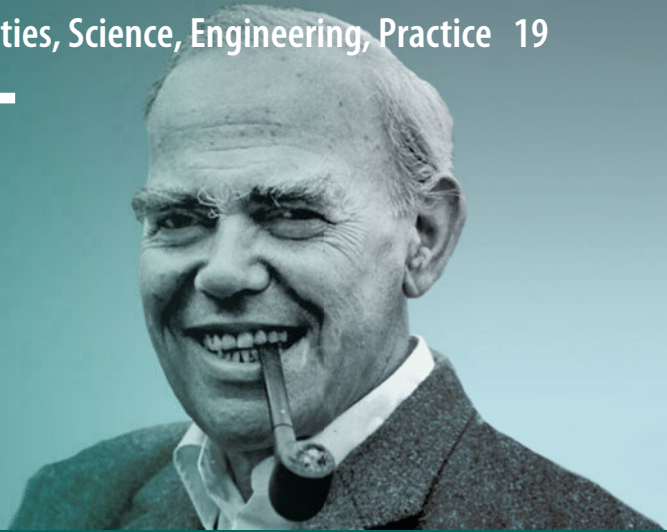


Enno Rudolph
Johannes Picht
Editors



Georg Picht: A Pioneer in Philosophy, Politics and the Arts

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*In grateful memory of the composer Hans
Zender (1936-2019), friend and student of
Georg Picht as well as patron of this edition*

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Lucerne, Switzerland
Schliengen, Germany
March 2021

Enno Rudolph
Johannes Picht

Introduction

When a renowned German weekly published a series of portraits of ‘great German-language philosophers’ of the twentieth century in 1971, a name that appeared alongside Karl Popper, Ernst Bloch, Max Horkheimer, Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker and others was that of Georg Picht. Only then was the general public – and the academic audience – suddenly made aware that a man they had hitherto perceived mostly as an expert on education policy and a participant in public debates on the politics of peace, the environment and science was in fact a philosopher.

Seven years earlier (1964), Picht had caused something of a stir with a series of articles entitled *Die deutsche Bildungskatastrophe* [The German Education Disaster], in which he accused politicians of failing in the field of education and called for wider access to academic education in all social strata. In other areas too, he had taken up politically sensitive topics and triggered controversies as well as intervening in ongoing disputes and pushing them in new directions. He was skilled in using the media – not only newspapers and magazines but also radio and television – to convey his political concerns to an increasingly large audience. But only a few had so far understood that these multi-faceted public activities stemmed directly from his understanding of philosophy. Before making philosophy his focus, he had first studied classics; he repeatedly referred to Plato as his most important philosophical teacher. Plato’s insistence that philosophical insight should guide the life and organization of the polis became as central for Picht as the Socratic maxim that the truth of a philosophy must be proved not only by a person’s words but also by their deeds. From Immanuel Kant, the Enlightenment thinker in whose work he kept trying to bring to light a coherent architecture, he adopted the demand that each individual must commit autonomously to using their own freedom in order to recognize the right of all people to freedom. Organizing the resulting reciprocal dynamics of actions in such a way that each individual person furthers the freedom of all by making use of their own freedom is the task of a community guided by reason. The use of freedom by a being endowed with reason is thus a public act, and aims for the creation of a critical public awareness. Only with this in mind can one understand the emphatic appeal to reason that repeatedly echoes in Picht’s writings. He saw himself as a thinker in the Enlightenment tradition, albeit one who first of all had to confront the

task of ‘enlightening enlightenment about itself’, that is, showing the preconditions – such as the assumption of achieving moral perfection among humans – underlying the programme of enlightenment. Thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, who relentlessly criticized Enlightenment philosophy, acted as counterpoints and models for Picht, and he engaged intensely with their work.

Kant had called for a ‘revolution in the way of thinking’, fundamentally challenging the validity of traditional metaphysics. As the originator of transcendental subjectivism and the author of both the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he had remained an avowed metaphysician on a new level – ‘a metaphysician of metaphysics’, as he put it. When Picht deals with Kant, he always bears in mind Kant’s goal of bridging the gap between being and obligation, between theoretical and practical reason, and of formulating a philosophy that can bring to light the conditions of possibility of natural science and mathematics as well as those of the mature individual’s political participation in the community. According to Picht, the fact that Kant encountered antinomies in this process that he was unable to resolve, yet did not evade them, demonstrates his greatness as a philosopher. One of these antinomies is what Kant considered an irreconcilable contradiction between the principle of consistent determinism of natural causality on the one hand and the principle of a ‘causality out of freedom’ (Kant) on the other. According to Kant, the former follows from the invariable validity of the ‘a priori pure concept of the understanding’, which he views as constitutive of the condition of possibility of experience as such, whereas the latter – in Kant’s solution – is an idea of reason that both instructs the understanding to cognize the laws of nature by means of its pure concepts and is able to, and should, apply itself as a liberating cause of ethically responsible action.

In 1938, Picht was struck by the full force of the realization that the knowledge of nature enabled by the natural sciences gives humans the means not only to cognize the objective world of nature by formulating natural laws but also to destroy it using those same laws, when, through his friend Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker, he became one of the first outside observers to learn of the possibility of developing a nuclear bomb. Unlike his teacher Heidegger, however, he did not conclude from this that science in general and natural science, in particular, should therefore be rejected (‘science does not think’) but rather drew a twofold conclusion from the experience: first of all, it was necessary to define the area in which natural science (and thus *eo ipso* metaphysics, which lives on in its forms of thought and epistemological foundations) is true, in order then to ask in what function metaphysics continues to be effective. Picht thus demands an intraworldly interpretation of metaphysics, whose truth he does not negate, but whose claim to universality he reins in. Secondly, and no less philosophically, one had to ask after the conditions of possibility of human responsibility in history. Picht was convinced that this could not be restricted to writing scholarly essays about the matter for an expert audience; there needed to be a transition here from philosophical insight to political action.

It was consistent with this that as early as the 1950s, Picht was one of the first to raise his voice against the threat to the human *oikos* and its supporting political and social systems. When he was appointed as Professor of the Philosophy of Religion

at the University of Heidelberg - the only such position in Germany to this day – in 1965, his characteristic combination of public activity as an academic and in the political and media landscape had been expressly welcomed as a criterion. When, as in a series of radio lectures broadcast in 1969 under the title *Mut zur Utopie* [Courage for Utopia] and subsequently translated into a variety of languages, he drew on detailed analyses and expertise to warn of the dangers of globalization and scarcity of natural resources, issues that were barely discussed at the time, he proved himself a cosmopolitan and public bearer of responsibility in Kant's sense, as well as a *zoon politikon* in the Platonic sense.

Kant and Plato are indeed the two philosophers who, more than any others, stand out for the way they attempted to bring together politics, science, ethics and mathematics in an overarching conception. In different (and complementary) ways, each of them places the human being in the centre and makes its self-awareness - which also means the awareness of its boundaries - their philosophical starting and vanishing point. In Kant, it is the self-cognition of the limits of reason which corresponds to a freedom that proves itself by only adopting maxims which condition their own possibility. Similarly, Plato understands freedom as the ability to impose rules of self-education upon oneself that enable an integration of the individual into a just state. Hence, both see freedom as autonomy, as self-legislation. This is not the only area in which Picht sees Kant as a successor to Plato, which exemplifies the way Picht repeatedly looks for the traces of antiquity in modernity and conversely reveals a form of enlightenment in classical philosophy that is no less significant than the modern Enlightenment. Both could be placed under Kant's motto: 'Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from its self-imposed immaturity'.

Another respect in which Picht sets himself apart from Heidegger, then, is that he leaves behind the latter's strictly-defended opposition of antiquity and modernity. He views the history of philosophy neither as the history of a progressive increase in knowledge that would permit the rejection of earlier philosophy as obsolete and inferior *a priori* nor as a series of opposing periods, let alone a history of degeneration. Rather, what characterizes his understanding of history is that every concept, every new form of thinking preserves the preceding forms and concepts within itself, representing and emerging from them - even where this is not based on a conscious reception of tradition. Consequently, if one is to understand philosophical concepts, they must always be made transparent against their historical background; for him, this understanding of what one is actually saying was the essence of philosophical education. What is required, then, is to reconstruct a figure of thought from the experience of thinking and the context from which it originally emerged; only by achieving this can one acquire the freedom to understand them in a new light, to examine them critically and develop their potential, rather than being at their mercy. That is why Picht was always concerned to gain insight into the present from the perspective of history but also to examine and rethink historical phenomena from a contemporary perspective. For him, systematic and historical thinking formed a unity. When he immersed himself profoundly in classical texts, it was not a matter of remote scholarliness but of recognizing the problems confronting the world today

as clearly as possible from their origins. In this way too, the philosophical and the political were intertwined in his work.

One notable example of this is Picht's extensive interpretation of Parmenides, which is at once a meditation on the beginning of philosophizing. As one of the most important representatives of the pre-Socratic philosophers alongside Heraclitus, Democritus, Pythagoras and others, Parmenides had a decisive and lasting influence on Plato and Aristotle, and thus on the whole of Western philosophy. In the centre of his so-called 'didactic' poem stands the statement that Picht terms the 'equation of Parmenides' and acknowledges as the discovery of the principle of identity: *to gar auto noein esti te kai einai*, which he translates as: 'For the same Is: to think and to be' [*Denn dasselbe Ist: Erkennen und Sein*]. For Picht, this statement, with which Parmenides simultaneously proclaims the eternal presence of this being (staged as revelation by the goddess of truth) and sharply contrasts the knowledge thereof with any mere 'opinion' about transient matters, marks the birth of European metaphysics; he refers to the possibility of reading the works of Plato and Aristotle also as commentaries on Parmenides, thus following the reflections and alterations of the identity principle (as the fundamental law of metaphysics) through the history of philosophy and science up to the present day. Yet before that, he had described the development that leads from Homer via Hesiod and Xenophanes to Parmenides and becomes recognizable as an increasingly abstract reflection on the immortality of the gods and their omniscience, in contrast to the ever-limited knowledge of humans. From this origin, truth is tied to transcendence and to the principle of identity and marked as 'eternal' truth. While this concept of truth remains valid (e.g. as the 'eternal' truth of mathematical theorems), its exclusivity is no longer appropriate today. Other concepts of truth, likewise rooted in antiquity (e.g. in Heraklit), stand alongside it. Even the 'eternal' truth of Parmenides, then, must be interpreted within the horizon of a history of truth.

In such explorations, one witnesses and appreciates Picht's expertise as a philologist who not only had a mastery of the classical languages but also of the critical methods of compiling and securing texts as well as interpreting them, as a core skill that defines his work. Perhaps one could say that he treated the history of thought like a texture to be philologically processed, with different layers and threads of translation that had to be revealed and interpreted. Here, philology also has the important task of protecting the texts and their interpretation from 'corruption', that is, from being adapted to unsuitable needs and instrumentalized for ideological purposes. With this philological commitment to the integrity of texts from other periods, Picht also sets himself sharply apart – without engaging in polemic – from Heidegger, who often posited bold etymologies in his readings of classical philosophical texts in order to validate his own philosophy with their idiosyncratic results.

Picht not only dealt with philosophical texts in his investigations, however, but frequently also with works of literature, architecture and visual art, as well as music. He considered them equally valuable documents of thought and was convinced that art, especially in modernity, was capable of formulating insights that were often far ahead of academic philosophy, and that it reacted with greater seismographic sensitivity to tectonic shifts. He saw the most innate quality of art in its ability to

offer an undisguised representation of the ‘phenomenality of phenomena’ – a concept whose importance in his late work is similar to that of the ‘Being of beings’ [*das Sein des Seienden*] in classical ontology. ‘Art cannot lie’, he writes in his lecture ‘Art and Myth’.

Even today, forty years after his death, Picht is viewed as an exceptional figure in his discipline. As a researcher in the field of classical Greek philosophy, a critical analyst and intermediary for the legacy of the European Enlightenment as well as an educator and political adviser, he was one of the very few humanities scholars of the last few decades in the German-speaking world who was not only competent enough for a qualified, methodologically secure interdisciplinary dialogue, but also viewed this as the norm and the foundation of his own research and thought. As the long-standing director of the Protestant Institute for Interdisciplinary Research [*Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft, FESSt*], he played a central part in developing up-to-date methods in this area. Philosophy as he understood it, namely as a mediator between historical competences across the boundaries of the scientific cultures treated separately today (natural sciences and humanities), and, on an even larger scale, as an attempt to bring together the spheres of science, art, religion as well as law and politics within a shared conceptual context, is more capable than any other discipline of organizing the diversity of specialist subjects, methods and perspectives found today inside a unifying matrix. It is the art of integration, which means not simply subsuming this diversity under the idea of a unity of knowledge, but rather to respond to the indissolubility of this diversity by taking seriously the incommensurability of the approaches whose structure it aims to reveal.

One can view Picht as a modern humanist of the old school who – like the Renaissance humanists from Petrarch to Erasmus – knew how modern antiquity was, and which antiquity was important in this regard. Yet he did not incorporate it in order to conserve it, but rather confronted its historical present with the present day in order to put it to the test. When selecting the texts for this volume, we tried to present a cross-section of his work and to document the most important areas of his thought as representatively as possible, though this meant that we had to pass over texts on particular issues (such as education policy). Picht’s tribute to his friend Theodor W. Adorno acts as a prologue, and not only gives an impression of his perspective on Adorno’s thought, but also demonstrates his philosophical interest in music.

For the first part, then, we chose three essays on classical Greek philosophy that simultaneously show Picht the philologist at work. The first has already been mentioned: in a close reading of the philosophical poem by Parmenides, it seeks to decode what was the first articulation of that original verbalization of the conception of truth which made its mark on European tradition for centuries, namely as the identity of thinking and being. The ontology of Parmenides also remained valid for Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle was faced with the task of mediating between the eternal presence of that which is and movement in nature; this is thematized in the third essay via an explanation of the concept of *energeia* that Aristotle introduced for this very purpose, alongside various other concepts. Placed between these two, Picht’s study on the irony of Socrates is intended to offer at least a small sample of Picht’s interpretations of Plato.

The second part comprises texts on ethics, politics and law. While the two essays ‘Philosophy and Politics’ and ‘The Philosophical Concept of Ethics’ take a fundamental and systematic approach to their respective subjects, albeit with a depth of historical insight, ‘Kant’s Transcendental Grounding of International Right’ is an exposition of Kant’s political theory as well as his theory of history. It stands alongside Picht’s critical examination of the basis of legitimacy for the concept of universal human rights, to which - over 20 years after its initial publication – he added an afterword in response to the human rights policies of the Carter Administration.

One of the central themes of Picht’s philosophical work, time, can only be documented in brief here, but it is present throughout the other texts. It forms the focus of two essays that we placed together in the third part of the book. The first - written for a festschrift on the 70th birthday of Werner Heisenberg - deviates from the metaphysical view of time in presenting time in terms of its phenomenality and showing the unity of time from the perspective of its differentiation in the three temporal modes, which Picht links to the three modalities of possibility, actuality and necessity. The second essay offers an approach to anthropology in terms of the historicity of the human being.

The texts in the fourth part are all taken from Picht’s seminar series ‘Kunst und Mythos’ [Art and Myth] from 1972/73. They are intended to show the horizons of his thinking on art. ‘Myth and Affect’ belongs in this context, even though its presentation of classical mythologems would also have made it suitable for the first part of the book: for Picht, art and myth were equiprimordial phenomena, and he viewed it as superstitious to believe that one could emancipate oneself from myth.

The book closes with one of the last texts completed by Picht and published in his lifetime. It deals with ‘the unthinkable as such’, ‘the power that opposes hope’ and the forms in which evil, understood as such, hides in the very places where we think we have defeated it.

Lucerne, Switzerland
Schliengen, Germany
March 2021

Enno Rudolph
Johannes Picht

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Chapter 1

Prologue: Atonal Philosophy – In Memory of Theodor W. Adorno († 6 August 1969)



If there were still such a thing as a history of spirit in Germany after Auschwitz, the death of Theodor W. Adorno would make it seem as if the clock had suddenly stopped.¹ In a society condemned to reproduce its own untruth, he broke the spell that shackled the freedom of the spirit. He called the delusional system that parades as reality by its true name, and could not be dissuaded from undertaking the ‘powerless attempt of the idea to retain power over itself’. The recognition of this very powerlessness paved the way for a new autonomy of thought. Through its horror at the deception of affirmation, philosophy here gains legitimacy as a higher level of the critique in which, according to his interpretation, lies the truth of the history of European thought.²

Without any illusions about the inward and outward possibility of philosophy in the twentieth century, Adorno, resisting everything that is granted legitimacy, refused to evade the requirements asserted by the name ‘philosophy’. Driven by fear, yet always fearless, the sensitivity of his thought was capable of achieving, every time it articulated itself, the impossible that he demands: ‘It turns the quintessence of the experience accumulated in it to the objects, rends the veil with which society conceals them, and perceives them anew.’ Over the last twenty years, Adorno changed the physiognomy of the intellectual landscape in Germany through the intensity of such spiritual experience. Anyone seeking to describe this period would note that its various tendencies can be precisely and sharply characterised by their stance towards that centre of innervation which Adorno’s name represented, yet simultaneously concealed.

¹ This text was first published as: ‘Atonale Philosophie – Theodor W. Adorno zum Gedächtnis’. In: *Merkur* 23 (1969), 889–892. Also in: G. Picht, *Hier und Jetzt: Philosophieren nach Auschwitz und Hiroshima*, Vol. I, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1980, pp. 245–248. The permission to republish this text in English was granted by Klett-Cotta publishers.

² Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Why Still Philosophy’, in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 13.

The path of spirit is that of misunderstanding. Adorno did not find an adequate answer in the society he agitated. The vibration emanating from his thought was so strong, however, that even misunderstanding, even hostility and defamation, indeed open infamy, could not suppress it. The tremors he caused even proved capable – contrary to his own analysis – of affecting political consciousness and public opinion, for better or worse. That the claim ‘the spirit is on the left’ gained a political meaning for the first time in German history would be inexplicable without the effect of Adorno’s thought.

The content and truth of that critical experience which he called ‘negative dialectics’ does not express itself primarily in the theoretical models that he used to raise sociology, musicology, literary studies, aesthetics and philosophy to the methodological level required by the objects of analysis. In the context of his thought, these models merely act as auxiliary constructions to enable an intellectual experience that cannot be captured by the schema of transferrable methods or ‘positive’ doctrines. His aim was not to enrich what we now call ‘academic research’ with new insights, methods and hypotheses within the established system of disciplines; this inevitable side effect contributed to a misrepresentation of his intentions. The primary content of his knowledge emerges whenever it transpires that this new form of critical thought cannot take place in a scholarship-immanent fashion, but rather seeks to question or even dismantle the entire framework of twentieth-century scholarship and its inherent premises.

One way in which this occurs is by showing that such scholarship, without admitting it to itself, reproduces the established social and economic conditions and their forms of domination merely through its ‘pure’ structure. It is a perversion of Adorno’s thought, however, to remove this insight from the context of experience that contains its meaning and its truth, elevate it undialectically to a doctrine and, in an open betrayal of its author, force it into the diabolical claws of affirmation. Adorno’s analysis was also confirmed by the fact that the very mechanisms he could unmask like no other even usurped his own insights. He bore it with the demeanour of a *grand-seigneur* who has no need for posturing because he has no reason to be ashamed of his sorrow.

If one wishes not only to acknowledge his work but to understand it, one must first realise that Adorno’s dialectical thought, for reasons that cannot be expounded here, is so radically opposed to the positivity of logical structures that its dialectical movement even eludes the residuum of classical logic in Hegel, namely the schema of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. In the concept, it already seeks the contradiction that negates it as a concept and takes it apart. The consequence of this, which irrupts into the centre of thought and is therefore scandalous, is that philosophy here appears in a guise that not only eludes the choice between true and false upheld by the principle of non-contradiction, but in fact declares this choice itself ‘false’ in a different sense of the word. Anyone who sought to portray Adorno’s philosophy as ‘true’ would already have denied this same philosophy. It identifies itself through its authenticity, which is expressed in the sensitivity with which the movement of micrological observation reacts to the matters it describes. It legitimises itself through the transparency of the ordeal contained in its experience. That is why it cannot be reproduced. Negativity, it

transpires, is the path on which his thought opposes, step by step, the violence done to the truth by established science and philosophy through the very form in which they utter it.

Thus the structure of transcendental philosophy is transformed. Kant's discovery of transcendental semblance is no longer restricted to metaphysics; rather, it becomes clear that precisely the foundation of the truth of experiential knowledge defended to the last by Kant, namely the identity of transcendental subjectivity, rests on a transcendental semblance. The reflection of thought upon the one who thinks can only break through this transcendental semblance if it always also resolves the contradictions of subjectivity from which thought emerges, its needs and motivations, the constraints to which it is subject and the longing that is shackled by these constraints in the process of thought. The subject of this transcendental reflection is the empirical one, or, more precisely, the subject that is trapped in society's 'context of delusion' and must be freed from it. The discovery and liberation of this subject's subjectivity, which can only be carried out in the form of critique, is the content of spiritual experience that manifests itself in Adorno's work. His method is transcendental reflection to the power of three, reached via Marx (Kant representing the power of one and Hegel the power of two). As the truth of the subjectivity thus grasped can no longer rely on the unity of the transcendental subject and the schematicisms latent therein as a metaphysical foundation, transcendental reflection now requires all the instruments developed by the modern crisis sciences, especially sociology and psychoanalysis, for the critical illumination of empirical consciousness. But the intention here is always a liberation for possible experience; its path leads through the emancipation of society to the freedom of the spirit.

The horizon of this thought is determined by the content of the experience it enables, namely the horizon of subjectivity in a newly-discovered dimension of this concept that breaks through the coldness of bourgeois thought. Adorno distances himself as clearly from the metaphysics of absolute subjectivity as from all inferior forms of subjectivism. Yet even when it no longer makes itself explicit in the traditional metaphysical forms, subjectivity necessarily points to a kernel of light that appears in it and guarantees its truth. Experience only becomes transcendental if the *truth* of subjectivity can be demonstrated in verifiable experience. Adorno's thought assures itself of that truth through aesthetic experience, the experience of those trails and configurations, those antinomies, ruptures and eruptions in which the inner shape of artistic constructs manifests the traces of the life from which they have emerged. That is why music is at the centre of this philosophy; philosophy becomes indistinguishable from music. *Negative Dialectics* is an atonal philosophy.

Without explicitly stating it, Adorno explained the form of this work in the essay dedicated to Pierre Boulez, 'Form in New Music'.³ Thought can assure itself of its truth through insight into artistic form because human beings cannot lie in art, even if they wish to lie; the sun brings it to light. A light shines out from the constellations of artistic form, a light from which the untruth is unable to hide. This is because form, as it emerges in all art, but most purely in music, should be understood as an

³ Adorno, 'Form in der neuen Musik', in *Neue Rundschau* 77 (1966), pp. 19–34.

‘intentionless language’: ‘The language of music is quite different from the language of intentionality. It contains a theological dimension. What it has to say is simultaneously revealed and concealed. Its Idea is the divine Name which has been given shape. It is demythologised prayer, rid of efficacious magic. It is the human attempt, however futile, to name the Name, not to communicate meanings.’⁴

Like music, Adorno’s philosophy aims for precisely such an intentionless language. That is why his *Negative Dialectics* is the last book of European philosophy in which the great philosophical themes – the absolute, freedom and immortality, love and death – can unfold in all their hidden truth, protected by the form of negativity. Adorno himself formulated the cometary orbit of the spirit that is retraced by the experience of philosophy in such a way that its dazzling light renders even the hidden substrata of twentieth-century industrial societies transparent. The final sentence of *Negative Dialectics* reads: ‘There is solidarity between such thinking and metaphysics at the time of its fall.’⁵

⁴ Adorno, ‘Music and Language: A Fragment’, in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 2 (translation modified).

⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1972), p. 408.

Part I
Ancient Greek Philosophy

Chapter 2

The Epiphany of the Eternal Present – Truth, Being and Appearance in Parmenides (1960)



In my essay ‘Die Erfahrung der Geschichte’ [The Experience of History] I developed the thesis that in the domain of Greek thought, truth is experienced as the epiphany of eternal presence.¹ I attempted to show how the form of truth manifested in this epiphany still determines, from the background and uncomprehended, the limits within which our experience of what actually is takes place. The epiphany of eternal presence turned into ‘supratemporal’ or ‘timeless’ truth, which developed its forms in classical logic and, through logic, also prefigured the structure and path of modern, objective and objectifying science. The path our thinking and our experience of the world had to take under the dominion of ‘timeless’ truth is the path of a negation of history that, in the Modern Age, led to an attempt to make history itself bow to logical reason through a total planning of legislation. This step from absolute truth to total planning is the final possibility, and simultaneously marks the close of the period that begins with the epiphany of eternal presence. We are therefore on the point of liberating ourselves from the negation of history and entering the human possibility of experiencing truth in history. Even if the experience of truth in history were an experience of the absolute in its appearance, it would still be determined by the negation in which the absolute constitutes itself as such. By contrast, the last part of my essay develops the proposition that time itself is being. If this proposition is potentially meaningful, then truth – as the truth of being – is the truth of time. Then truth itself has a history, and we experience the truth in history by experiencing the history of truth. Hence we cannot exit the historical period that stood in the light of the epiphany of eternal presence by taking the path of abandonment; this would in turn be a negation of history. Rather, we must first make it truly accessible for us as a

¹ This text was originally published as: ‘Die Epiphanie der ewigen Gegenwart: Wahrheit, Sein und Erscheinung bei Parmenides’. In: H. Höfling (ed.), *Beiträge zu Philosophie und Wissenschaft: Wilhelm Szilasi zum 70. Geburtstag*. München: Franke 1960. Also in: G. Picht, *Wahrheit – Vernunft – Verantwortung: Philosophische Studien*. Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag 1969, pp. 36–86. The permission to republish this text in English was granted by Klett-Cotta publishers.

period in our own history by understanding it as the period in the history of truth that enabled our own experience of truth. Accordingly, we ask after the original horizon of that manifestation of truth that sustains the ontology of Plato and Aristotle, and thus the whole of European science.

In the study ‘The Experience of History’, the assertion that truth appeared to the Greeks as the epiphany of eternal presence was reached via an interpretation of Aristotle’s definition of the human being as a *zōon logon echon* – a creature that possesses the *logos*. The form of knowledge in which truth discloses itself as truth, namely *nous*, was ‘consciously omitted’ there because it did not belong in an investigation that sought to gain access to the experience of history by following the history of the concept of experience. The result of this omission was that the origin of the Aristotelian *logos* remained obscure, and that in the analysis of Kant, the shared ontological foundation of the concept of time and the concept of pure reason could be hinted at, but not revealed. The ontological foundations of Kant’s thought are the ontological foundations of objective science. We cannot expect to attain the status of freedom in relation to this science and its effects on the shaping of the technological world if the foundation on which it rests remains hidden from us. That is why the question of the original sense of the ‘epiphany of eternal presence’ is one we must no longer avoid.

The following investigation does not actually seek to pose this question, only to prepare it. It will show that the epiphany of truth that determined the fate of European thought took place, in a sense that can be precisely defined, in the poem by Parmenides. In order to reach an understanding of Parmenides, the first part of the text will trace the path that leads from Homer via Hesiod to Xenophanes, whose concept of *nous* will be interpreted. The second part will attempt to build on this by examining some fragments from the poem. The method of our approach can only develop through a philological interpretation of difficult texts that have survived as fragments; there is no ‘royal road’ to the insights we seek. If we seriously mean to speak of the ‘history of truth’, we can no longer view the ‘historical’ as the ‘relative’ or the ‘contingent’, which indifferently circles a timeless truth. The well-worn distinction between ‘historical’ and ‘systematic’ work is then revealed as a naïve prejudice. We will only be able to explore and experience the history of truth if the great patience of philology is combined with the great patience of fundamental questioning.

For reasons of space, I have been forced to limit my consideration of existing research to the bare minimum. Experts will quickly notice how much I owe to the work of Hermann Fränkel in particular. Where I have taken a path of my own, I hope that the reason for this will be clear without a discussion of other views.²

² After the publication of this study, a considerable number of important contributions to the scholarship on Parmenides appeared and created a new situation. I believe the view presented here still stands in all important aspects, but it would have to be supported at greater length now. I therefore considered revising the text or adding notes, but it transpired that any such attempt would be thwarted by limitations of space. The study would have to be transformed into a book, and the ‘systematic’ aim of this essay, which proceeded from an examination of the foundations of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, would be obscured by the wealth of philological details. I therefore decided to republish

2.1 The Prehistory of Epiphany from Homer to Xenophanes

The main section of Plato's *Timaeus* begins with the following words (27 DE):

estin oun dē kat' emēn doxan prōton diaireteon tade: ti to on aei, genesin de ouk echon, kai to gignomenon men aei, on de oudepote? to men dē noēsei meta logou periplēpton, aei kata tauta on, to d' au doxē met' aisthēseōs alogou doxaston, gignomenon kai apollymenon, ontōs de oudepote on.

Therefore, in my opinion, it is necessary to begin by making the following distinction: what is that which always is that knows no becoming, and what is the ever-becoming that never is something that is?³ The one can be encompassed through *noesis* with the help of the declaratory statement, as it is always being as per the same; the other, however, can be apprehended by an apprehension [*doxa*] through perception that cannot be revealed by a *logos* because it is something that comes into being and passes away, but never is in the manner of being.

The distinction observed here – the distinction between, on the one hand, that which always is, with the *noesis* that belongs to it, and on the other hand, that which is ever-becoming and ever-fading, to which the *doxa* belongs – not only forms the basis for the *Timaeus*. For Plato, it is the most fundamental of all distinctions; it is the original opening of the realm in which his philosophy unfolds.

It may therefore be surprising to find him saying that, in his 'opinion' [*doxa*], it is necessary to begin the investigation with this distinction; he thus seems to term it a mere *doxa*. All Plato means by this, however, is that this distinction must be considered a *doxa* until it is revealed – which occurs in a sense in the course of the investigation – in a *logos*. With the word *doxa*, then, he has something similar in mind to what Hegel wrote in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'But Science, just because it comes on the scene, is itself an appearance: in coming on the scene it is not yet Science in its developed and unfolded truth.'⁴ Yet neither Plato nor Hegel manage to do away with the difficulty they both see by means of this explanation. For both of them find the foundation on which they are standing as a historical imprint that is given to them directly as 'appearance', in a form that allows no evasion in any direction. In their respective historical locations, they must recognize this appearance of knowledge and truth just as one must recognise what is evident a priori. But thought

the text with minor changes in the form in which it was written in 1959 as a birthday gift for my friend and teacher Wilhelm Szilasi.

³ Editor's note: Parmenides consistently uses *estin* in the strictly ontological sense. He is not referring to facts in relation to possible predicates of things (*estin* as copula), then, but rather (aside from remarks about the misguided opinions of mortals living in semblance) exclusively to their being. That which is, is referred to by Parmenides as *to eon* (*ta eonta* in the plural). The translation must do justice to this consistent reduction of speaking about things to their mere being by restricting itself – even where this leads to unidiomatic formulations – to the verb 'to be' and its derived forms. As English (unlike Greek and German) lacks a nominalised participle, *to on* (*das Seiende* in German) is translated as 'that which is'. This maxim is also followed in quotations from Plato and Aristotle in so far as they refer to the Parmenidean ontological tradition.

⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 48.

cannot deduce its own preconditions from itself a posteriori. Therefore, no *logos* in the strict sense is possible in which this fundamental distinction has been revealed; for, conversely, this distinction is the condition of possibility for the *logos* as *logos*, and for every revealing act that seeks truth in a *logos*.

We must therefore seek the original meaning of this distinction adopted by Plato where it grew historically, namely in the thought of Parmenides. As we will see, it ‘occurs’ in the poem by Parmenides as epiphany, as underivable divine revelation; yet even this epiphany required a historical preparation. As we operate under the spell of supposed self-evidences today in our thinking and our view of historical phenomena, self-evidences that largely developed from misunderstandings of Greek ontology, it is indispensable for us as a preparation for entry into the thought of Parmenides to retrace, as far as possible, the historical path that leads to Parmenides.

We will begin with Homer’s invocation of the Muses, whom Hesiod calls the daughters of Mnemosyne, of memory (*Theogony*, 53ff.). At the start of the Catalogue of Ships in Book II of the *Iliad* (484ff.), the poet interrupts the flow of the poem to call on the Muses for help:

*Espete nyn moi, Mousai Olympia dōmat’ echousai –
hymeis gar theai este, pareste te iste de panta,
hēmeis de kleos oion akouomen oude ti idmen –
hoi tines hēgemones Danaōn kai koiranoi ēsan.*

Tell me now, you Muses who reside on Mount Olympus –
for you are goddesses and present everywhere, and have seen everything,
but we only hear the news and have seen nothing –
who were the leaders and rulers of the Danaans.

Here the divine knowledge of the Muses is contrasted with our human ‘knowledge’. Only the goddesses can have true knowledge, for the perfect tense *oida* used by the Greeks to refer to knowledge means ‘I have seen’, ‘I am an eyewitness’; the goddesses alone can be eyewitnesses to everything, because the goddesses alone are omnipresent. We humans, on the other hand, only hear news, we rely on hearsay, and lack the reliable knowledge to which an eyewitness can invoke. Thus in truth we hear, as stated in the first line of the *Iliad*, the voice of the goddess in the song of the poet. In Book II (488–492), Homer continues:

*plēthyn d’ouk an egō mythēsomai oud’onomēnō ...
ei mē Olympiades Mousai, Dios aigiochoio
thygateres, mnēsaiath’ hosoi hypo Ilion ēlthon.*

But I could neither count nor name their multitudes myself [...] if the Olympic Muses, the aegis-bearing daughters of Zeus, would not call to my memory how many came before Ilion.

What does ‘call to memory’ mean here? It does not, at any rate, mean that the poet had already known the number and names of the heroes who came before Ilion but forgot them later, such that the Muses would simply be jogging his memory. Rather, the word *mnēsasthai* – ‘call to memory’ – is used because the relationship of the

poet's indirect knowledge to the direct knowledge of the Muses corresponds to the relationship of the memory's indirect knowledge to direct apperception itself. In this sense, the Muses are the daughters of Mnemosyne: as conveyors of the immediate knowledge to which we humans only gain access through mediation.

How this mediation of the immediate is to be imagined is shown in the words of the singer Phemios in the *Odyssey* (22, 347ff.):

*autodidaktos d'eimi, theos de moi en phresin oimas
pantoias enephsen.*

I am self-taught, but a god caused manifold paths to grow
in my mind.

In a widely used metaphor, the 'manifold paths' are the paths of song; their meaning is shown in a line by Stesichorus (Fragment 25D): *ha Mousa gar ouk aporōs geuei to paron monon, all' epergetei panta therizomena*, 'for the Muse does not merely sample the present without a path, but reaches everything and collects the harvest.' To sample only the present does not require a path. But the Muse reaches everything, including what is absent from us humans – in the *Iliad* she is present everywhere and an eyewitness to everything – and thus requires manifold paths. The paths on which the Muse reaches 'everything' are the paths of song. And if the Muse 'plants' these paths in the poet's mind as if they had grown within him of their own accord (*enephsen*), he can report as if he had been present himself as an eyewitness and can offer up the harvest of the Muses as his own gift. This only applies, of course, to the self-taught singer, who does not sing the verses of other poets, but what the Muse herself has placed in his mind. The paths that open up in the poet's mind do so thanks to the instruction from the Muses known in Book II of the *Iliad* as 'memory'; but he finds them in his own mind and not someone else's, in his own *physis* (*enephsen*), and that is why, by human standards, he is self-taught. Thus we already find in the Homeric singer and poet the same agreement between divine memory, divinely revealed path, personal learning and personal natural disposition that would later return in Plato in the 'highest art of the Muses' (*megistē mousikē, Phaedo* 61 A), namely philosophy, as the doctrine of anamnesis, 'recollection' (re-remembering). In the doctrine of anamnesis, Plato discovers what would later be called a priori cognition. But the 'recollection' of a priori cognition is incomplete if it forgets that it originated from the inspiration of the Homeric poet by the Muses.

In Plato, the capacity for anamnesis is *nous*. We will therefore have to determine more precisely what is meant by *nous*, and how the *nous* of the later philosophy relates to the inspiration of the poet.⁵ In Homer, the verb *noein* first of all means 'to spy', 'to see with the eyes' (*ophalmoisi noein*, in *Iliad* 15, 422). But because observing remains mere gaping if one does not also perceive what one sees with one's

⁵ The following outline of the history of the philosophical concept of *nous* contradicts the study by K. Von Fritz, '*NOUS* and *NOEIN* in the Homeric Poems', in *Classical Philology* 38 (1943), pp. 79ff. There is insufficient space here for a comprehensive explanation; see now W. Luther, 'Wahrheit, Sicht und Erkenntnis in der griechischen Philosophie bis Demokrit', in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 10 (1966), pp. 13ff.