



Dilthey's and Jaspers' Reaction to the Clash of Worldviews

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Abstract: Surprisingly fast in the nineteenth century, the epistemological concept of *Weltanschauung* (worldview) became surprisingly fast the term for the individual interpretations of the whole of human existence, so that finally different worldviews opposed each other in a hostile manner. Wilhelm Dilthey did not take part in this conflict, but tried to explain it, while Karl Jaspers accentuated the significance of worldviews for the existence of the human being. Even if their intention and their concept of worldview is different, they agree on two important points: Both philosophers teach the diversity of views, and they both completely exclude political worldviews. The latter, however, increasingly penetrated the public consciousness and shaped the social conflicts and upheavals of their times.

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From Epistemology to the Struggle of Worldviews

It is still hard to believe that Immanuel Kant's single use of the term *Weltanschauung* (worldview) in his *Critique of Judgment* should be the first evidence of this expression, because the term was immediately received in nearly all philosophies of the German language regions. It is as if philosophy had been waiting for this shaping of the word. The rapid spread of the concept of *Weltanschauung* after Kant was certainly only possible due to the processes of secularization and individualization, which took place at the end of the eighteenth century. While in the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff rational theology and rational psychology were quite central areas, their thinking could hardly be called a "worldview," for God and soul were not intrinsic of the world for anyone. Yet through the sharper awareness of the diversity of

the ways of thinking of individual people and specific societies, cultures, and epochs, one needed to posit a word for designating these different approaches to comprehend the world. At first, however, the term had a purely epistemological meaning.

One can distinguish three stages in the development of the term *Weltanschauung*: (1) In the context of the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the term denotes the infinite whole of phenomena, which cannot be fully intuited, but can only be thought. In Fichte, *Weltanschauung* is contrasted with *Selbstanschauung* (self-perception). This means that worldview refers exclusively to the external world, or, in his words, to the non-ego. (2) Following the perspectivism of Leibniz's theory of monads, the early F. W. J. Schelling uses the word in order to designate the individual positions toward the world that are taken naturally by each living being. Friedrich Schleiermacher, however, in his pedagogy

first declares it to be the task of every human being to form an orienting *Weltanschauung* coupled with *Weltbildung* (world-formation, practical action) and to do so with the help of the sciences. He presupposes that science of nature and history will progressively develop a better understanding of the world. (3) From 1801 onward, G. F. W. Hegel and Schelling use the term in such a way that it also includes the relationship to the absolute being, that is, the divine. Worldview is now also a view of life (*Lebensanschauung*), an interpretation of human beings in their relation to the totality of what is. If religion, morality, and art do not yet belong to the forms of worldview in the former modes of use, this changes clearly in 1807 with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel criticizes the "moral worldview" of Kant and Fichte, and this results in a situation in which there can now also be aesthetic, religious, speculative, and scientific worldviews.

After having equated worldviews to life-views the term has been used in various ways for the history of ideas, especially for the history of philosophy. It allowed to concentrate both on the specific character of epochal ways of thinking and of individual systems. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, all philosophies could be called worldviews. This usage was initially only concerned with historical truth, that is, with respect to the correct picture of formations of the history of ideas. However, since by way of the historical retrospectives one also made the intellectual situation of the present understandable, in which completely new ways of thinking collided with the older ones, the transition to struggling for the correct, for the true worldview was inevitable.

Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote in his treatises on the philosophy of language that with every language comes also a worldview. Consequently, there could not and did not have to be any struggle for these worldviews, for languages were matters of fact. Even if his brother Alexander von Humboldt in his 1845 work *Kosmos: Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* combined the knowledge of nature, which had reached his time, with a worldview, nobody was attacked by that combination. But it was somewhat more critical when Hegel spoke of the "modern Christian worldview" and justified modern times as being the fruit of Christian history. For this view was not shared by everyone. To other authors, the radical Enlightenment with its critique of religion and its pantheism or naturalism appeared as a fundamental break with the history of Christianity. In 1830, Josef

Görres declared this modern thinking to be the "return of the old paganism" (*Rückkehr des alten Heidenthums*) that had to be fought.¹ Now, the intellectual world began to polarize. While some intensified their criticism of religion and the social system, others reaffirmed their adherence to the tradition shaped by Christianity. The first climax of this controversy was the so-called materialism fight of the 1850s. While some defended atheistic materialism with the help of the natural sciences as the only true interpretation of the world and human existence, others opposed this view with the aid of philosophical and theological arguments. The only thing they agreed on was that it was a fight about the right worldview.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a variety of worldviews emerged that took a position on the dispute and sometimes tried to provide solutions. Very simplified, at least the following three main directions came into conflict with each other: Forms of a Christian worldview opposed the new materialism, while idealistic philosophies intervened as well. The severity of those disputes, reminiscent of the former religious wars, also resulted from the fact that naturalism presented itself as a new religion and that the parties were not only concerned with identifying and defending the right theory, but also with establishing the right practice, with the shaping of society. The resolute advocates of atheistic materialism—Carl Vogt, Ludwig Büchner, and Jacob Moleschott—were also involved in political struggles and for this reason had to give up their academic careers. David Friedrich Strauß declared in a widely read book in 1872 that the old faith had given way to a new faith based on science.² The Darwinist Ernst Haeckel then explained his naturalistic monism as being a new combination of religion and science. Naturalism was therefore by no means only an academic philosophy, such as, for example, Neo-Kantianism that flourished at the same time. Rather, it aimed at transforming culture and society. In 1905, Ernst Haeckel, the founder of the naturalistic monist alliance, explicitly proclaimed that a "fight" had to be waged. One reads the words "fight" and "struggle" in many statements in the time around 1900, already these word choices betray the hardness of the argument.

¹ Joseph von Görres, *Ueber die Grundlage, Gliederung und Zeitenfolge der Weltgeschichte*, Breslau, DE: Josef Mar Verlag 1830, p. 22.

² David Friedrich Strauß, *Der alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis*, Leipzig, DE: Verlag G. Hirzel, 1872.

Wilhelm Dilthey's Distancing from the Contention

Dilthey did not take sides in this controversy, but he rather attempted to make it comprehensible. At first, he did this with reference to the intellectual history: In his treatise on pantheism, written in 1900, he distinguishes three "great typical worldviews of mankind" which were present in the thinking of his time, namely, the various manifestations of naturalism, idealism of freedom, and pantheism.³ Shortly thereafter he replaced the concept of pantheism with the concept of objective idealism, without changing his idea. The historical perspective alone puts the current controversy at a distance and defuses it. The three worldviews belong to the intellectual existence of mankind from the very beginning, even though their conflict may come to a critical point only in the present. In the subsequent years, Dilthey searches for the reasons that lead to the controversy and gives in 1907 the following explanation in his "The Essence of Philosophy":⁴ Distressing and puzzling experiences in the life of human beings, death in particular, overwhelm human understanding. The incomprehensibility of life allows for a variety of answers that, nonetheless, are not compatible. First, the answers are given by religion and poetry and later by forms of metaphysics. Similar to the sciences, various metaphysical philosophies aim for general validity but cannot venture beyond their diversity. Their origin, the unfathomability of life, can only be interpreted from certain perspectives and shows itself to be incompatible with any scientific explanation. Therefore, a critical, consensus-oriented philosophy can only try to clarify the origin and function of worldviews more precisely, but it is not able to establish or defend any one of them.

The reasons for their emergence are, on the one hand, experiences such as defeats and victories, and,

on the other hand, they are rooted in the different psychological dispositions of people. Looking at the history of ideas and the structure of the human mind, Dilthey distinguishes those three known types—naturalism, subjective idealism of freedom, and objective idealism—and suggests that his theory will allow for a better insight both into the history of ideas and into the structure of human dispositions and possibilities of interpretation. This view is shared by Rudolf Makkreel who has shown how Dilthey's theory of worldviews can be made fruitful for hermeneutics.⁵ Dilthey's typology is a provisional scheme that should be continuously corrected and improved through research. In Dilthey theory and experience presuppose each other mutually, as it is also claimed today by the more recent philosophy of science. When Dilthey sometimes brings his method of typologization very close to the methods of the natural sciences, he makes it clear that he is aiming at an objective philosophy which, as a science, is to be distinguished from worldviews.

In his critique of reason, Kant had declared the most important subjects of metaphysics (God, freedom, immortality) to be unknowable. However, he had justified metaphysics by way of pointing out the fact that human reason naturally asks more questions than it can answer. He had then removed those contents merely from theoretical reason, but had granted them a right to exist in a space of reason where they occur as postulates of practical reason. In a similar way, in Dilthey the worldviews are only downgraded, but not dropped. Even more radically than through Kant's critique, they lose their claim to truth through historical consciousness. But they are being shown to be authentic, truthful expressions of life. They are appropriate interpretations of the world and of the self for some people that are challenged by life. Hence, as it were, they do not have an objective truth, but a subjective one. They are not scientific, yet they are nevertheless inevitable and necessary for human existence.

In this way, Dilthey tried to keep his philosophical thinking free from worldviews. But he was not entirely consistent. Occasionally he called his own thinking a "historical worldview." An advance made in the historical sciences of modern times—he wrote in 1901—created the conditions "to produce our historical

³ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Der entwicklungsgeschichtliche Pantheismus nach seinem geschichtlichen Zusammenhang mit den älteren pantheistischen Systemen," in *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen: Seit Renaissance und Reformation, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume II*, Leipzig and Berlin, DE: Verlag B. G. Teubner 1921, pp. 312-90, here pp. 312-5.

⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Essence of Philosophy (1907)," transl. John Krois and Rudolf A. Makkreel, in *Ethical and World-View Philosophy, Selected Works, Volume VI*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2019, pp. 171-248, here pp. 231-6.

⁵ Rudolf A. Makkreel, "Metaphysics and Hermeneutical Relevance of Worldviews," *The Review of Metaphysics* 74/2 (December 2020, Issue 294), 321-344.

world view in the nineteenth century."⁶ For Dilthey this worldview is closely connected with a problem, because it shows the relativity and "finiteness of every historical phenomenon." It teaches freedom, but in doing so it also creates uncertainty. Dilthey confessed to have worked on the solution of this problem all his life.⁷ Thinking with admiration of his friend, the Lutheran Graf Paul Yorck von Wartenburg, he noted: "where is an identical force in my historical worldview?"⁸ This conception of worldview belongs to a quite different type, which – as it already had been noted in regard to Schleiermacher and A. von Humboldt – seeks only to gain and arrange knowledge and is not at all oriented toward solving of life's riddles. Martin Heidegger said in 1925 that Dilthey was the only one who had taken the right path in the current struggle for a historical worldview because he was concerned with making the historicity of the human being understandable.⁹ And that led Heidegger to the conception of *Being and Time*. Moreover, one could ask whether Dilthey's philosophy of life was not also a worldview. Following Dilthey, Georg Misch then developed a life-philosophical worldview which avoids all dogmatic determinations and which definitely lays claim to truth.¹⁰ Against this background it is not surprising that in 1919 Karl Jaspers tried to clarify the issue again in a new and much more detailed way.¹¹

The Different Conceptual Approaches in Dilthey and Jaspers

The writings of both philosophers are very different already at first sight. Dilthey published his theory of worldviews at the end of his life, first only briefly in the context of his treatise on the nature of philosophy in 1907 and then in an essay composed in 1911, which is dedicated to this topic and comprises merely some forty pages. One can admire his ability to present a result of his many studies in the broad field of intellectual history in a concise and structured way, yet this brevity comes at a price. For while Dilthey succeeds in making perfectly clear the character and origin of the worldview types, he also left questions unanswered. For example, he places Aristotle into the tradition of subjective idealism, and Schleiermacher and Hegel into the one of objective idealism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, these two philosophers oriented their practical philosophy precisely on Aristotle for, unlike Kant, Aristotle did not oppose reality with abstract postulates of reason, but conceptualized the *polis*, the city-state, as a rational institution. When one describes the character of objective idealism and thus also the way of thinking of Schleiermacher and Hegel as being "contemplative, meditative, aesthetic,"¹² this cannot convince everyone either since their work was closely connected with the Prussian reforms. Unlike Dilthey, Jaspers wrote his work right at the beginning of his philosophical path, and it is at times rather too extensive than too short. One wonders whether some of Jaspers' long historical digressions such as the ones on the philosophy of antiquity (PW 197-206) were really necessary for a typology, since very good histories of philosophy had already been published at that point in time. In any case, it is understandable that Jaspers later called his book not entirely well executed (PW 7). Just as he states, it is the result of self-reflection as a young researcher. Therefore, one will also take note with indulgence when he quotes at length the life report of Gottfried Arnold, who wrote an acclaimed history

cited as PW, all translations are by the author]

⁶ Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Eighteenth Century and the Historical World (1901)," transl. Patricia Van Tuyl, in *Hermeneutics and the Study of History, Selected Works, Volume IV*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1996, pp. 325-86, here p. 333.

⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Rede zum 70. Geburtstag (1903)," in *Gesammelte Schriften, Volume V*, Stuttgart, DE: B. G. Teubner 1982, pp. 7-9, here p. 9.

⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Der moderne Mensch und der Streit der Weltanschauungen (1904)," in *Gesammelte Schriften, Volume VIII*, Stuttgart, DE: B. G. Teubner 1962, pp. 227-35, here p. 233. [Henceforth cited as MSW]

⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Wilhelm Dilthey's Forschungsarbeit und der gegenwärtige Kampf um eine historische Weltanschauung," ed. Frithjof Rodi, *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften* 8 (1992/93), 143-180, here pp. 153, 157-8, 161.

¹⁰ Georg Misch, *Der Weg in die Philosophie. Eine philosophische Fibel*, Leipzig and Berlin, DE: Verlag B. G. Teubner 1926, pp. 109-10.

¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, ed. Oliver Immel, Basel, CH: Schwabe Verlag, 2019. [Henceforth

¹² Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Types of World-View and Their Development in Metaphysical Systems (1911)," transl. James McMahan and Rudolf A. Makkreel, in *Ethical and World-View Philosophy, Selected Works, Volume VI*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2019, pp. 249-94, here p. 289. [Henceforth cited as TWMM]

of the church and heresy, as being "an example of the *irrational lifestyle* of a mystic" (PW 414).

Already Jaspers' and Dilthey's motives were very different. Dilthey's main motive was his worry that the openly carried out and unsolvable dispute regarding the worldviews could discredit all philosophy and produce a general skepticism. Therefore, he wanted to demonstrate that while none of the known worldviews can find universal acceptance, scientific investigation of these phenomena is doubtlessly possible and forms an integral part of the task of philosophy. In contrast to this, Jaspers, on the other hand, wanted to explore the abundance of presently possible worldviews in order to better understand human beings in general and especially his contemporaries. He had noticed that in the background of the scientific discussions and medical decisions different attitudes were at work, which were not spoken about, but which led to controversies and to agreements. Above all, he wanted to illuminate the "wide space" of possibilities "in which those existential decisions are made that no thought, no system, no knowledge anticipates" (PW 10).

Dilthey tried to take a standpoint beyond the worldviews, which is scientific and not worldview-based and which everyone can share. Jaspers, however, starts from his own worldview experience and aims to show his fellow humans the inventory of available possibilities for which they can decide themselves. Therefore, for Dilthey the worldviews are given objects of research, however, for Jaspers they are also always stimulating interpretations of life, which call for affirmation and from which one can learn a lot for *eigentliches Menschsein*, "the authentic being human" (PW 9). Each of the two authors is guiding a different understanding of truth. For Dilthey, each one of the worldviews represents only a partial truth, and accepting this as the whole nonetheless may be useful for the life of the individual, yet this cannot be justified scientifically. For Jaspers, however, there can ultimately be important truth only within the framework of limited perspectives, and for him the decisive criterion for judging a worldview is their being lived genuinely, sincerely, authentically. His book does not only want to serve as an orientation, yet it is an appeal to the individual to form a worldview that is rendered livable. For Dilthey, however, this could only lead to more strife and social conflict. That Jaspers' project is no longer centrally focused on the disputes of Dilthey's time is also shown by the fact that religion and naturalism, with which Dilthey was permanently concerned, are

only marginally mentioned in his work. When Jaspers is writing about religion, he is mainly engaging with Søren Kierkegaard, the critic of Hegelianism and bourgeois Christianity.

Since Dilthey is concerned with understanding in the field of philosophy in conflict, whereas Jaspers with the authentic being human, they also relate differently to the given philosophical conceptions. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche, together with Kierkegaard, is for Jaspers one of the "greatest psychologists of worldview" (PW 33), whom he often quotes. In contrast to this Dilthey called Nietzsche "an eccentric man of feeling and imagination,"¹³ placed him close to literature and accused him of not relying on careful research but only on introspections and intuitions, and for this reason producing "completely unverifiable psychological hypotheses" (PCP 155). In Dilthey's time, Kierkegaard, however, was not yet a well-known author. Yet Jaspers is clearly fascinated by Kierkegaard; his extensive quotations and presentations evidence how the newly emerging existential philosophy discovers one of its pioneers (PW 382-94).

Furthermore, their concept of worldview also has a different scope. Dilthey uses it to refer only to forms of thought and belief that attempt to solve the riddles of life and thereby come into conflict with science, and these forms include metaphysical systems as well as works of art and especially of religion. Jaspers, on the other hand, focuses on philosophy for it is the most differentiated, self-conscious expression of man, but he does not limit himself to metaphysics and almost completely excludes other cultural areas.

Clearly, the approach of the two authors is different. Both replace with their typologies the diachronic sequence of worldviews that one can find, for example, in Hegel's aesthetics, by implementing a synchronic arrangement, because they both are concerned with the thinking of the present. Yet, Dilthey also argues historically, showing transitions and connections between the religious, the poetic, and the metaphysical ways of thinking. Although his typology does not intend to be a closed system, it acquires a quasi-systematic character in that he relates the three types of

¹³ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Present-Day Culture and Philosophy (1898)," transl. Patricia Van Tuyl and Rudolf A. Makkreel, in *Ethical and World-View Philosophy, Selected Works, Volume VI*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2019, pp. 141-60, here pp. 153. [Henceforth cited as PCP]

worldviews to the three faculties of the human soul, whose structural interrelationship he had explained in more detail in several works. In naturalism the intellect is dominant, in subjective idealism the will is of central importance, and in objective idealism feeling plays an important role. Therefore, one could more aptly call Dilthey's approach psychological than the division offered by Jaspers. Dilthey writes:

World-views are rooted in life-conduct, life-experience, and the overall structure of our psychic life. [TWM 262]

Jaspers, however, starts with the subject-object split, which for him is a primordial phenomenon. This split and its consequences are not a topic of today's psychology, but a problem of epistemology, and specifically of modern epistemology since Descartes. Only against the backdrop of his habilitation and under the condition of the understanding of the very broad concept of psychology around 1900 could Jaspers give his book the title *Psychology of Worldviews*.

The Main Parallels and the Exclusion of Politics

Despite the differences, one also recognizes certain parallels between the two basic conceptions. Although Dilthey did not say it himself directly, his distinction of the three types can be traced back to the division subject, object, and subject/object, for subjective idealism is opposed to naturalism, which starts from the world of objects, while in objective idealism the dichotomy between the moral will of the subject and the objective cognition is abolished. In the section *Metaphysical Antinomies*, Dilthey notes:

In life there is the process of distinguishing oneself, of differentiating. This we finally trace back to subject, object, but this too is intellectually distorted.¹⁴

Since his typology is a scientific and hence necessarily an intellectual construction, he could well have named the terms for his division. That tripartite division can also be seen in the background of Jaspers' main division of his work: chapter 1, *Die Einstellungen* (the dispositions, mental attitudes), matters to do with the subjects are being detailed; in chapter 2, *Weltbilder* (world pictures) orders of the objective world are being depicted; and in chapter 3, *Das Leben des Geistes* (the life of the spirit or

spiritual life) is aimed at what lies beyond the division under discussion (*PW* 47-8).

In respect to life experience the parallels between the theories of worldview in Dilthey and Jaspers are clearer. Through life experience worldviews are caused and also limited. The riddles of life and world, which arise from the unfathomable life in Dilthey's writings, correspond to the *Grenzerfahrungen* (boundary situations) in Jaspers, about which the latter wrote a separate extensive chapter; in both authors the normal progress of life is interrupted and the intellectual self-assertion of the human being gets into aporias. Both philosophers repeatedly emphasize the contradictions into which human life inevitably is ending up in. One can read in Dilthey that in nature and society there is a permanent struggle, and frequently one finds very similar statements in Jaspers. Here they show and develop their own thinking, from which they take a look at the worldviews. Dilthey calls this thinking "philosophy of life" and Jaspers calls it "psychology," from which subsequently emerged his "existential philosophy" (*PW* 9). In his detailed comment on his friend Jaspers' book, Heidegger also showed a great interest in the concept of boundary situations, however, not in regard to the subject-object separation. In a time of troubles and upheavals, Jaspers had made a personal experience of the central theme that probably had greater significance for the younger generation of philosophically interested readers than all questions of epistemology had.

Yet to me another parallel between the theories of worldview in Dilthey and Jaspers seems to be even more important. For both philosophers, it was obvious that several worldviews are possible, and they declared none as being the only correct one. In this respect, both of them taught tolerance. One could even say that Dilthey was more tolerant than his own philosophy would have allowed for. For he had shown that one cannot do justice to the humanities with the methods of the natural sciences, since these disciplines, unlike the natural sciences, also always require hermeneutics and criticism. In this respect, he had shown naturalism, which was based on the research of the natural sciences, to be insufficient. However, if one considers the fact that the advocates of naturalism nevertheless continued their own course, his thesis of the insolubility of the dispute was correct. In his book Jaspers declared right at the beginning that one should not look for the right worldview. If one has the impression that he wanted to list and order

¹⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Das geschichtliche Bewußtsein und die Weltanschauungen," in *Gesammelte Schriften, Volume VIII*, Stuttgart, DE: B. G. Teubner 1962, pp. 1-71, here p. 69.

all philosophies in the same way only distantly, he emphasizes their meaning for the human being. He takes up Kant, he admires Hegel, but even more so Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and he has a criterion of judgment for evaluating them: Jaspers distinguishes the "genuine worldviews" from the "spurious ones" (*PW* 37-9). The former ones are completely fused with human life, they are even "the factual existence of the soul", yet the latter inauthentic ones have only been accepted merely externally or half-heartedly. Guided by his question about the actual and authentic humanity (*eigentliches Menschsein*), Jaspers does not at all want to look at the worldviews at all in a distanced and objective way like Dilthey does it. But in the end, as with Dilthey, each individual must decide alone, which is the real one; no worldview can exclusively be justified by means of arguments.

Neither one of the two philosophers investigated how a society must be organized so that people with very different worldviews can live together peacefully, and to what extent forms of government such as monarchy or democracy already presuppose or require the acceptance of certain worldviews. However, it was precisely the socio-political function of worldviews that made them important and made them, thus, become essential for the development of real history. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, while historical materialism called itself a "worldview" and attracted considerably sized groups of people, nationalism also began to appear as a new "German worldview" that promised to reconcile everyone. Later on—having become state ideologies—they both attached great importance to their scientific basis and aimed to end the philosophical controversy in their respective domains. Numerous historical references concerning this matter have been published. For example, in his introduction to the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of Jaspers' book Oliver Immel has shown with a number of titles that authors from the circles of nationalism and racism used the concept of worldview for their thinking (*PW* xii-xiv).

Already Dilthey excluded the political sphere completely from his philosophizing, and that is astonishing. One sometimes gets the impression that the philosophical interpretations of life are a matter only of one's own life based on individual experience. He quotes Goethe, who had said that in the course of one's life, one's worldview usually changes as well, and Dilthey explains in his treatise on worldviews from 1911 that at the basis of culture—namely in economy,

in social coexistence, in law and the state—there is a division of labor, and that each craft pursues its limited task. In contrast, religion, poetry, and metaphysics are parts of the sphere of freedom in which there are no ties to external purposes and no restrictions (*TWM* 262-3). This sharp separation of culture from its underlying foundation I do not find to be convincing, for it is not consistent with his thesis that worldviews permeate all spheres of life, nor with his earlier works on intellectual history. In these he had expressly emphasized and convincingly explained that a "shaping of life and the world" is connected to the worldviews.¹⁵

In a literary fragment from the estate, Dilthey explains the different attitudes through a fictitious conversation between a friend (Paul Yorck von Wartenburg), a clergyman, a neurologist, a painter, and himself. This text ends with the insight into the relativity of all worldviews (*MSW* 227-35). Whoever is looking the world in the face, as it were, discovers traits that do not fit together. It is experiences that are gained in different professions that lead to quite different perspectives on life as a whole. This at least indicates a way of transition to collective convictions. Yet these are just as evident in the sphere of politics as in the one of religion.

Since the new national states of Europe in the nineteenth century also received constitutions and parliaments, political associations and parties were also formed in the various social strata. They all had presuppositions that can certainly be called worldviews, for one saw in each case the world and one's own task in it with different eyes depending on whether one looked at it as a devout Catholic, as a liberalist or as a socialist. Dilthey witnessed this new development and the division of the politicized public into parties, as well as the conflict of the largely secular state with the Catholic Church in the so-called *Kulturkampf* (1870-1879) and Bismarck's attempt to limit the spread of socialism through restrictive legislation in this regard (1878-1890). In the Berlin anti-Semitism controversy over new rights for Jews (1879-1881), it became clear once again that in the nineteenth century the new national feeling could take on the character of a secular religion.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Das natürliche System der Geisteswissenschaften im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen: Seit Renaissance und Reformation, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume II*, Leipzig and Berlin, DE: Verlag B. G. Teubner 1921, pp. 90-245, here pp. 243-5.

In his preparatory work for his treatise on the typology of worldviews, Dilthey had noted some thoughts on social policy. The "ideal of a socio-political order" was sought by some parties through strict regulations and an order as rational as possible, while others strove to realize this ideal through a free development of all forces involved. When the social system runs into difficulties and insoluble conflicts, one changes from one order to the other. Examples of this, he elaborates, were the transition from the feudal system to absolutism which provoked the liberalism and then the new turn to social democracy (MSW254). A modern statesman does not consider any of the theories to be the true one, but chooses the one that is suitable for the situation at hand. Dilthey did not include such thoughts in his publication, and this is really strange, as change and the shaping of forms of government cannot be traced back to the will of individual persons, and the political convictions and activities of citizens are entirely not taken into consideration. One can only guess as to why Dilthey avoided the broad political movements in the society of his time: On the one hand, he was not a political thinker, but he was centrally focused on the philosophical justification of the sciences. On the other hand, he may have seen those three types of worldviews as being quite effective in the background of political convictions, but he did not want to elaborate on that, so that his thoughts would not get into the hard, open party dispute. After all, all parties could feel misunderstood by his stance. To be sure, above all else kept him his skepticism from taking a political stand. His aforementioned fragment on worldviews ends with the contradictions that life presents us with:

In us [there is a] need for a just order of things, and in society [we see] the victory of the ruthlessly strong. We praise sacrifice and devotion, and a world in which they ruled would give evil boundless scope. In us [there is a] sense of freedom, viewed from the outside, all [is] necessity. [MSW 235]

Dilthey lived and thought since 1871 in the German Empire, in a state in which there were hard confrontations, but which on the whole did not waver on either side. Jaspers' book, however, was written during World War I and appeared when the war was lost; that empire no longer existed and chaotic conditions prevailed. During the revolutionary period of 1918-1919, it was still undecided whether, after the end of the monarchy, the German Reich would turn into a *Räterepublik*, that is, a Soviet republic, a parliamentary

democracy, or an authoritarian military dictatorship. The new democratic constitution could not be adopted in Berlin due to the violent confrontations, so it had to be adopted in Weimar. It came into force in August 1919. As late as January, the political left had tried to prevent it with the Spartacus Uprising, and as early as March 1920, right-wing military forces wanted to overthrow it again with the so-called *Kapp-Putsch*. In Dilthey's time, the parties fought each other with words and arguments in publications and public speeches. At the time of the publication of Jaspers' book, the parties were fighting each other in the streets through the use of weapons.

Jaspers wrote his work with regard to existential decisions and already saw the freedom of man provided by the possibility of different worldviews. He also wisely wrote that time and milieu limit the choice for each individual, he even suggests that one does not decide for a certain type at all, but gets into it (PW 31, 37-8). In the section "The Individual and the Comprehensive," Jaspers briefly mentions that the individual can behave differently toward the state (PW370), yet one does not learn how that relationship is depicted in the competing political theories. Many of his contemporaries had decided to fight for the fatherland, for the monarchy, for religion, for the proletariat and social justice, or for democracy and they had even risked their own lives by doing so. Jaspers apparently did not recognize their different views of a meaningful social order as genuine worldviews.

Neither Dilthey nor Jaspers betray any interest in the political processes of their time, nor did they point out the practical consequence of their findings, namely that the possibility of the co-existence of many different worldviews must be granted by the social order and no authority may abolish this freedom. If one pays attention to the consequences of their thinking for living together, one recognizes in Dilthey's basic question about the possibility of settling disputes not only a theoretical, but above all a social and institutional problem. One then realizes, for example, that not all worldviews want to tolerate such pluralism and that hardly all of them can be realized simultaneously in one single society. Such problems have been avoided by Dilthey and Jaspers. They represent a type of scholar who separates politics and philosophy for good reasons, but who neglects the fact that the freedom of thinking, research, and communication presupposes nevertheless the order of a certain kind of society. Ernst Cassirer, whose

philosophy of culture lacks a social philosophy and a conception of the state, and Karl Mannheim, whose theory of ideologies underestimated their current dangers, behaved similarly as Jaspers with regard to the political situation of their time. They had to emigrate after 1933, while Jaspers was banned from publishing and was threatened with deportation.

Conclusion

For Dilthey and Jaspers worldviews are not sciences. Dilthey, however, in order to overcome conflict among them, Dilthey defends a non-metaphysical philosophy, as Voltaire, Hume, and Kant already had advocated it before him. In contrast to Dilthey, Jaspers emphasizes the great importance of worldviews merely for human beings regarding their guidance that the sciences cannot offer. Thus, Dilthey's goal of creating peace and understanding in philosophical thought seems to be abandoned by Jaspers as it cannot be realized. Nevertheless, Jaspers also promotes the recognition of the multiplicity of possible perspectives.

Their own "philosophy of philosophy" they did not call worldview, but philosophy of life and psychology. Their thinking claims comprehensibility and agreement. Dilthey sees in it a way to avoid the worldviews, while Jaspers tries to understand them with the aim of actualizing being human. Since Jaspers starts from a very broad concept of philosophical worldview, and since their philosophies focus on very specific statements about the contradictions of human existence, one can hardly avoid calling their respective thinking a view of life and world. Those who want to avoid all worldviews in their philosophy today, limit themselves mostly to logic, language analysis, and philosophy of science, but do not speak about human life.

Both authors kept their distance from politics and political parties, although in and through these institutions some worldviews gained global power and determined the thinking and acting in societies. Their justification for this reticence can be found in their assumption that worldviews are a matter for the individual and only suitable for conducting private life. However, this premise is a highly problematic one, since certain worldviews are shared by large segments of the population and since the relevant choices of outlook—provided that they are chosen explicitly and consciously at all—always occur in particular sociocultural contexts. Additionally, in

much of his work, Dilthey emphasized that one can only approximate understanding of any given person in the context of one's community.

Hence, their thinking must be placed in a historical context, and in doing so one cannot avoid referring to the conflict of the political parties at that time. These parties tried to replace the former religion with worldviews as new means of cohesion in society. Dilthey and Jaspers most likely consciously avoided the political party struggle in order not to be drawn into it and subsequently potentially lose their freedom of reflection. This has a certain actuality. For even today some directions of philosophy try to argue only scientifically, situating themselves as far as away as possible from the worldviews, and the natural sciences are being chosen as a model for this. However, Dilthey and Jaspers stood already *nolens volens* in the middle of this conflict. For they presupposed quite naturally a society which grants the freedom of thinking and publishing. This freedom had often been very restricted in the past—for instance, by the aforementioned socialist laws—and it was endangered afresh at the time of Jaspers' book. After all, it was not certain what direction the state would take after 1918. The German National Socialist state later put shackles on Jaspers. This fact refutes the belief that worldviews in philosophy, religion, and art are independent of the basis of culture, as Dilthey wrote, but rather, on the contrary, their freedom depends on state and law.

In 1919, their freedom was guaranteed by the Weimar Constitution. It explicitly allowed the existence not only of different religions, but it also protected associations that cultivated worldviews.¹⁶ In a way, Dilthey and Jaspers helped to prepare this legally guaranteed freedom through their philosophy, by stating that none of them is irrefutable and therefore none of them can be made binding. However, against this one could also say that their philosophy still left the institutional safeguarding of freedom completely out of consideration and thus contributed nothing to the stabilization and survival of the Weimar Constitution. Yet this would have been needful, for strong political groups strictly rejected a state guarantee of freedom of worldview and wanted to assert only their own point of view in an absolutist

¹⁶ Constitution of the German Reich, 1919, Article 137 (7), <http://www.verfassungen.de/de19-33/verf19-i.htm> and <http://www.documentarchiv.de/wr/wrv.html>.

manner. This 1919 constitution did not yet contain any provision as to how to deal with its enemies.¹⁷ This means that it had to be accepted and defended by the citizens.

¹⁷ Taking note of these historical events, today's German Basic Law contains a defensive measure in Article 18: Anyone who uses the freedom to overthrow or undermine the existing constitution can be deprived of basic rights. The application of this article is occasionally called for, but is avoided as much as possible.

All philosophies and sciences presuppose a society which grants and guarantees them freedom. A legal guarantee, however, cannot be formulated under the accepted presupposition of determinism by nature, for it can only be given via the general conviction of the principal possibility of free decisions. Since this conviction cannot be demonstrated scientifically, it can be called a worldview too, assuming Jaspers' broad concept. According to this, complete freedom of worldviews is not an ideal, but a self-deception or an illusion.