowledge that a historian might be able to provide about the history of the Roman Empire or the circumstances surrounding the French Revolution. The announcement does not

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just pass along a piece of information, but rather the event of its communication belongs to the fact itself. The Kerygma is not the reproduction or transmission of knowledge of a historical fact; rather, the fact cannot be separated from the mode of its communication: the historical fact at stake is itself a form of communication, a moment of revelation. It is in this sense that Bultmann places the emphasis not on the “what” of revelation, but rather on the “that.” And the historicity of the “that” of revelation—that is, its facticity—is not merely past, but present in each here and now, in each moment of address. In other words, the theology of Kerygma does not seek to represent the reality of revelation, as if this moment could be fully constituted; it therefore as little in common with the realism of the historical novel or historicist research. It is related, rather, to forms of neo-realism in which the position of the writer is inseparable from his engagement in the facticity of the present. The theology of Kerygma broaches the opening of the real. It is a moment in which thinking and thought, the act of communication and that which is to be communicated, are inseparable.

I want to emphasize that the temporal dynamics of the theory of Kerygma, in which the communicative structure of the sermon enacts an “eschatological now,” have implications for neo-realist forms of culture in the 1920s. For the concept of eschatology as belonging not to a distant future but as posing a question in each moment implies a poetics of revelation in which the mode of communication is decoupled from a historical account and figured as a fact of salvation whose reality consists in the moment of communication itself. So there is a realist return to the facticity of an object, but it is an object that cannot be separated from the process

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347 Just as Bultmann conceives the word of revelation as taking place in the ‘Hier und Jetzt,’ so too does the Neue Sachlichkeit focus its gaze on the ‘Hier und Heute.’ See Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit und magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918-1933*, 13. The more interesting question, of course, is the nature of the “real” that is produced in the immanence of the present moment.
through which it is represented and communicated. Subject and object become inseparable, and this is a feature of both Bultmann’s theology and Heidegger’s phenomenology. One can observe this interrelation of communicator and communicated in Bultmann’s connection of the eschatological now to the “word” of the sermon:

Das eschatologische Jetzt von Tod und Auferstehung Jesu ist also nicht ein vergangener Moment in der verfließenden Zeitreihe, sondern als eschatologisches Jetzt ist es dadurch ausgezeichnet, daß es überall da Gegenwart ist, wo die Predigt erklingt: ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρὸς ἐυπρόσδεκτος, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας [Siehe, jetzt ist die hochwillkommene Zeit, siehe jetzt ist der Tag des Heils! (2. Kor. 6, 2). Die Predigt ist das Heilsgeschehen, weil sie keine bloße historische Mitteilung ist, sondern, so wie sie dem Paulus selbst begegnete, die entscheidende Frage an den Menschen. . . . Die Heilstatsache ist also das Wort (Röm 10, 13-17), aber freilich nicht als Träger eines Ideengehaltes oder als Vermittler historischem Wissen, sondern als Predigt, legitimiert durch die Person Jesu Christi, in eins mit ihr, aber so daß auch sie eins mit ihm ist und nur in ihm begegnet.

This passage makes clear that the concept of an “eschatological now” has implications that extend beyond its relevance for concepts of history and forms of temporality in the 1920s; the eschatological now is not just theoretically present in each moment, because of its potential; the presence of the eschatological now depends, moreover, upon the sermon and its communicative form. Rather than having a merely speculative form, the eschatological now is a “fact” insofar as it takes the form of the “word”: Bultmann conceives of the sermon itself as the saving event (“Heilsgeschehen”), such that the fact of salvation (“Heilstatsache”) lies in the word.

In this way, the theology of Kerygma makes productive use of the multivalence of the “word” in the New Testament, which can refer both to the sermon, the enunciation of the gospel,

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348 One can draw a parallel here to Franz Roh’s claim that the New Objectivity did not simply reject Expressionism’s subjectivism out of hand, but rather sought to approach the object world through a refined form of subjectivity.


350 Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus für die Theologie des Paulus (1929),” 209.
and to the person of Jesus himself, in his corporality. It is precisely because the “word” is both the person of Christ and the gospel of the saving event for which he stands that the word cannot be a mediation of historical knowledge or a vessel for the content of an idea. For this would presuppose a difference or disjuncture between “what” is communicated and the fact (the “that”) of its communication. The word is the fact of salvation, instead, Bultmann argues, insofar as the sermon (as word) is “one” with the person of Christ, in such a way, however, that Christ is at “one” with the word and is encountered in the word. In other words, the representation is the represented; there is no distance between the fact communicated and the fact of communication. The kind of facticity that this form of revelation establishes for humanity can best be understood as a form of neo-realism in which subject and object become interchangeable. At stake is a “word” that functions as a medium but does not mediate historical knowledge, but rather is itself the “fact of salvation.” The mediality of the eschatological fact is therefore immanent to the event of its communication; it does not reproduce an external, historical reality, but rather produces a new reality through the poetics of its communication.

6. *A Realist Poetics of Revelation: Heidegger and Brecht*

Finally, the new realism consists in a poetics of revelation in which the articulation of the real is bound up with a dialectic of concealment and revelation. That is, the “event” that both Heidegger and Bultmann theorize—the eschatological event of revelation or what Heidegger calls “das Ereignis”—uncovers a reality that is immanent and this-worldly but tends to be concealed. Such a poetics of revelation, which I argue are at work in Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur*
Philosophie (1936-1938), must first estrange what has been taken for granted as reality in order to reveal another reality that is uncanny for its closeness to home. In this way, the new realism inherent in this poetics of revelation draws upon both the realism of Bertolt Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt and the psychoanalytic concept of the real developed by Sigmund Freud.

The opening of reality at stake in Heidegger’s “Ereignis” figures the eschatological moment in an immanent way. The “realist eschatology” of the 1920s and 1930s thus diverges from the expressionist eschatology of Ernst Bloch, for eschatology is no longer tied to a concept of transcendent reality.

The concept of “Ereignis” that Heidegger develops in the late 1930s concerns the relationship of humanity with a God that is not transcendent and yet infinitely distant from humanity. The distance or remoteness (Ferne) of God takes on eschatological proportions in

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351 For a similar argument (albeit not in the context of the Beiträge), see Peter C. Hodgson, “Heidegger, Revelation, and the Word of God,” The Journal of Religion 49.3 (1969), 228–52. Hodgson argues in general terms for a correspondence between Heidegger’s idea of Being as “event” (Ereignis) and the Christian idea of revelation as the word of God. Whereas Hodgson’s work is part of the early theological reception of Heidegger that tries to show how his philosophy is useful for theology, my argument here is that both Heidegger’s philosophy and theology in the 1920s and 1930s confront the problem of realism from the vantage point of an eschatological event. In particular, Hodgson points to formal structures in Heidegger’s account of the “Ereignis” that parallel the theological concept of revelation: “It can be argued, I believe, that this correspondence - between Being and the word of God - is implicit in Heidegger's entire conception of Being as the event of unconcealment. . . . Unconcealment, then, has both a creative and a "salvific" or "healing" character; what is unconcealed is not Being as such but human existence in its secular-temporal-linguistic authenticity. We have here, I think, the basic formal structures for a theological understanding of revelation or of the word of God” (243).

352 In an echo of Karl Barth’s characterization of God as “das ganz Andere,” Heidegger writes that God is “so weit entfernt von uns,” “daß wir nicht zu entscheiden vermögen, ob er sich auf uns zu oder von uns weg bewegt.” See Martin Heidegger, Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936-1938), Gesamtausgabe, vol. 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2003), 23. At the same time, Heidegger points to a nearness of God coextensive with an “affliction of the abandonment of being”: “Diese Ferne ist zumal: die weiteste und uns erste Nähe zum Gott, aber auch die Not der Seinsverlassenheit” (24), again showing an affinity to Dialectical Theology’s connection of the affliction of humanity’s suffering from the distance of
Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie* and marks a space for revelation, as the following passages indicates in characteristically elliptical fashion: “Diese Ferne der Unentscheidbarkeit des Äußersten und Ersten ist das Gelichtete für das Sichverbergen, ist die Wesung der Wahrheit selbst als der Wahrheit des Seyns.” While Heidegger doesn’t name it as such, das “Äußerste” can be read as a cipher for the “Eschaton” — which in its Greek etymological root means not only the “last” but moreover the “extreme.” The notion of a “Unentscheidbarkeit des Äußersten und Ersten” circumscribes the very heart of the eschatological problem in the 1920s and 1930s: a sense of eschatology in which the “end” is not a terminal point in history but rather a new beginning. The extreme of eschatology, its ultimate expression of revelation, is at once a moment of beginning or creation; it was already inherent in the first things. But Heidegger’s dense conceptual knot takes this thought further: the undecidability of the most extreme and the first, of end and beginning, is a function of the “distance” of God. And further: the eschatological situation of the remoteness of God is the very phenomenon of revelation in its dialectic of opening and concealment: in Heidegger’s terms: “the clearing [das Gelichtete] for self-concealment [das Sichverbergen].” In other words, one might say that the distance of God as eschatological possibility provides, in and despite this distance, a space for revelation, a clearing in which that which is concealed can be revealed. The *topos* of truth as unconcealment or “Unverborgenheit” has theological implications here.

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355 See Chapter Two, which considers such eschatological reversal, the coincidence of beginning and end in eschatology, in terms of Franz Rosenzweig’s *Stern der Erlösung*.

The “Ereignis,” then, by articulating reality in the interplay of humanity and God between concealment and revelation, places humanity in a situation of crisis, displacement, and affliction. The poetics of revelation, in other words, disrupts and alienates the surface effects of perception in order to uncover the “real” in the space between revelation and concealment. That is, the event at stake in Heidegger’s “Ereignis” is not transcendent, but rather has the character of being “in between,” just as Dialectical Theology thought of the eschatological moment between time and eternity, and hence the situation of humanity, as “Zwischen den Zeiten.” As Heidegger writes,


The eschatological event is therefore not a transcendental determination of humanity, but rather an opening, a space between, in which Dasein takes part in the event of being. The opening of this space between, I argue, is the site of the figuration of the real in Heidegger’s poetics of revelation.

In other words, far from signifying a transcendental reality beyond this world, the eschatological event concerns an immanent reality that is so close that it remains concealed. For this reason, the eschatological event both unsettles and reveals reality in a moment of estrangement. The realism of the event, in the undecidability of its being both beginning and eschatological end, is therefore distinctly this-worldly, as Heidegger argues:

Die Ferne der Unentscheidbarkeit [des Äußersten und Ersten, MM] ist freilich nicht ein “Jenseitiges”, sondern das Nächste des noch ungegründeten Da des Da-seins . . . . Dieses Nächste ist so nah, daß alle unumgängliche Betreibung der Machenschaft und des

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The distance of undecidability, which, as the convergence of eschatological end and new beginning, provides the condition under which the “event” can take place, is for Heidegger not other-worldly but rather defines the proximity or nearness that constitutes the “thereness” of Dasein. However, the proximity of the eschatological situation is so near that it in its everyday experience Dasein does not take note of it. This is a common trope in Heidegger’s work: the most persistent structures of Dasein are so close that they are never thematized as such. This sense of the “real” has a parallel in psychoanalysis: it is not that which one perceives as reality but rather the concealed substratum of lived experience. For this reason, the “Ereignis” remains the most strange (“das Befremdlichste”), in the sense of Freund’s concept of the uncanny. It is so close to home that its exceptional appearance is unhomely.

To sum up: Heidegger’s “Ereignis,” which has the central features of the eschatological event of revelation, is strange because it reveals a reality that is present at each moment but so close to Dasein that it goes unnoticed as such. Eschatological reality is therefore immanent (rather than transcendent), but it is also concealed, and becomes present only through a movement of revelation. Hence the facticity of Dasein depends upon this eschatological fact, but not in the same terms as historical facts and events. The reality at stake in Heidegger’s realism is therefore one that it by nature concealed; it is opened up only through a poetics of revelation, one that at its heart is the becoming-present of the eschatological event. In this way, Heidegger’s

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357 Martin Heidegger, Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936-1938), 27.
realism is related to Brecht’s deformation of the real through alienation effects (which, however, on a deeper level, bring the “real” of social relations to light).

For Brecht, realism in art and literature entails a political commitment to expose reality for what it is, such that “Realistic means: discovering the causal complexes of society / unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power / writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up / emphasising the element of development / making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it.”359 Realism, then, is always at once a portrayal of reality in its objectivity and the estrangement of this reality, the appearance of reality as uncanny. It is in this sense that one can square Brecht’s realism with his Verfremdungseffekt: the exposure of reality is always tied to the banishment of illusion. What appears to be reality must be estranged before the objective conditions of life can be revealed. The same could be said for the “New Objectivity” in art: with Otto Dix and George Grosz in mind, it is clear that this art did not aim so much to “reflect” or “mirror” reality as expose its underlying social conflicts. Indeed, the critic Esther Leslie has argued out that the Neue Sachlichkeit ought not be reduced to an “objective recording of the surface;” the Verism of Dix and Groß, he argues, “is not so much reflection as revelation of underlying, masked, unpleasant truths.”360 The “reality” depicted in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit is that of the darker, repressed side of perception and consciousness.


360 See Esther Leslie, “Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: ‘The fact of new forms of life, already born and active’.”
My claim here is that Bultmann and Heidegger’s work enacts a theological realism in their poetics of revelation that operates in an analogous way to the new realism of Brecht’s epic theater and the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit. They do so by leveraging a new concept of eschatology, in which the extremity of the “Eschaton” marks not a transcendental reality but one that is immanent in the dialectic of concealment and revelation. Eschatology is figured by these writers as an “event” in the “here and now,” in which the reality of life is revealed as possibility. This eschatological trope, which focuses ever more closely on the reality at hand, incessantly reveals the “real” as possibility on the border of life and death. The effect is profoundly alienating, for reality is revealed to be more than a reproduction of the immediacy of perception. At the same time, the possibility at the heart of the uncanniness of the real is nothing other-worldly, nothing transcendent, nothing like the ecstatic apocalypse of the self that defines Bloch’s expressionist eschatology; rather, the “real” as possibility is, as Bultmann put it, a “possibility of the self” that it always had, a possibility turned towards the future. The “real” at stake in the poetics of revelation is one that is coextensive with the recognition of possibility as such. Hence it is not the case that revelation reveals “that which is real,” but rather that reality is the very possibility at stake in the movement of revelation. Hence for Heidegger the “Ereignis” is originary history (“das Ereignis ist die ursprüngliche Geschichte selbst”361) in the same sense that Dialectical Theology conceives of eschatology as “Urgeschichte.” The “event” is neither past nor a moment fully present but rather a potential that is always in coming; it is “primal history” or “originary history” insofar as it acts as a motor of history as such. The “Ereignis,” in its dialectic of concealment and revelation, therefore marks the drama of historical time, in its never complete opening.

361 Martin Heidegger, Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936-1938), 32.
The figures and intellectual formations analyzed in this chapter—from the Neue Sachlichkeit, to Bloch, to realism in literature, to Heidegger and Bultmann—allow us to draw some conclusions about the cultural significance of eschatology in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. Eschatological thinking not only struggled with problems that were addressed in other ways by what has been called the “new realism.” Moreover, eschatology itself took a turn towards realism in the 1920s, leaving behind its prior transcendentalism and observing an eschatological event at work in the facticity of human life. That is, Heidegger and Bultmann each point to the immanence of the eschaton in the very constitution of the real. In contrast to the apocalypticism of Bloch’s *Geist der Utopie*, for whom eschatological fulfillment defines the possibility of an alternative reality born out of the ecstatic imagination of the subject, for Bultmann and Heidegger the eschatological event entails a poetics of revelation that in which the real is defined by an alterity beyond the control of the subject, yet determinative of its relation to the world. Eschatological realism consists not in representing the “object” of revelation—that is, what is communicated in the eschatological moment—but rather in articulating the mediality with which the “eschatological fact” determines the facticity of religious life in terms of possibility. Such a theological argument might be thought of as what Robert Musil called “ein Sinn für die mögliche Wirklichkeit.”  


363 Or, as Heidegger put it, “Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit.”
actualized in the “now” of its communication, the “real” recedes from representation and
becomes reality only in consummation, that is, in the realization of possibility. And yet the
relation to the real in Heidegger and Bultmann is not deferred to the “end of time” or figured as
other-worldly transcendence, but rather present in a concrete way in the facticity of religious life.
In this way, their realism finds a hint of possibility between the cultural formations of naturalism
and expressionism.

Eschatological discourse, in short, complicates the narrative of the dialectic of
expressionism and realism implicit in the debate between Bloch and Lukács and in the
antithetical stance of the Neue Sachlichkeit towards the expressionist art of the first decades of
the twentieth century. The modes with which art, literature, philosophy, and theology interact
with “reality” in the 1920s and 1930s, it should be clear, are exceedingly differentiated, ranging
from the subjectivist claim that the self produces and constructs reality in its interiority, to a
return to the real in the things and objects of everyday life, to the insight that the reality of social
relations is concealed and must be estranged into order to be shown. The breadth and nuance of
this tapestry, I have argued, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the ways in
which theological discourse enters the picture. It too is formative in the emergence of a new
realism that is both non-representational and immanent. Realism in this sense is neither
subjective nor objective, but concerned with a mode of interaction with reality, as process and as
consummation. And in this way, as the enactment of a relation to the real, as a moment of
actualization, eschatology becomes constitutive of a new history, an originary history, a different
relationship towards historicity. Eschatology, in other words, becomes real as possibility.
**CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study has been to show how the theological discourse of Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, and Heidegger brought about a re-thinking of history in the 1920s, one that called into question the historicization of thought from Schiller and Hegel through the nineteenth century. By reconceiving the nature of the “end” as a spatial and liminal concept rather than a temporal and teleological one, these figures put forth a modernist eschatology that confronted history with a moment that exceeds historical representation. The theological challenge to historicism is therefore an integral part of twentieth-century modernism, not only in its critical potential but also in its search for alternative means to approach the problem of history.

Yet these alternative approaches to temporality—from its interruption as *kairos*, to its liminal relation to an eschatological now, to its contemporaneity across historical discontinuity—are by no means unproblematic solutions that simply return to the metaphysical thinking that preceded the historicization of thought. Rather, they reflect the challenges and aporias of the attempt to conceptualize forms of temporality that must remain on some level inassimilable to historical experience. The new “historiographies of the present” reflect an interrogation of the historical moment from the perspective of the eschatological limit, but at a fundamental level there can be no knowledge of what is on the other side of the limit. The construction of history becomes determined by an eschatological moment that is radically other and inaccessible, one that has implications for the immanence of worldly experience as the very absence and negativity of its transcendent ground.

The restoration of the limit of historical thought in terms of a negative theology opens up a space of self-reflection characteristic of modernist artistic and cultural production. From the
assembly of geometric forms and spatial tensions in Constructivism to the engagement with the concrete reality of things in the Neue Sachlichkeit, these modernist spaces look neither back to tradition nor forward to an emerging world, but turn their attention to the present as a moment that stands apart from history. Even within secular historiography, a mode of writing closely tied to narrative forms, there is a focus on the construction of history in the present, as a series of structural relations. As such, the reinvention of history takes place in a space that is discontinuous with its own historical moment. This reflects both the potential contemporaneity of this discourse and its fragile, aporetic constitution.

In light of this modernist moment, one that criticizes and stands apart from historicist modes of thought, it is paradoxical to ask the kinds of questions that inevitably arise at the conclusion of a study: How does the story end? What is the legacy of the writers considered here in the second half of the twentieth century? Where do things go from here? All of these questions presume a narrative mode of chronological history, one whose causalities can be reconstructed through historical research. They presume that the “end” of the story must come later, finally bringing to a close what was begun. Yet in light of the concept of eschatology uncovered here, the “end” of modernism cannot be assimilated into a narrative of teleological development. The only “end” of modernist eschatology is the return to its origin. This means that the critique and reinvention of history at work in the early twentieth century needs to be considered in its Aktualität, as much as its study demands that it be historicized and located in its context. Eschatological discourse in the 1920s carried its “end” within itself, yet it was an end that could never be actualized as such but always remained the limit of its possibility.

However, the story of the historicization of thought continues to this day. Its theological critique notwithstanding, scholarly disciplines in the Humanities still depend on historicist modes
of argumentation and contextualization. Yet these methods no longer depend upon the
commitments of nineteenth-century historicism and philosophies of history. There has been a
refinement of the historicization of thought, one that incorporates many of the insights and
temporal constructions that emerged from the “crisis of historicism” in the 1920s. Further study
would be needed to work out these connections in detail, but a few approaches can be sketched
in preliminary form.

First, the collapse of the universal and teleological structure of history is visible in the
“historical epistemology” of Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Michel Foucault.
Their work reflects a model of historiography that is not object-oriented but rather concerned
with the structuring properties of regimes of knowledge. Foucault’s work in particular is
attentive to the discontinuities and caesuras that undercut the possibility of a history of
development. Yet the presupposition that knowledge is historically contingent and the
delineation of distinct historical epistemes still belong within a larger process of the
historicization of thought, even as Foucault’s approach fundamentally breaks with the continuity
and totality of Hegel’s philosophy of history. This raises the question of whether there can ever
truly be an alternative to the process of historicization once it has been set into motion.

Second, one can trace the repercussions of the modernist reinvention of history to the rise
of Begriffsgeschichte in the work of Reinhart Koselleck, Joachim Ritter, and Erich Rothacker. To be sure, the method of historical semantics opens up a rather different avenue of investigation
insofar as it works with the discursive structure of concepts as the key to their viability and

364 See Michael Foucault, The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New
365 See Reinhart Koselleck, Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der
politischen und sozialen Sprache (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006); Reinhart Koselleck,
circulation. Still, the movement, life, and death of concepts in their work cannot be mapped onto the causalities of chronological history. The “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” remains an essential presupposition for any “history of ideas.” The interruptive potential of the time of *kairos* accounts for sudden reversals and upheavals in the history of concepts. *Begriffsgeschichte* does not depend upon an inner-historical dialectic in which concepts emerge by reflecting on themselves. Rather, the history of concepts exceeds their conscious articulation and reflects moments of contingency.

Finally, the conjunction of the crisis of historical thought with the Kantian problematic of the limits of cognition in modernist eschatological discourse finds an important resonance in the work of Hans Blumenberg. Blumenberg’s “Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit” is an important extension of Kantian epistemology, one that arguably depends on an insight into the limit of history as articulated by theological discourse. According to Blumenberg, the history of ideas is rife with thoughts articulated through metaphors, ones that reflect a constitutive limit of conceptual thought. Yet seen from another angle, “Unbegrifflichkeit” is no more or less than what Barth names “das Unanschauliche”: it is a figure of thought that cannot be historicized and brought to conceptual stasis. The non-conceptual remains in a relation of tension to conscious thought just as eschatology stands in tension to history. Blumenberg’s sifting through history to find those moments in philosophical thought that elude conceptual formulation bears an affinity to Barth’s recognition that there are moments of revelation in history that point beyond history, that reveal the other and outside of history.

It may well be that we are still living in the “long nineteenth century” and its age of historicism, for the case can be made that the very consideration of the relation of history to its

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outside can only arise within a framework of historical thought. Nevertheless, the perspective provided by Barth, Tillich, Rosenzweig, Bultmann, Heidegger, along with their counterparts in secular modernist cultural production, can be read as a moment of hesitation in the midst of the historicization of thought. These figures confronted history with its eschatological limit and brought to light the discontinuities, caesuras, and non-teleological structure of history. They criticized the excesses of historicism and changed the terms with which history and temporality are understood. Whether this amounts to the inauguration of a different mode of thought or merely a refinement of the process of historicization is a matter of perspective. Yet the very attempt to conceive of temporal possibilities beyond the frame of history is an important moment of modernism, one that embodies, as it were, an end in itself that knows no end.
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