Appendix III
Karl Löwith's Impressions of Husserl and Heidegger

Fiala, "the hero of this story," is obviously Löwith himself, who as an exile managed to publish several articles in Germany in the Nazi thirties under the pseudonym of Hugo Fiala. "Fiala" is an acronym of *Fi*n*al*m*a*rina, the fishing village on the Italian Riviera where the 19-year-old Löwith spent an especially formative year (1916–1917) of his life in a prisoner-of-war fortress recuperating from his near-fatal battle wounds.[1] There "Fiala" had three ground-laying experiences from which he developed, "in accord with his philosophical nature," three corresponding insights: that it is harder to live than to die "a hero's death"; that it is easier to live in the South than in the North; that the radical collapse of all the customary "arrangements" of bourgeois existence can be liberating and fruitful.

An unpublished story by Karl Löwith called "Fiala: The Story of a Temptation" ("Fiala: Die Geschichte einer Versuchung") provides an advanced student's perspective on Heidegger early in his career. The Karl Löwith Archive at the German Literature Archive in Marbach catalogues this 106-page typescript as an "unpublished autobiographical story." The facing page dates it as "Fall 1926, Marburg," but the contents indicate that the composition of this text extends into 1927. Access to the eight-page excerpt (16–22a) translated here, granted by Dr. Klaus Stichweh, and permission to translate it for publication, granted by Adelheid Krautter, are gratefully acknowledged. The pages on Heidegger (Professor Ansorge) are crossed out in the typescript and marked with a note in Löwith's hand: "See now 1940, my *second* life story!" This "second life story" is now published as Karl Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933. Ein Bericht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986); English translation: *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*, trans. Elizabeth King (London: Athlone, 1994; Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994). The reader may therefore want to compare Löwith's temporal shift in view of Husserl and Heidegger from the perspective of the Nazi 1930s with the account of 1927 presented here.

1. See Karl Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutshland vor und nach 1933. Ein Bericht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 4–7; English translation: *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*, trans. Elizabeth King (London: Athlone/Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 4–7.

The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy IX (2009): 420–26
ISSN 1533-7472 • ISBN 978-0-9701679-9-6

The recurring "temptation" of this life story from the early teens to age 30, pseudonymously ("objectively") written after the fashion of a philosophical Bildungsroman, is suicide, Löwith's personal starting point for philosophizing: "Every human Dasein is struck by the most thoughtworthy of paradoxes: To-be-here without already in fact wanting to be, on the basis of this be-ing to negate itself in thought and to be able to complete this thought by actual negation. Human life is therefore at the peak of its existence in *two* interrelated decisive moments: in the negative resolution toward suicide and in the positive resoluteness to be-here." On the basis of this central dialectical experience, Löwith would repeatedly conduct a corrective polemic against Heidegger's sense of resoluteness as forerunning one's own death by shifting the priority to the social dimension in a philosophy of Dasein. "The necessary condition of every actual suicide is the radical isolation of human existence, a theory of philosophical solipsism that has become real." Its philosophy of nature dialectically highlights on the one hand bare mountains and the raw sea—"Where can one more radically philosophize than on the rim of Vesuvius, at the limits of life, in the consciousness of the freedom of dying and of living?"—and on the other the joys of visceral life beginning with sexuality and sociality. "The individual's willingness to live is believable only by the readiness to continue its species. Fiala's Hamlet question, 'to be or not to be,' was silenced."

It is from this existential context of the fanciful development of a personal philosophy of life that a student's caricatures of his teachers, Husserl (Privy Councillor Endlich) and Heidegger (Professor Ansorge), are drawn. Though some of the lines of this 1927 account will be repeated in the 1940 recounting, the context will have shifted radically by way of the world-historical events that took place in Germany in 1933, and the perspective now becomes that of a native German exiled from his homeland as well as from his beloved second land, Italy, simply because he was Jewish.

An Excerpt from "Fiala: The Story of a Temptation"

Two Discoverers of the Truth

A few months after this postwar interlude in Munich, so rich in experiences,[2] the wayward son left his parental home for the second time in order to be able to study in complete independence in a university city in the middle of Germany, and to establish new bonds of friendship. The university that Fiala chose was nothing special viewed from the outside. It was built of squares of red sandstone that seemed to be put together like a box of bricks anchored to the ground. Its style of construction was as indefinable as the Protestant church across from it. But both

2. Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland*, 13–20/14–20.

buildings had put some even more essential analogies on display. Just as the house of the God of liberal Protestantism invited its grown children with the biblical line, cast in bronze, "Thy Word is the Truth," so did the "alma mater," purportedly profane but verbally still true to the Bible, proclaim to its unfaithful children in golden letters, "The Truth Shall Make You Free." In addition, the entrance to this stone-brick box of truth was flanked by the patriarchs of "art and science," the ponderous statues of a Homer and an Aristotle.

The person in charge of the key to the truth was in the first place a Privy Councillor Endlich. A story then in circulation about him serves to define his character: As Privy Councillor Endlich went to visit a colleague in another city, he was met at the door by the wife. Upon reading the card extended to her, the professor's wife, who had often heard her husband speak of Endlich's *Logic*, was startled to the core and retorted, "Ach, but is that possible, are you *really* Herr Privy Councillor Professor Endlich? I always thought you were a book!" This remark was so profound that it went beyond the comprehension of those involved. Only the students who listened to his lectures knew that the Privy Councillor was in fact nothing more than his own extant book. This man, who lived so much in his ideas that it sometimes seemed as if his ideas were actually something real, promulgated the pure and final "truth" according to the latest method, the one he had discovered. Fiala could not believe his ears when he first came into the large and crowded lecture hall and heard from the mouth of this extraordinary being, who was only about 55 years old although he had long outlived himself, the following prophetic as much as professorial words of introduction: "Gentlemen and Ladies, the true philosophy is still in its beginnings, but I can now promise you that the exact analysis of the pure consciousness of time will in about twenty years have progressed to such an extent that we ourselves shall have solved a difficult problem such as that of immortality." Several weeks later, as Fiala witnessed a demonstration at the psychiatric clinic and observed a mentally ill patient who was unshakeably convinced that he had solved the problem of the infinite prolongation of life by the invention of a "life machine," Fiala automatically expected that the demonstration would include the philosopher for whose sake he had come to F[reiburg] to study. The only difference between the professor and the psychotic seemed to him to be that the former ran around freely to confuse healthy minds with his crazy ideas and the latter did not. Nevertheless, Fiala made an effort to enter into the mysteries of the "logical experiences" of his mentor.

In the course of this not only sincere but even successful, albeit unfruitful effort, he became acquainted with a somewhat younger student who like him had fled from his parental home to a student's freedom and now was granting a hearing, likewise with German perseverance and thoroughness, to the "truth" for which his parents had given him the necessary "freedom." In accord with the special significance that even slight differences in age get in the years of development

toward maturity, Fiala, about two years older, was at first definitely the provider and guide in this mortal pact of friendship. It became his misfortune that the significance of the difference in age lessened noticeably as the younger of the two friends developed, so that the vital impetus of this relationship lost more and more of its drive and after several years totally slackened due to its lack of inner tension. Seven years later, when Fiala again met his friend, now married and finished with his habilitation, in Florence on a vacation trip, he had become a total stranger. To be sure, his face still had the charm of the adolescent, but it seemed to Fiala that the musical nature of his being had become totally absorbed by the fervor of work in "musical science."[3] In his heart, Fiala was at once enraged and depressed by the bourgeois lack of expectation with which this young and ever so German married couple traveled through Italy: not for the "pleasure," as the two tended to put it, but in order to "work" in the libraries—without a clue of how unfruitful an intellectual work that affords no pleasure really is and how much work the actual enjoyment of Italy requires. Fiala's unexpressed thought was that a "science" had to be in a sorry state when it had the effect of bringing a promising young life with a universal bent in just a few years to the point where movies and sleep become the "recovery" from the corresponding "work" of a scientific business trip. Only with reluctance did Fiala admit to himself that his disappointment was in fact the consequence of an undue expectation.

A greater power by far than this friend's came into play in Fiala's development through the intervention of another man, who under the rubric of the most varied titles for his lecture courses presented his factical insight into life with scholastic breadth and acumen. He knew how to attract students by first repelling them and then referring them to himself, which would result in their *de facto* attachment to him to such a degree that they would become his adherents. Under the guise of renouncing disciples and a "school," he inbred his Hegelians in his own image like a little Hegel. Outside of his public lecture courses he lived according to the philosophical ground principle "Si tacuisses philosophus mansisses," i.e., he would remain a philosopher by maintaining his silence, as only a Jesuit knows how to remain silent and listen. Just as he was skillful in keeping silent, he knew how to work. From early until late he sat at his writing desk with pen in hand and—thought—with either red or blue ink according to the context. But in oral conversation he was as helpless as a speaker at an open grave whose notes had been blown away at the decisive moment.

---

3. "Heinrich Besseler habilitated in musical theory at Freiburg and became professor in Heidelberg" (Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland*, 59/62; see also 102/107, plus two photos of Besseler). The archival record shows that Heinrich Besseler (1900–1969) was at first a philosophy and mathematics major who took part in both Husserl's and Heidegger's seminars in 1919–1922, as well as "entertaining" the student-organized Phenomenological Society with "musical afternoons" to which Heidegger was regularly invited.

The external world of this thinker did not extend beyond his writing desk to his writing chair and from there to the lecture hall. His internal world was likewise held within the limits of his own highest Dasein, which he called "existence." His writing desk was always completely covered with countless slips and scraps of notes, the bricks of a master builder. From their artful juxtaposition in the course of ten years filled with work, he built a system which in consistency, complexity, incomprehensibility, acumen, and fundamental dilapidation, but not in richness, stands comparison with the last system of German idealism.

As typical and modern as the writing desk may have looked, so untypical and unmodern in appearance was its correlate, the writing thinker. A black-and-red woven wool jacket of the kind generally worn only by peasants, but not by professors, shielded the body of this rigorous thinker from the cold. His legs were always elaborately wrapped in a blanket and feet stuffed into a foot-muff, whose motley composition out of leftover scraps suggested less its aesthetic sense than the superlative frugality of the housewife who was at the same time the "woman of the house." She had also provided a colorful scarf for the neck of her thinking man, not out of tender loving care but rather out of congenital proficiency, with a sober regard for the requirements of a thinking household. Among the other dispensers of heat were to be found a glowing oven, steaming tea, and the smell of an old-fashioned tobacco pipe. This manifold supply of heat was needed to endure the "frigid air of the philosophical concept" (a favorite expression of the thinker).[4]

How Professor Ansorge's ["the thinker's": 1940 change] face looked up close was at first really impossible to say, and for a very simple reason: the thinker could not actually *look at* anyone for any length of time, or even into the distance with head held high, the pose that photographers like to have.[5] The natural expression of his face included a working forehead, veiled face, and lowered eyes, which now and then would take stock of the situation with a short and swift glance. If someone temporarily forced him into a direct look by speaking to him, then this extremely unharmonious face, jagging angularly in all its features, would become somewhat reserved, wily, shifting, and downright hypocritical. Its expression was through and through self-conscious, since candor and directness were for it in every respect unnatural. What was natural for it was the expression of cautious mistrust, at times full of peasant cunning [*bauernschlauen*].

---

4. The 1926 Pentecost talk, "On the Essence of Truth" (chapter 19) in fact invokes two alternating moods essential to the philosophical quest for "truth," perhaps in part as a result of Löwith's "southern" influence, as well as other interchanges with his students at the time: "The frigid air of cold deliberation and contemplation, the hardness and necessity of the concept are one thing. The sunny gaiety of play and dance, the free approximations and tentative moves of finding and giving oneself are another. Both are our Dasein."

5. With this paragraph begin the lines that are in part taken up and woven into the "second life story" of 1940, in the section entitled "Heidegger's Personality"; see Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland*, 43–45/45–47.

This face assumed its most positive expression when the thinker looked to the ground or, glancing at his manuscript, spoke with composure and concentration as he thought to himself. In spite of his extraordinarily short stature, his effect at the podium was quite normal, due to his austere and resilient bearing and the well-disposed proportions of his philosophically insignificant corporeality. His lecture was totally devoid of gesture and bombast. The one rhetorical device at his disposal, which he certainly did not forego, was an artful soberness and thesis-like rigor in the construction of his ideas. His bronze-colored countenance seemed full of expression from the manifest effort of mental concentration and through its plain but interesting asymmetries. The penetrating look of his dark eyes was directed only in passing at his listeners. It was the forehead, which was traversed and arched by a highly prominent vein, that laid claim to total animation. One *saw* it literally working of its own accord, without regard for the audience, which was roused to listen to the lecture more than solicited to think with it. The tangled black hair and an old-fashioned, stiff white collar gave the whole of this face an impressive frame, while the whole man stood at his podium in conscious isolation, as he turned page after page of his manuscript with a slightly conceited hand gesture that betrayed the proud and modest consciousness of a man who knows his way about his subject matter and has nothing to worry about.

The pinnacle of his philosophical system was the problem of death. By death, of course, this thinker did not mean ordinary actual death, which he labelled a mere "passing away," but the philosophical possibility of "forerunning" one's death. This "forerunning" naturally did not mean an actual run, like the "Double time!" of a military unit, but a thoughtful anticipation [*Vorausnehmen*] of death. By means of this imaginary artifice, this remarkable thinker sought to prevent his own highest Dasein from ever being overtaken. In this system, there was no room for suicide and the anxiety of living, for suicide would destroy this extremely interesting philosophical possibility by means of a brutal, naked reality. In opposition to this, Fiala was convinced that the anxiety of living is a much more fundamental fact than the anxiety of death, tainted as this is by Christianity. Death's true face seemed to him to be totally distorted in the system of this thinker, since it left out every aspect of peace. Lack of peace was also the basic trait of this inwardly tense and fanatical thinker, whose truths were as constrained as their peaceless proclaimer.

Captivated by the energetic earnestness of this thinker so in tune with the times, Fiala spent four long years of his study in the fruitless effort of establishing a human relationship with this man, whose entire life was spent in avoiding personal obligations. Ansorge's knowledge reached just as far as the mistrust from which it originated. And the only fruit of this mistrust was critique, of which he was an unsurpassed master. Critique and mistrust of everything and everyone were the basic forces of his essential being, which was soft at its core. The reason why one could be misled by his personality lay in the ambiguous discord pervading his life

and thought, which only seemed clear and univocal from the outside. By birth a simple sacristan's son, through his profession Ansorge became the lofty representative of a "scholarly consciousness"; refined in his thought, he remained primitive in his life; stringent in the world of the spirit, he was lax in the world of the senses; reticent toward others, he was thereby curious like few others; radical in ultimate matters and bent on compromise in everything penultimate; critical in his particular field of expertise [*Fach*], he remained uncritical outside of it; a Jesuit by education, he became a Protestant in rebellion; a Scholastic dogmatist by schooling and an existentiell pragmatist from experience; a theologian by tradition and an atheist as scientific scholar; a renegade of his tradition in the guise of being its conservative historian; existential like Kierkegaard with the will toward philosophical system of a Hegel; as dialectical in his method as he was primitive in the content of his philosophy, making thesis-like claims out of the spirit of negation—asserting himself without believing in himself: such was the ambiguous discord that this man's influence created among his students, who wanted to learn not just "sharp thinking" from philosophy, but also the true life.