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Antimodernism in Nineteenth-Century Basle

Franz Overbeck's Antitheology and J.J. Bachofen's Antiphilology

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In my view, liberal theology is a *contradictio in adjecto*. . . . A proponent of culture, ready to adapt itself to the ideas of bourgeois society, it degrades the religious to a function of the human . . . an ethical progressiveness.—Thomas Mann, *Dr. Faustus*, XI.

This essay has grown out of a larger study of culture and society in nineteenth-century Basle on which I am collaborating with Carl Schorske. The projected book, provisionally entitled *The Prophets of Basle*, will consist of an historical account of one of the last city-states in Europe toward the end of its history as an autonomous polity, followed by chapters on four or five of the major figures associated with it in these years: Bachofen, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Overbeck, and possibly the painter Böcklin. The central focus of the study is the emergence, in the work of these figures, of a radical—politically equivocal—critique of nineteenth-century liberalism, optimism and confidence in science, and of a new “postmodern” consciousness and view of the world. We are also interested in investigating what it may have been about a small, economically enterprising but socially conservative and politically powerless community, wedged between three nations at one of the great crossroads of European commerce and culture, yet at the margins of all of them, that made it the home or haven of some of the most original and challenging thinkers of the nineteenth century and a hatchery of new and disturbing ideas.

There were other centers like Basle. In an 800-page diatribe against the peripheral “Germanic neutrals” who had persistently sought, in his view, to obstruct Germany’s development into a powerful nation state, the young Nazi historian Christoph Steding identified Norway, Denmark, the free Hanseatic cities, the Rhineland, and above all the two great trading civilizations at the head and the mouth of the Rhine—Switzerland and the Netherlands—as traditional focuses of a questioning and equivocating, ironical, and negative culture favorable to endless delaying tactics and subversive of the conviction and the decisiveness needed for the realization of the new Germany. Exaggerated and paranoid as it is, there may be a grain of truth in this thesis. Danzig, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Frankfurt did represent traditions incompatible with the hegemonic ambitions of the new Reich. Nevertheless, Steding himself awarded “die stolze Basilea” (the haughty old city of Basle) a privi-

leged place at the center of this oppositional network. It represented “in an unusually symbolic way,” he claimed, the outlook of an earlier Europe and an outdated German Empire. Above all, its historical experience as a border city had “developed in it the ability to slither and wriggle around in the cracks between particular powers to such a degree of virtuosity that today every intellectual or artistic production that comes out of Basle is marked by neutrality” (Christoph Steding, *Das Reich und die Krankheit der europäischen Kultur*, 3rd ed. [Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1942], pp. 42–43, 65, 203, *et passim*).

My aim in this paper is modest: to present one of the least known and most enigmatic of our Basle “prophets” to a scholarly audience. There is not a single translation into English of anything by Franz Overbeck, though his name is familiar to all Nietzsche scholars as that of the man who was brought to Basle from Germany as professor of theology the year after Nietzsche was brought to fill the chair of philology, who took rooms in the same house as Nietzsche—the “*Baumannhöhle*,” as the two friends called it after the name of their landlady and with a playful allusion to a famous scene in Goethe’s *Faust*—and ate his meals with him, became his intimate friend, went to Turin and brought him back after the onset of his madness, and defended his memory, often in bitter conflict with Nietzsche’s sister, Frau Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, to the end of his own life. What I shall be most concerned with here is Overbeck’s criticism of modernism, but in order to see what differences, if any, there might be between the antimodernism of a newcomer to Basle—one who had found asylum there and never thought of leaving it, but who equally never fully belonged to it—and that of a wealthy and prominent member of one of the city’s elite families. I shall also outline a rapid comparison of Overbeck’s criticism of modernism with that of J.J. Bachofen, the Basle classical scholar and pioneer anthropologist.

Bachofen and Overbeck were personally acquainted. Despite rapid expansion in the decades after 1840, Basle was still a fairly small city of about 60,000 inhabitants in the 1870s. Above all, Basle “society” was well defined and compact, and professors at the university were expected to take their place in it. That was one of the characteristics of the old humanist city-republic. Because of it, Wilamowitz, when he was consulted on an appointment in Latin, felt he could not recommend the Italian Giorgio Pasquale, whom he had had as a student for a semester and considered—rightly as it turned out—one of the most gifted of the younger generation of classical philologists. “Pasquale,” he wrote, “is simply unthinkable in an ancient center of distinguished social culture like Basle” (W. Calder and C. Hoffmann, “Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff on the Basel Greek Chair,” *Museum Helveticum*, 43 [1986], p. 259).

The relations of Bachofen and Overbeck appear, nevertheless, to have remained formal. There is no evidence of anything corresponding to the friend-

ship that was quickly established between Nietzsche and the Bachofens and that lasted until Nietzsche's hostility to Christianity became too outspoken for Bachofen to tolerate. Nietzsche was a frequent guest at the Bachofens' house in the early years of his sojourn in Basle (Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: eine Freundschaft* [Jena: 1908], vol. 2, p. 381). It is not clear that Overbeck ever enjoyed the same favor. A letter from Bachofen to Overbeck, as rector of the University of Basle, requesting assistance from one of the university's benefit funds for the widow of his old teacher Gerlach, has a formal ring, as though the two men rarely encountered each other socially (Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* [hereafter GW], vol. 10, p. 474, letter of November 16, 1876).

Bachofen must have appeared to Overbeck as a distinguished private scholar from one of the wealthiest local families, an older man who had long since resigned his professorship of law at the university (his appointment having provoked a campaign in the radical press against the elite's domination of the city's educational institutions) but who still played an influential role in university politics as a former member of the *Curatel* or Board of Regents and a rich benefactor. Bachofen on his side may well have seen in Overbeck primarily a young professional brought in from Germany, reportedly in response to pressure from liberal groups with which Bachofen notoriously had no sympathy.

Bachofen was deeply rooted in Basle society. The Bachofen firm was one of the most successful of the ribbon manufacturing businesses that at that time formed the mainstay of the Basle economy. The family was connected by marriage with many of the other prominent families in the ruling elite—Bachofen's mother was a Merian, his wife a Burckhardt—and it owned some of the finest properties in the city and the surrounding countryside, among them the imposing baroque Weisses Haus overlooking the Rhine and several handsome houses in and around the Münsterplatz and the Rittergasse. Bachofen himself had been strongly marked by his neohumanist, Humboldtian education at the local Gymnasium and at the Pädagogium (a special preuniversity institution of which the Basle elite was particularly proud), which later study at Berlin under Ranke, Boeckh and Savigny reinforced, and there is evidence that in his youth he had been singled out by influential members of the previous generation (men such as Andreas Heusler, the liberal-conservative founder of the *Basler Zeitung*) as a future political leader.

As he grew older, Bachofen became increasingly isolated from Basle society, but his isolation was always only relative. Like Burckhardt, he often liked to mock his fellow-citizens and to make fun of the pettiness of life at Basle (see my essay "Basle, Bachofen, and the Critique of Modernity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 [1984], pp. 136–85). No doubt the much-travelled and well-read classical scholar, who spent his life with the gods and heroes of ancient Greece and prehistoric Italy, felt rather superior to the humdrum, bourgeois way of life of the

local citizenry; he himself claimed he never felt quite at home in the “boring factory town” (*langweilige Fabrikstadt*) Basle had increasingly become in his own lifetime. Embittered by the turn of political affairs in Europe generally and in his native city in particular, where the rule of the merchant elite, which had held on to power longer than the leadership of any other Swiss city, was finally being successfully challenged, appalled by the social and political consequences of the new industrial order that his fellow citizens seemed resolutely if cautiously set to embrace, but unable to suggest any practical alternative, he had gradually withdrawn into a kind of inner exile in his own city. By the time of his death in 1887, he was virtually unknown to the majority of his fellow citizens. Yet his withdrawal was not complete. The millionaire hermit occupied a prominent house in the very heart of Basle, on the Münsterplatz—number 2, Place de la Cathédrale, as he liked to write in his correspondence—and he presumably continued to live off the holdings and profits of the Bachofen firm, the direction of which he had been happy to leave to his younger brothers Carl and Wilhelm after their father’s retirement. There was no question where he belonged, how he should be defined or that he was a Basler through and through. His entire attitude to the world was that of a man for whom—whatever his own personal difficulties—social life, the life of a community, constituted the highest reality.

With Overbeck, things were different. His grandfather, an employee with a Frankfurt merchant firm, had emigrated to England to try to improve his situation, and had even become a British subject, but had had to return to his native Frankfurt about ten years later, without having made his fortune. Within two years he again set out to try his luck, this time in St. Petersburg. Here one of his sons married the daughter of a local French Catholic family, and of this mixed marriage Overbeck was born in 1837. Overbeck’s father had a position in the so-called *Englisches Magazin* (which was in fact run by a Scotsman called Colquhoun) and the family moved in a cosmopolitan circle of English, French, and German residents of the Russian capital. Overbeck grew up in this milieu, speaking a variety of languages. In his memoirs he returns frequently to the language question. Apparently he saw it as emblematic of his situation in general. “I got to have a mother tongue unusually late,” he writes. “I first spoke Russian, presumably because I learned it from my nurse. Otherwise French was the language that was spoken in our house. To my grandmother, however, I had to speak in German. From the age of seven a private tutor was engaged to improve my German, and I also had lessons in English, which I had many occasions to use in my everyday life” (*Selbstbekenntnisse* [hereafter SB], ed. Eberhardt Vischer [Basle: Schwabe, 1941], pp. 84–85).

At the age of nine, in 1846, Overbeck was sent to France to spend two years as a boarder at the Collège de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, outside Paris. Here he achieved complete fluency in French, but forgot most of his German, English, and Russian (SB, p. 93). After his return to Russia (he was shipped back on the outbreak of the ’48 Revolution, but, characteristically, has almost nothing

to say about that event in his memoirs), it required frequent association with friends of his own age and more private lessons to bring back his German. In 1850 Overbeck, then thirteen years old, again left “the land of my birth, this time forever,” and went with his mother to live in Dresden. His father retired and followed a couple of years later. Only then was it clear to him, he relates, that German was to be the language he would use in his everyday life. Even so, he remained fluent in French, his true mother tongue, which he continued to speak at home, and moderately competent in English. (His wife Ida, whom he married after settling in Basle, also spoke French well; she was the translator of Sainte-Beuve’s *Lundis*). Though Overbeck always identified himself as a German, he acknowledges in his memoirs that his family never succeeded in striking roots in Dresden, largely on account of his father’s modest financial circumstances (SB, p. 113). Uprooted, obscure, and only moderately comfortable, Overbeck’s family could not provide him with the contacts and recommendations that might have promoted his career. In that respect alone his circumstances were strikingly different from those of Bachofen and Burckhardt, both of whom could count on an extensive network of family and business connections in Switzerland and abroad.

As is well known, there was a considerable Basle diaspora in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Members of the city’s merchant and manufacturing families had settled in London, Leeds, Paris, Le Havre, Vienna, Brussels, Amsterdam, St. Petersburg, New York, Rio de Janeiro. By the early decades of the nineteenth century others were serving with the Basle Missionary Society in South Russia and India. Basle’s commercial fortunes depended to a considerable degree on the contacts and information provided by these expatriates. The men of the ruling class were themselves widely travelled, for it was customary for the sons of merchant families to spend a year or so abroad apprenticed to a firm with which their family did business. In this way Bachofen spent a year in France and England; his brother Wilhelm spent a similar period in New York in the 1840s. All the better-class Basle citizens—male and female—spoke French and German as well as the local Alemmanic dialect in which they communicated with each other; many were also fluent in English and Italian. But no Basler doubted the solidity of the ground under his feet. Even the celebrated explorer Lewis Burckhardt, who spent his best years in the Near East in the service of an English geographical society, living and behaving like an Arab, speaking Arabic and writing his reports in English—he died in Cairo and was buried as Sheikh Ibrahim in the Bab el Nasr cemetery just outside the Egyptian capital—even this unusual figure of the early nineteenth century, who was related to both Burckhardt and Bachofen, corresponded regularly with his family, kept up with the affairs of the little city-state, and frequently reaffirmed his intention of returning home one day to enjoy a peaceful existence in one of the handsome town or country houses that belonged to his family.

Overbeck, in contrast, despite an absolutely ordinary and unremarkable

bourgeois existence as a university professor, was in every other respect a man of everywhere and of nowhere, an outsider—even, in fact especially, in his professional life. As his successor in the chair of practical theology and church history at Basle observed, “by birth he was cosmopolitan and interconfessional. He was highly gifted, sharp-witted and immensely curious. But he had no experience of the day-to-day life of a German Evangelical family, no church affiliations and habits, no feeling for any homeland, community, or congregation. . . . His entire outlook was scholarly, theoretical, critical, and skeptical” (quoted by Hans Schindler, *Barth und Overbeck* [Gotha: Klotz, 1936; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974], p. 141). Overbeck himself explains that without any strong religious background in his family—only his German grandmother was a devout Lutheran—he drifted into theology, vaguely motivated by the desire to pursue a professional career and by diffuse feelings of humanitarianism. Among his fellow students in theology at Leipzig, he felt, he says, like a Hottentot (SB, p. 116; see also p. 118), and in later years the strange situation he found himself in—of being a theologian whose chief aim was to criticize theology and who was in all probability an atheist into the bargain—led to almost unbearable tension. “I did not teach what I believed, that is to say, what I wanted to, but what I considered appropriate, that is, what I took it to be my duty to teach” (SB, p. 140). No doubt that is why he came to find his “role as a teacher distasteful,” and retained a keen interest in his work only as a learner, not a teacher (SB, p. 159). As a human being, as a theologian, and as a teacher, he never felt “at home” and he lived out a thoroughly contradictory existence.

Overbeck had been called to Basle from Germany in response to pressure on the university authorities from the local liberally-inclined Reformverein, which wanted the biblical criticism of the New Testament and the associated field of church history to be represented by someone more in tune than the incumbent with the modern liberal and critical theology that had swept Germany (Letter of invitation to Basle, *Overbeckiana*, vol. 1 [the correspondence], ed. E. Staehelin and M. Gabathuler [Basle: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1962], p. 86). Local radical politicians like Carl Brenner welcomed him with the expectation that he would “carry the torch of free criticism into the dark paths of error taken by authoritarian belief and assert the rights of reason in the field of religion” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 89). But those who had counted on him to promote liberal theology at Basle must have felt bitterly disappointed, even betrayed, by his scathing attack on liberalism in *The Christianity of our Present-Day Theology* in 1873 (*Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* [hereafter CHT], 2nd ed., [Leipzig: 1903; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981]). As he was no more in sympathy with the entrenched Orthodox Calvinists or the powerful Basle Pietists, Overbeck quickly became a solitary, respected, but little understood figure in his adopted city.

In his book on Nietzsche and Overbeck the Swiss writer Carl Albrecht

Bernoulli, who had been Overbeck's student, observes that the influence of his friend Treitschke "saved Overbeck from the dangers of cosmopolitanism" (Bernoulli, vol. 1, p. 35). The letters from Overbeck to Treitschke at the time of the German-Danish and Austro-German wars testify to his support of Prussia at this time and to his enthusiasm for the cause of a unified German state under Prussian leadership rather than a confederation. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 Overbeck's German patriotism was still alive and well. The young theology professor, then newly arrived in Basle, immediately informed Treitschke that "we Germans here have set up an auxiliary committee that will today issue a call to all Germans in Switzerland to rally to the cause" (Bernoulli, p. 31 [letter of July 20, 1870]).

Overbeck later acknowledged that he was a "slow and late developer" (SB, p. 72). In politics especially, for which, as he himself wrote, he lacked the "holy furor" of his friend, he was long under Treitschke's influence (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 178). But for that very reason, he added, he could not in the long run stay true to Treitschke, though he loved him dearly. "It was not politics that brought us together, but a certain warmly felt human regard for each other of a quite general nature. That is also the reason for the fragility of our relationship. For Treitschke was a politician through and through, which I was almost not at all" (*Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie von Franz Overbeck* [hereafter CK], ed. C.A. Bernoulli (Basle: Schwabe, 1919), p. 191).

Bernoulli had to concede in the end that the cosmopolitanism, from which he first claimed that Treitschke had saved Overbeck, was in fact what saved Overbeck, for all his German national feeling, from the fanatical nationalism of Treitschke, the "furor teutonicus," as Overbeck himself put it, of his day. As early as 1866, at the time of the war against Austria, Overbeck had had to confess to an "invincible and bothersome feeling of political uneasiness" at seeing certain goals with which he was in complete sympathy "being pursued by Prussia in a manner that constantly ran counter to my convictions," so that he began to be concerned lest "as a result, these goals themselves might be endangered for a considerable time to come." To be sure, "nothing can be done except by force"—Overbeck was already then no idealist—"but if German national unity is to be more than a mere word, the Prussian statesman cannot be relieved of the duty of finding a way to moderate the violence of the political transformation of Germany." In the end he cannot altogether "suppress an anxious feeling that no one has quite measured the extent of the misfortune it would be if the issues of national unity and of freedom were to be treated as separate" (Bernoulli, vol. 1, pp. 17–18). In these reservations one can already hear the voice of the man who later declared that what united him to his own nineteenth century was not nationalism but "that which was most youthful in all its struggles," that is, its "striving for freedom and everything that it achieved for mankind through that striving" (CK, p. 293).

We know how Nietzsche reacted to the outpourings of patriotic fervor and the cultural chauvinism that the war with France elicited from the German academic and religious establishment. The liberal theologians who had been Overbeck's friends in his student days had joined enthusiastically in this chorus (see *Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, letters 42–49, 54). One of them, who had been appointed to a post in Bern at the same time that Overbeck went to Basle, wrote of the “irreparable loss of not being able to live in the great flood, the ocean of enthusiasm and of the deepest stirring of all the noblest human feelings that presently flow toward Germany” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 93). Other friends in Germany pitied Overbeck for having to experience “this great national event beyond the frontiers of Germany and among a non-German people” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 91). No wonder that from his outpost at Basle Overbeck became increasingly suspicious of the liberal theology that had identified itself with the new German state. One more moderate letter—from Georg Ebers, a fellow student from Overbeck's Jena years, who had become a highly regarded Egyptologist at Leipzig—indicates that he may not have shared the enthusiasm of most of his friends. Ebers, who was admittedly of Jewish origin, expressed a concern that, as we saw, Overbeck had already voiced to Treitschke. “Our new Empire is costing a great deal of young blood,” he wrote. “Germany will have to look to it that she does not lose the little bit of freedom she has in her new unity” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 95).

By 1873 relations with Treitschke were becoming strained. Treitschke observed that the grand avenue opened up by Overbeck's critique of Christianity in *The Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology* led not to a majestic palace but only to “a tiny hut,” that is, to “no positive result.” Nietzsche's friend Wagner likewise appreciated Overbeck's criticism of Christianity but deplored his apparent lack of interest in discovering a substitute (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 113). By judging every worldly form of religion as fundamentally un-Christian, incompatible with the original Christian message, Overbeck, according to Treitschke, had taken a far too narrow view of Christianity. Treitschke himself took the opposite view and admired what Overbeck most disliked: the political cunning of Christianity, its capacity to survive and adapt to new circumstances. In general, Treitschke objected, Overbeck and his friend Nietzsche had no understanding of the new Germany and no sympathy with it. How could they have, isolated as they were from the great stream of national life in the anachronistic old free-city of Basle? “You two sit in your sulking corner, and know nothing, absolutely nothing of what moves the nation.”¹

It was true that in Basle the old bourgeoisie did not find the face of the new Reich attractive. Soon relations between Treitschke and Overbeck came, if not to a breaking point, then to a kind of impasse. Overbeck always maintained that Treitschke had not the slightest tincture of Christianity; in fact he regarded him as his “teacher in Unchristianity,” as he put it (CK, pp. 190–91). When Treitschke began to draw nearer to the Church for political reasons—that is, as

Overbeck himself remarked, “for the sake of his own religion, patriotism”—he came perilously close, despite the realism and cynicism that motivated him, to what Overbeck found most insufferable: the “age-old, cunningly worldly wise” habit of compromise and accommodation, the unwillingness to choose between being an authentic Christian and being an authentically modern secular individual, which he considered especially characteristic of nineteenth-century “modernism” (see CK, p. 69). “I appreciate nothing more in the rise of our German Empire than its worldliness,” Overbeck explained later. “On the other hand, nothing would be more likely to extinguish the last spark of patriotism in me than the expectation that *for the sake of this Empire* one had to return to Christianity” (CK, p. 190).

Perhaps one could sum up by saying that, even at the time of his greatest enthusiasm for Prussia, Overbeck never made a religion of nationalism. As a Petersburg-born German, with a Russian-born French Catholic mother, living as a professor of theology in Protestant Basle, he might have tried to compensate for his experience of alienation and isolation by passionate devotion to the Empire. But he did not. On the contrary, he regarded isolation as the inevitable consequence of modern individualism and freedom, and he accepted it as the price that had to be paid.

When Overbeck came to Basle, he imagined, as most Germans who took up posts in Swiss universities did, that he would return to Germany as soon as a suitable position opened up. Teaching in Switzerland was only a provisional solution, a *pis aller*. “Conditions in Germany at the moment are so hopelessly unpromising for me,” he explained to Treitschke, “That it makes no sense to wait around” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 89). For that reason the call to Basle was an “unexpected stroke of fortune.” But even as he wrote his letter of acceptance, “I still permitted myself to hope that I would some day return to Germany” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, pp. 87–88). An old friend and colleague at Kiel, Adalbert Lipsius, wrote consolingly that “after all, the Swiss universities are branches of the German ones” and that “a return to Germany will be possible in the future” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 89). Another friend, a professor at Jena, wrote that he surely would not and should not settle down and become Swissified. “Basle will . . . always be only a provisional home for you” (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 94).

The provisional home proved to be as permanent a one as Overbeck ever found. Two years before he retired, he wrote to his old friend Treitschke from this provisional home in the city which had served a similar function for so many before him: “I have remained a foreigner in this land, even after living here as a guest for twenty-five years.” Nevertheless, he added, he felt very “attached” to it (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 178). For it was the new German Empire that in the end had become completely alien to him. He himself felt no sympathy with any form of nationalism and love of fatherland that was not anchored in the “natural basis” of love of home—in the kind of local patriotism,

in other words, that was characteristic of his provisional home. His position in this matter was consistent with his thinking in general, for nationalism in his eyes was among the more degenerate products of the idealism he and Nietzsche criticized unremittingly. Although he had not become Swiss, he was, in short, no normal citizen of the German Empire.

On the contrary, his theological thinking and writing had identified him as a man who had positioned himself against the tide of his time and the efforts of the majority of his theological colleagues in Germany to hold state and church, religion and culture together, and have them serve each other. As a result he had become, as he himself put it, “embroiled in an unresolvable conflict with the dominant theological current in the German Empire and in consequence was condemned to exile.” The country he had spent twenty years of his life in or rather “the Empire that it has become since I left it in 1870” has been in a “state of war with me since 1873,” he declared, that is, since the publication of his *Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology* (CHT, p. 169). With the publication of that work—which incidentally appeared in the same year and with the same publisher as Nietzsche’s second *Unzeitgemässe* (the attack on David Strauss) and which each of the two housemates, along with their common friend Erwin Rohde, had bound together and always referred to, understandably in view of the similarity of their themes and arguments, as “die Zwillinge” (“the twins”)—Overbeck had burned his boats. There was never any possibility afterwards of his going back to Germany. In Basle, on the other hand, where he had disappointed the expectations of some and shocked the religious sensibilities of others, he was let be. As both his scholarship and his personal integrity were universally acknowledged, people respected his convictions and his inner conflicts. He never had the slightest reason to believe that anyone in Basle ever thought of having him removed from his professorship, he later recounted. On the contrary, not once in twenty-five years of teaching had he been subjected to interference, criticism, or attack (CHT, pp. 9, 168). He was in fact several times elected rector of the university by his colleagues. “Basle,” he wrote in the Afterword of the second edition of his *Christianity* (1903), “has remained the refuge of my ‘Theology,’ and I have never ceased to experience it as such from the moment I first arrived there; it has thereby earned my equally enduring gratitude” (CHT, pp. 168–69). Nor did he ever make any effort to solicit a call to a German university, since he would have been unable to accept it even if it had come. For that reason he kept “as quiet as a mouse, avoided making myself into someone who could not be ignored on account of the countless books he has written, and in general moved not one of the many more than ten fingers that those who feel they may or must attract attention to themselves know so well how to move” (SB, p. 141).

Perhaps it was only in Treitschke’s “sulking corner,” in short, only in the predominantly commercial city-republic which Treitschke despised as a histori-

cal backwater in the age of the great nation-states, that Overbeck was free to be the contradictory figure he had indeed become: a theologian to whom theology was thoroughly problematical, and who battled with it all his life, *as a theologian*, while at the same time refusing to set himself up as a reformer of it and feeling no obligation to press his ideas on others. Only in Basle perhaps was it possible for him to announce the *finis christianismi* without launching an attack (or being construed to have launched an attack) on Christianity as such, to herald a new truly secular culture without engaging himself on behalf of this new culture with the *religious* vehemence and optimism of a Strauss, a Feuerbach or a Bauer, to expose and challenge “modernism” while insisting on his own modernity. Basle, in short, was perhaps the one place where he could freely “sich in die Luft hinausstellen,” as he put it—lift off into the unknown—beyond *both* orthodox Christianity *and* the humanist or nationalist *Schwärmerei* of the modern liberal theologians, without feeling he had to carry everyone along with him (CK, p. 77).

In this respect he and his colleague Nietzsche—at that time a professor of philology to whom philology had become problematical²—were in the same boat. “I appreciate Basle,” Nietzsche wrote to Erwin Rohde, “because it has let me live in peace, as on a country estate. In contrast, the sound of Berlin vocal organs is as hateful to me as the clanging of steam-driven machinery” (Letter of 1872, quoted by von Martin, *Nietzsche und Burckhardt*, p. 21). Eccentric, anachronistic, determinedly neutral and independent, yet at the same time the traditional point of intersection of the great lines of communication linking Paris to Vienna and Northern Europe to Italy, Basle offered an ideal redoubt from which the European centers of nineteenth-century modernism, most notably the expanding, capitalist, imperialist Berlin of the *Gründerzeit* and its “Philistine” culture-czars, could be observed and denounced with impunity. The Basle capitalists, characteristically pragmatic and fairly tolerant, were not so enamored of the new German Empire that they might want to prevent a couple of intellectual Davids in their midst from having their sport with the German Goliath. On the contrary, they were alarmed by it as an economic as well as a political and military threat and the sympathies of many in 1870 had been with France, just as in the heyday of French supremacy they had been with Germany. Moreover, the nineteenth-century Basle leadership may not have been averse to letting a fox or two loose among the theological chickens, as it had done earlier in the century when, to the dismay of local pietistic and orthodox circles alike, it brought De Wette, the friend and disciple of Schleiermacher, to Basle from Germany. As Bürgermeister Wieland observed on that occasion, courageous speculation in matters of theology was preferable to the narrow self-righteousness and dogmatism of “unsere dermaligen Zionswächter” (Ernst Jenny, “Wie De Wette nach Basel kam,” *Basler Jahrbuch* [1941], p. 61).

Overbeck once explained his peculiar neutrality—which was by no means

indifference: the term he himself preferred was “Gelassenheit” (serenity or composure)—in a comparison of his own conduct as a teacher with Treitschke’s:

I always let my audience determine for themselves how as theologians they should deal with what they learned from me. I never tried to make things especially difficult for them, nor, to be sure, did I do anything to make them easy. . . . What I taught was simply . . . what I knew about the topic under discussion, nothing else, and I presented that as clearly as I could, given my very skeptical and cautious way of proceeding in matters historical. . . . Now that was a totally different conception of the task of the academic teacher from Treitschke’s (SB, p. 134).

Overbeck emphasized that this attitude had nothing to do with saving his best insights for his publications instead of sharing them generously with his students, as some had maliciously insinuated, but everything to do with his disinclination to play the part of a hunter of souls (“Seelenfänger”). For the same reasons he described himself as “not cut out to be an important professor” or, as we would say, a *guru*. He always felt himself more of a learner than a teacher, he wrote, and was driven by no “need to instruct others” (SB, p. 70). With its meager total enrollment of about 150 students in 1871, the University of Basle might well have suited Overbeck’s skeptical and questioning, but reserved, intellectual temper as well as the University of Berlin, with its thousands of students, suited the proselytizing Treitschke.

In suggesting that the circumstances in Germany around 1870 were unfavorable to Overbeck’s critical stance toward the modern ideas of his time, while those of Basle were perhaps uniquely favorable, we have yet to define what he meant by “modern.” This is not an easy thing for a non-German to do. Not only is the range of terms designating modernity (“das Moderne,” “die Moderne,” “der Modernismus,” “die Modernität”) somewhat wider in German than in English, not only does Overbeck’s criticism of the modern encompass an apparently contradictory commitment to it, but the concept of modernity is in itself a peculiarly loaded one in German culture, as the debates surrounding it—to which there have been important recent contributions by Habermas and Blumenberg—attest. In many respects what its nineteenth-century German critics understood by “the modern” is the very opposite of what we nowadays—in England, France, and America at least—understand by it. For us it signifies a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement of reaction against the positivism and utilitarianism of the nineteenth-century bourgeois world. To the German critics, on the other hand, “the modern” meant precisely those features that “moderns” such as Flaubert or Baudelaire were reacting against. At issue, essentially, were a number of key values of the Enlightenment: the inherent rights and freedoms of the individual; confidence in critical rationality, the processes of argumentation and public debate, and the progress of science; and belief in democratic and constitutional government. Taken together these have

become so much a part of the Anglo-French inheritance, they are such commonplaces of our tradition, that it seems to require a special effort on our part and usually some acquaintance with “foreign,” particularly German, thinkers to question them. (Since Oscar Levy, who was in charge of the first English translation of Nietzsche, scholars have repeatedly noted the imperviousness of the English to the philosopher who mounted the most sustained attack on the scientific and democratic tradition of the Enlightenment.) In Germany, in contrast, where from the beginning Enlightenment was associated with courtly absolutism, foreign influence, French Jacobinism and Napoleonic imperialism, anti-Enlightenment impulses and ideas have always been strong and the legacy itself has been curiously divided, so that while some separated the goal of technical, material, and national political development from that of freedom and democracy, others, like Nietzsche, emphasized the heroically critical aspect of Enlightenment thought and regarded the uncompromising pursuit of truth as the prerogative of an aristocracy of the spirit incompatible with the ideals of egalitarian democracy.

Fortunately Overbeck dealt directly with the question “Was heisst modern?” (“What does modern mean?”) himself. Five pages are devoted to it in Bernoulli’s edition of Overbeck’s literary remains. At the risk of some simplification, one could say that Overbeck distinguishes in these pages between something objective: “modernity,” defined as “the pure phenomenon of the relation of a human individual or even a thing with its present as such,” and something subjective: “modernism,” defined as “the sickly degeneration or deformation of modernity that results from the possession of it and from the consciousness of that possession, the *idea* of modernity, modernity that has lost its innocence through human consciousness and self-consciousness” (CK, p. 246).

Modernity thus seems fairly close to presentness, though as a purely temporal, prehistorical notion the latter is prior to the former. As I understand it then, there is something unselfconscious or “naive” about modernity. Modernism, in contrast, is thoroughly self-conscious, reflected upon, “sentimental.” That explains why, according to Overbeck, “though all ages of human history have the same right to call themselves ‘modern’, they have made varying uses of this right. Most until now have made no use of it, our present time has made the greatest. Indeed we can say of our time that it conceives itself mostly in terms of its modernity” (CK, pp. 243–44). In its usual and most frequent usage then, the adjective “modern” designates a certain *rhetorical claim* to modernity, the *desire* to be modern, à la mode, that is, to *perceive oneself* as and to *pass* for modern, fashionable, up-to-date. Contrasting the treatment of Greek religion by his friend Erwin Rohde, on the one hand, and by the eminent classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, on the other, Overbeck points out that where Rohde is “freethinking, antique, classical, and naive,” Wilamowitz “rolls his eyes and is modern in an unpleasant sense, that is to say, in the sense that he is involved, romantic, sentimental, . . . affected” (CK, p. 193). Speak-

ing always in bombastic and quasi-prophetic tones, so that he gives the impression of being a “theologian of paganism,” Wilamowitz is the very type of “the classical philologist who is full of pieties in the modern manner” (CK, p. 194).

“Modern” thus appears to mean for Overbeck a self-conscious—and, from his point of view, decadent—substitution of masks and images for “real life,” a willingness to purchase historical survival at the expense of truth or authenticity. As a theologian, he was naturally thinking chiefly of modern Christianity, which, according to him, tries to deck itself out with up-to-date culture and worldliness in order to pass itself off as scholarly and scientific (see CK, p. 242), which has lost the courage to set itself uncompromisingly, anachronistically, and in most *unmodern* fashion, in opposition to the world and to history, but instead strains every nerve to permit those that profess it to also enjoy the modern “blessings of culture” with a good conscience (CK, p. 99; CHT, pp. 54–55), and which is willing to ensure itself a place in the world order by becoming the handmaiden of politics. In general, then, to Overbeck as a theologian, “modern” signified the adaptation of Christianity, which he claimed is always fundamentally unworldly, to the world, the subordination of Christian unworldliness or otherworldliness to a thoroughly modern historical optimism and belief in a worldly future, the sacrifice of immediate religious experience to the historical success of religious institutions. Overbeck’s antimodernism, it needs to be acknowledged, implies a negative view of the historical in general and of politics, as the means of historical survival, in particular. Politics appears as a corrupt and corrupting brokerage by which ideals are accommodated to historical interests, and live convictions turned into manageable and communicable concepts. This view is not only close to that of the seventeenth-century French Jansenists, for whom Overbeck had considerable admiration, it is also disturbingly consonant with ideas expressed more crudely by some of the politically reactionary “volkish” ideologists familiar to us from the studies of George Mosse and Fritz Stern. “Jesuitism,” for instance, also serves to designate the alleged compromises and corruptions of the modern in the work of Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Like Nietzsche, Overbeck kept his distance from the popular ideologies of his day, and in particular from the increasingly virulent anti-Semitism of the time. Though he was critical, as was Nietzsche, of particular features both of early Jewish culture (notably the influence of Pauline “legalism” on early Christianity) and of modern Jewish culture (notably its alleged close association with modern “demiculture”), he was utterly contemptuous of the contemporary anti-Semitic movement in Germany and would have nothing to do with it. (See letter to P. J. Möbius of 21–22 July 1902, *Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 203). Nevertheless, the common ground Overbeck shares with the volkish critics of the modern—in particular, contempt for rhetoric and politics—should perhaps serve as a warning that he himself requires to be treated with circumspection as well as sympathy. In this connection, it is worth recalling that the disparagement of the political by the French Jansenists of the

seventeenth century—at least by those whom Overbeck most admired—was double-edged. It produced a radical demystification of political authority, a significant erosion of respect; but it also led to political passivity and resignation, which in the end proved to be a major support of established political power.

Theologians, especially, are in Overbeck's eyes the great champions of the modern, since the heart of their task is to make it possible for religion—which, as we saw, he regarded as essentially a- or even antihistorical—to live a historical existence in the historical world. Because it is intimately bound up with modernism, with the impure—and impossible—enterprise of mediating between the world of myth and the world of philosophical and historical reflection, between spontaneous religious experience, which is unconscious of history, and calculated, practical, and historical interests, theology elicits from Overbeck the striking designation, “the Satan of religion” (CK, p. 13). “That theology has always been modern and for that reason has always been the betrayer of Christianity is one of the key arguments of my little book,” Overbeck declares in the Afterword to his *Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology* (CHT, p. 217; see also CK, p. 245). For these “traitors to the cause that they are to defend” (CK, p. 236), who corrupt both true religion and true culture (*worldly* culture) by trying to create a monstrous amalgam of the two, he cannot find insults enough. They are “panderers coupling Christianity and the world” (CK, p. 273), “the Figaros of Christianity” (CK, p. 274), “old washerwomen drowning religion for us in the endlessly flowing stream of their chatter” (CK, p. 253). Neither authentic Christians nor authentic men of culture, they are “Christians by observance, but never simple Christians or men whose relation to Christianity is simple and unequivocal; rather servants of Christianity, whose very existence supposes the existence of a world alongside and outside Christianity” (CK, p. 273). And if they are only demi-Christians, they are correspondingly only men of demiculture, “Philistines of culture”—that is, “people who are enthusiastic about culture but have no vocation for it, would like to be cultured, but are attached to culture only half-heartedly and to some extent for appearances' sake.” So their culture is “culture with a bad conscience,” and for that reason it has not been to culture's advantage that they have supported it. On the contrary, what might appear to be the greatest triumph of culture, its subjection of religion, is “in reality its greatest misfortune” (CK, pp. 270–71).

As if all that were not enough, we are told that theologians are “craven worshippers of power in all its forms,” the first “to swear homage to temporal power and to seek its protection in order to pursue their own ends” (CK, p. 242). All theologians, in Overbeck's pithy phrase, are Jesuits, in the sense that “Jesuitism is Christianity that has become worldly-wise” (CK, pp. 124) and pursues “the absurd idea of imposing the Christian religion on the world under the explicitly sanctified guise of modern culture” (CK, p. 125). In this sense the

Jesuitism of theology has to be regarded as a thoroughly interconfessional phenomenon (CK, p. 276). For Jesuitical turns out to be—as it already was for the seventeenth-century Jansenists—simply another word for modern.

Just as “historical”—according to Overbeck—means “subject to time,” so, then, “modern” means “subject to the mode or to fashion” (CK, 244–45). And since for Overbeck true Christianity is, or rather was, timeless—in the sense that, being exclusively oriented toward the imminent end of the world and the return of Christ, it was fundamentally averse from all worldliness and all history—the very idea of “modern” Christianity is an absurdity, something that has neither more nor less meaning and value than a “modern hat.” “Even if the world around us believes that it possesses something eternal in this modern Christianity, it is we who are sane in our judgment and the ‘modern’ world around us, with its talk of modern and historical Christianity as things to be taken seriously, that is not.” Whether Catholic or Protestant, Christianity is being gradually reduced to nothing in the “stew” of this modernism (CK, pp. 245, 277).

In stark contrast to the project of “modernizing” religion, Overbeck’s goal was to emphasize how far apart religion and modern secular culture are, and to keep them apart. “These grapes are too high for you to reach,” he warned Treitschke when the latter began to try to place religion in the service of his nationalist politics (Letter of 1 November 1875, *Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 119). He therefore regarded with skepticism and distaste all efforts, such as those of David Strauss or even Paul Lagarde, with whom he otherwise had much in common, to found new religions. “The cult of the ‘universal’—whose most enthusiastic prophet has been discovered in our soberest critic” (that is, Strauss)—is no “true religion” but only a “mental artifact” (*Gedankending*) (CHT, p. 119). But Lagarde’s plan to confine traditional theology to denominational seminaries and introduce a new theology to be taught in the universities and to act as the forerunner of a future “German religion” also seemed highly dubious to Overbeck. “Theologies,” he noted drily, “have always followed their religions; in fact, the more energetic and unquestioned the original religious impulse, the longer it took before a theology made its appearance. That a theology should precede a religion is unheard of, and it is scarcely to be expected that something of that kind could happen in the future” (CHT, p. 129). There can be no rational “programming” of what by its nature belongs to a totally different order of experience.

In opposition to the conciliatory and compromising efforts of modernism to maintain a comforting sense of historical continuity by adapting the new to the old and the old to the new, Overbeck’s “modernity” is radical and revolutionary, closer in certain respects to that of the *Modernes* of the early Enlightenment in France. It requires acknowledgment of the gulf that separates past and present, recognition of the fact that the Christianity of the nineteenth century is something entirely different from the world-denying religion of two thousand

years before, and that Christianity “in the form in which it has come down to the modern nations is by no means only a religion” but “at the same time a culture,” in fact “the embalmed form in which classical antiquity has been transmitted to our own age” (CHT, p. 22), that—in a word—most so-called modern minds are equally far removed from genuine Christianity, genuine antiquity, and genuine modernity.

Christianity as it originally was has disappeared from the everyday world of modern man, Feuerbach once wrote. Reduced to a religion for Sundays, it has “nothing to do with a life now entirely centered on man, dominated by a sense of history, and motivated by a drive toward the future. It stands in stark opposition to our world of fire and life insurance companies, railways and locomotives, museums and galleries, military and professional schools, theatres and natural history collections” (*Wesen des Christentums* [Leipzig, 1883], p. 32; cf. CK, p. 26). Overbeck accepted this diagnosis fully. To be modern in the sense in which he applied the term to himself—“You call yourselves modern,” he once exclaimed; “I am even more so! What else should I be but thoroughly modern” (CK, p. 292)—meant to acknowledge honestly that the renunciation, otherworldliness, and eschatology of the early Christians were irreconcilable with the “future orientation” of the present time (CK, p. 66). It meant not looking any more for solutions on the basis of the Bible (capable now “only of awakening prophets of new religions”) or of theological debates among liberals, orthodox, and others (CK, p. 77), but understanding instead that “old religious problems have now to be considered on an entirely new basis . . . ultimately perhaps at the expense of what has hitherto been thought of as religion,” and that this rethinking should in no circumstances—and one would like to underline this point a hundred times—be accompanied by an effort to “find a substitute for this thing (i.e. religion) and by means of rhetorical conjuring tricks come up with some still-undefined new construction clothed in the old name of religion” (CK, p. 270). To be truly modern meant to be ready for the truly new, to be willing to “take a leap into the air” in order to move forward. It meant resisting the temptation to settle for the “Philistine” comfort of owning a past culture instead of struggling to create a live one. In a striking passage Overbeck compares the situation of modern man with that of the original Christians. For neither could there be any choice but to pursue the path already entered upon into the unknown.

At the point where we have been brought by all our efforts, all our thinking and imagining, we are so anxious and dissatisfied that we are ready to turn around and in despair renounce all further striving. But it is in vain. The choice is no longer ours. Our defection from the old and our falling away from it are irreparable, as we learn from Hebrews 6, 4–8. . . . There is nothing for it: having come so far, we have no option but to press on further, and however one looks at it, “it is impossible for those who were once enlightened” or for those who have probed into the darkness to throw away what they have once tasted of without becoming an “earth . . . which beareth

only thorns and briars." If our falling away has truly extinguished all light, we can least expect to receive new illumination by turning back and we can be all the more sure that it can only lie ahead of us. We find ourselves placed before the same *adinaton* [impossibility] as the early Christians (SB, p. 166).

Though Overbeck's antimodernism has more in common with late Romantic "volkish" ideologies than one would like, he always insisted that he was himself modern; except that the modernity he espoused was not shamefaced, but radical, uncompromising, and revolutionary. This is probably the source of the "uneasiness and incomprehension" with which his work was received by his contemporaries (CHT, p. 158). His former fellow student Carl Holsten who, like Overbeck himself, had found a position in Switzerland, as professor of theology at Bern, probably expressed the feelings that Overbeck's *Christianity* aroused in most of his old "liberal" friends. "Naturally," Holsten wrote, "it must cause me pain, deep pain, that you have to attack the liberal pastors and theologians who are working to shape the new 'view of life' gradually and in a conciliatory way into a practical worldview for the people. Your book will make their position significantly more difficult than it already is" (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 100). To Overbeck, however, the truth was not negotiable and no desire for comforting compromises could find a way around it.

Nevertheless, Overbeck did not advocate an all-out war against Christianity. Though many contemporaries were outraged by the aggressiveness of his writing, he himself contended that his intention was only to promote the cause of truth by presenting the issues as trenchantly as possible. Moreover, he always thought of himself as writing for other scholars, not for a large public. Far from trying to engage in a campaign to sway public opinion, he was convinced that a bitter struggle to root out Christianity would only serve to keep obsolete feuds, passions, and ways of thinking alive, when they ought rather to be allowed to die off naturally. It was more prudent and more effective to undermine Christianity slowly by peaceful scholarly labor, and so "prepare an end for it that would do it more honor and entail fewer perils for us" (CK, p. 69).

Bachofen's position was strikingly close in many respects to Overbeck's. He too carried out an unrelenting critique of modern culture, and he too denounced it for its inauthenticity. As a theologian, Overbeck focused his attack on modern theology and modern theologians—chief among them his erstwhile friend Adolf Harnack, "the supreme salon professor," the "protestant abbé," the "smug bourgeois" (like Nietzsche in the second *Unzeitgemässe*, Overbeck uses the French word *satisfait*), who was "happy with the well-being provided by the present day Reich" and who, as "theological master of the University," willingly served as "principal friseur of His Majesty's theological wig" (CK, pp. 199, 208, 209). As a classical philologist and student of ancient law, Bachofen directed his barbs at modern philology and modern philologists—chief among

them Harnack's friend and colleague at the University of Berlin and at the Royal Prussian Academy, Theodor Mommsen, with whom he had likewise once entertained decently collegial relations but whom he now castigated as a "modern Berlin emptyhead," the "very model of a modern fashionable thinker, a man who expresses openly and unreservedly everything that the age conceals within itself" (GW, vol. 10, letters 143, 150).

According to Overbeck, theologians are men of demiculture, Philistines incapable of understanding or giving wholehearted and honest support either to religion or to culture and, in their efforts to reconcile and combine the two, corruptors of both. According to Bachofen, the new philologists, under Mommsen's influence, have completely misunderstood and misrepresented the culture of antiquity since they have no feeling at all for what he claims was its very life, namely its foundation in myth and religion. Instead they trace everything back "to the pet ideas of the shallowest modern Prussian salon liberalism." In Mommsen's highly successful *Roman History* (1854–56) everything turns on "imports and exports, the balance of trade, investment, competition, free ports, navigation acts, factories and emporia, as if that was the only point of view from which it is possible to consider and evaluate the lives of peoples. This 'practical point of view' is even carried over into religion, the Romans are admired for their 'clear rationalism,' law is considered from the perspective of land and personal credit, the elimination of customs barriers is seen as a triumph of liberalism" and those scholars who are not sufficiently advanced to appreciate such arguments are dismissed as persons with whom it is a waste of time to carry on a discussion. "The entire modern age" according to Bachofen, "with all its obstinate, overbearing, vacuous, Prussian demagogy" is concentrated in Mommsen's book (GW, vol. 10, letter 143).

If, for Overbeck, the religion of the early Christians has become a culture religion in the hands of modern theologians, genuine antiquity, for Bachofen, has been transformed by the liberal German philologists into an ideological support of the modern imperialist nation-state or a bloodless object of professional pedantry. Like the dwarfs they are, modern scholars "edit" (*schulmeister*) the great texts of antiquity in order to reduce them to their own petty dimensions and remove from them whatever might disturb their own certainties; by their labors they debase the magnificent myths of the past and degrade a heroic spirit that they cannot comprehend. As always with Bachofen, the political and economic conservatism of the well-to-do burgher of Basle and his hostility to Jacobin-inspired criticism of large concentrations of wealth and property glimmers through the lexicon and imagery of his attack on modern philological criticism of the ancient sources. Here he is writing of the earliest Greek settlements in the Peloponnese:

The mighty building blocks of the gigantic old walls have often been broken down into a mass of smaller shaped stones in order to make them available for new proj-

ects. They proved too mighty for the small and weak race of men that now wanted to use them. Homer met with a similar fate. Gigantic figure that he was, he was too great for mortals as they now are, was therefore shorn of his individuality and dissolved into a collective idea which could be offered for sale in a quantity of small lots, like a great property after the owner has died, with the aim of putting it within reach of the feeble resources of poverty (*Griechische Reise* [hereafter GR], ed. Georg Schmidt [Heidelberg: Richard Weissbach, 1927], p. 111).

For Bachofen, as for Overbeck, the essential thing is the “massive abyss” which “divides the new from the old,” the irremediable fact that “between our present time and ancient times there is no continuity of consciousness” (GR, pp. 190–91). Every attempt to get round this abyss, instead of acknowledging it as the only possible starting point for our thinking, is rejected by Bachofen, as it was by Overbeck, with scorn. What Strauss’s “new faith” represented for Overbeck, is represented for Bachofen by “today’s Bavarian Greece [the new Kingdom of Greece established by the Great Powers in 1832 under Otto I], an enormous contradiction, at once ridiculous and repellent. . . . A people full of impetuous energy has been decked out in Bavarian servants’ uniforms and conditions of the most primitive kind have been prettied up in the taste of the decadent monarchies of the nineteenth century” (GR, p. 161; see also p. 213). The Greeks and Turks of nineteenth-century Greece were separated only by their religion: in their ignorance of antiquity and their indifference to it, they were alike, and at least honest. “They passed by the relics of the famous old days with equal forgetfulness and incuriosity.” The modern kingdom of Greece, with Athens as the capital of its Wittelsbach monarchs, is thus not a spontaneous or authentic historical phenomenon but the grotesque product of the “scholarly enthusiasm of the Germanic West” (GR, p. 192).

The philologists, in other words, have done the same job on antiquity that the theologians did, according to Overbeck, on Christianity. And in both cases the criticism of the “modern” is at the same time a criticism of the so-called mass culture of cheap newspapers and the popular press, of the democratization and alleged vulgarization of learning, and of the transformation of literature into a commodity produced with an eye constantly on the market. Modern learning, it is claimed, no longer has anything to do with genuine culture: organized on the model of an industrial enterprise, it is characterized by a high degree of division of labor, a massive increase in scholarly production, writing, and specialization, and a deliberate cultivation of notoriety and publicity, but a firm ban on whatever does not conform to established ideas (CK, p. 233; CHT, p. 204 [Afterword to the 1903 edition]). Overbeck ridicules Harnack’s “Viel-schreiberei” almost as frequently as Bachofen expresses his contempt for that of the philologists. “Personally motivated research is no longer in fashion,” Bachofen observed sarcastically. “To pass for a scholar of talent one has to blow the trumpet of today’s fashionable leaders and tone-setters and no deviation from the royal Prussian line is permitted” (GW, vol. 10, letter 244). To

Bachofen, in contrast, philology was a calling in an almost religious sense; it required a dedication on the scholar's part that had nothing to do with publicity and publication and everything to do with his own culture and education. Like Burckhardt, Bachofen and Overbeck both kept their distance from the modern culture market. After his return to Basle in 1858, as is well known, Burckhardt stopped publishing his work and devoted himself exclusively to his university teaching, to the education of his fellow citizens through public lectures, and to the exchange of ideas with close friends in his correspondence; Bachofen's major works were either unpublished or printed in ridiculously small editions, virtually for a small circle of associates; Overbeck wrote exclusively for learned journals and would have nothing to do with efforts to reach a wider readership.

The alienation of Northern (in particular modern German) scholars—from the culture they purport to interpret is highlighted by Bachofen through repeated allusions to the Platonic cave, hyperborean mists, and the poor, artificial light of oil lamps. The Prussian scholars are “smoking club men,” he writes, “bunglers and rationalists moving around in their smoke-filled rooms” without naturally “ever coming to any correct insight” for “history is not to be found in books” (GW, vol. 10, letters 264, 199). “With all their scholarship they succeed only in getting to the point where they can peer out from a remote forgotten corner at the grand spectacle of antiquity” (GW, letter 18; see also GR, p. 54).

What chiefly obstructs the vision of the German scholars, Bachofen explained in a letter to Lewis Morgan, the great American anthropologist with whom he entertained an active correspondence toward the end of his life and whose portrait hung in a place of honor in Bachofen's study, is an idea of *Bildung* or culture in which the Greeks and Romans are represented “as a kind of elect who are not in any circumstances to be compared with barbarian peoples” (GW, vol. 10, letter 304)—an idea that must in any case have been totally unacceptable to the deeply Christian Bachofen—an invented “so-called classicism” (*sogenannte Classicität*), which is in fact a product of *our* culture, in the same way that Overbeck's “culture-Christianity” is a product of modern times and has little if anything to do with the faith of the early Christians. Above all, the Germans' insight into antiquity is blocked by their desire to read the old in terms of the new and the new in terms of the old, so that they can present themselves as the modern Greeks or Romans and impart the prestige of classical antiquity to their new Empire—just as the modern “culture-Christians” want to be seen as the heirs of the early Christians. As there is a Bismarckian Christianity, in short, so there is a Bismarckian antiquity. In several letters Bachofen attacks Adolf Kiesseling, a German scholar who had been brought to Basle as professor of classical philology. “As a true bootlicker of Mommsen's he liked to make fun of Brutus, ‘that model of virtue,’ to scoff at the ‘miserable’ Roman patriciate and the ‘ridiculous’ Stoics, to present Tiberius as the scourge of the Junkers, Tacitus as a liar, Suetonius as a pinkie school-

master, and to praise the administrative machine of the Empire as far superior to the free strength of the Republic" (GW, vol. 10, letter 212). When Kiessling left Basle in response to a call to Hamburg, Bachofen was happy to see the back of him. "He stood at the peak of the age," he wrote—and this was definitely not a compliment!—"was a fanatical Bismarck supporter, a boot-licker of Mommsen, an admirer of Tiberius, a disparager of Christianity, in a word, he was painted in all the colors of modernity" (GW, vol. 10, letter 258).

The true task of the classical scholar, however, is not to be modern or à la mode. It is not to modernize, but to show "the *difference* of what has been once and what is now," as Bachofen wrote to Morgan in his no longer idiomatic English (GW, vol. 10, letter 308; see also letters 63 and 322). "In order to trace our steps back to the time of the ancient Greeks," he had already declared in his account of his journey to Greece, "we must first lose ourselves" (GR, p. 120).

The core of the conflict between Bachofen and the German philologists was the latter's commitment to a harmonization of Christianity and classical culture, religion and worldliness, in which religion, in Bachofen's view, as in Overbeck's, had necessarily yielded to culture. Bachofen, in contrast, constantly underscored the irreconcilability of this "Bildungsclassicität" and religion, the incapacity of aesthetic culture and modern "Hellenomania" (GW, vol. 6, p. 8) to "satisfy the eternal longing of the human soul" (GR, p. 53). Instead of subordinating religion to culture, he subordinated classical culture to religion, by emphasizing in the manner of Zoega and Creuzer the religious significance of the ancient myths and their central place in Greek culture, as well as the subterranean, officially repudiated relation between Greek culture and the "maternal" Orient (which, in the early nineteenth century, still meant in the first instance the lands of the Bible).

Ultimately, the consequence, for the author himself, of Bachofen's philological antimodernism was to be an increasingly pronounced shift away not only from progressive or narrative history, but even from the idea that ancient history is an autonomous field of study, toward the comparative study of myth and of enduring, long-term social structures, toward anthropology, and above all toward the study of kinship relations in all early societies, African and American as well as Greek and Roman. In this respect he followed a route similar to that taken by his compatriot Burckhardt when he forsook narratives of political history for cross-sectional synchronic accounts of cultural history, such as the *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*.

Overbeck and Bachofen thus shared a good deal of common ground. Both mounted vigorous attacks on the condition of their chosen profession and on the practice of their colleagues. If Overbeck argued strongly for a "new critical theology," Bachofen claimed it was "high time for German classical scholarship to pursue a new course and lead historiography on to a different track from

the one it has followed with smug self-satisfaction since Niebuhr" (GW, vol. 10, letter 63). Both men claimed that the studied indifference, or at best bewilderment, with which their work was received in Germany was due to their having challenged the received wisdom of their time, disturbed the routines of their increasingly professionalized guilds, and exposed the efforts of their colleagues to put the object of their study—Christianity in Overbeck's case, antiquity in Bachofen's—in the service of contemporary culture and the politics of liberalism and nationalism. For both, the ancient world of myth and religion was separated by an unbridgeable gulf from the modern bourgeois world with its belief in "progress" and its pursuit of historical success. Finally, both described themselves as exiles or hermits in the contemporary world (Bachofen: GW, vol. 10, letter 322; Overbeck: SB, p. 152). But both accepted their destiny without demur, declining every form of activism, not—they claimed—out of laziness, pusillanimity or indifference, but out of a kind of historical fatalism, because they were convinced of the futility of all efforts to either avert or precipitate the inevitable, and because it was impossible for them to intervene in public debate without themselves becoming party to the culture-business—the *Vielschreiberei*—they denounced and despised.

Yet there are also significant differences between the two men. In the end, Overbeck was an isolated figure in the closely knit society of Basle. Unlike some of the immigrant professors—Wilhelm Wackernagel, for instance, in Germanic philology, or Carl Steffenson in philosophy, both of whom married into distinguished Basle families—he never struck roots in Basle, had little sense of belonging, and no loyalty or obligation except his intense, limitless commitment to truthfulness. As a consequence of that, perhaps, he thought of the freedom he valued so highly as philosophical rather than political. Above all else, it meant the opportunity to make free and honest judgments—free, that is, not only from external constraints but from inner presuppositions and prejudices. The "defection from the old, the falling away from it," was "irreparable," and in a disenchanted world the genuinely modern, free individual must learn to do without all traditional supports. "Whoever stands truly and firmly on his own two feet in the world must have the courage to stand on nothing." he may no longer speak of God, least of all rediscover God in himself. "The thorough individualist must be able to do without God. . . . Only without God can he live as a free individual. If he cannot bid farewell to God, either his individualism is not genuine or it has not developed to its fullest point of freedom" (CK, p. 286).

The radicalism of Overbeck's thinking sets him worlds apart from the pious and conservative Bachofen. The most memorable aspect of Bachofen's work is his enthusiasm for "the antiquity of antiquity" and for the lost world of myth, his passionate and poetic evocation of an Edenic world prior to paternal law and paternal property rights, a world governed by the so-called Mother-Right. Yet Bachofen never came close to breaking either with the wealthy and enter-

prising Basle bourgeoisie to which he belonged or with orthodox Christianity. He remained committed to the Law of the Father and while he sang the praises of communal life, he never sacrificed the individual. In fact, the individual plays a vital role in Bachofen's thinking. He regarded the socialist doctrines of his day as regressive; the attempt to return to a bygone (that is, for him, virtually prelapsarian) social order *in modern conditions* could only produce a new and terrible barbarism. "In all ages whatever is truly great was the work of individuals" (GR, p. 111).

In Bachofen's worldview (as in many other nineteenth-century worldviews), it is the individual who represents the spiritual (also the masculine) principle, the communal or popular that represents the material (or feminine) principle, and there is no question about the proper relation of these two principles. Like woman or matter, the people prepares itself by a slow process of maturation to receive the seed that, like divine grace, will awaken it to a higher spiritual life. This awakening is accomplished by the hero, the genius, the great individual, rather perhaps as the old medieval Basle of guilds and artisans was awakened to new and vigorous economic life by the enterprising capitalists who immigrated to it in the early modern period, bringing both new money and new ideas, and who founded the city's leading families: the Bernoullis, the Burckhardts, the Debarys, the Legrands, the Paravicinis, the Passavants, the Vondermühlls, and the Bachofens themselves—the heroic bourgeois of Basle.

The preparation of the soil may last untold millenia. The peaceful labor is like the silent uniform operation of all the forces of nature. The work goes forward in exactly the same way for thousands of years. For that reason, this period has no history. . . . And so the remote Pelasgian early age of the land of Argos knows no development and therefore no history. A history begins only with the arrival of Danaus. It is he, the stranger from Egypt, who founds a ruling dynasty, builds up high Larissa as his royal fortress, and brings to the land the beginnings of culture and artificial irrigation (GR, p. 169).

Yet this hero is no modern, critically-minded individualist in Overbeck's sense. He himself belongs fully to the world of myth, and as his mother's son, that is as the son of the earth, represents the great forces of nature, or the people (GR, p. 119–21).³ "Every man," according to Bachofen, "is a product of his soil, a son of his time, a child of the customs of his motherland" (GW, vol. 1, p. 17). The King, the Savior, is indeed "prior to the City, the ruler is prior to the people (GW, vol. 1, p. 277)." But he is no independent, autonomous, modern individual: he "stands in the middle, between the mortals and the immortals; . . . on one side, he represents his people before the throne of Zeus the highest, on the other he rules over it as Zeus's deputy" (GW, vol. 1, p. 282). As the "product of his soil," the son of an earthly and carnal mother and at the

same time the representative of “Zeus the highest,” the hero is a Christ-like mediator between two worlds and the instrument of a second consecration of the community. In Bachofen’s view of the polis, individuals and particular families (magistrates or patricians) play a leading role, but only as mediators of “higher” ideas and agents of “higher” purposes (GW, vol. 1, pp. 35, 38–39, 55–56, 313). They are themselves part of a totality, in which God, nature, and community are inseparably linked (GR, pp. 119–20, 199–205). Though the community can only be raised above itself and transfigured through the mediation of an extraordinary figure or hero, it is still the enduring, encompassing ground of all human existence. In terms of local Basle history, the well-being of the great families was due to the skill and enterprise of outstanding individuals, the prosperity of the little city-state itself to the skill and enterprise of refugees and immigrants from other lands: it is the commonweal, however, that remains the object of individual lives and gives them meaning. “The destinies of families and states,” Bachofen wrote in the great 1854 autobiographical letter to his teacher Savigny (usually referred to as the *Selbstbiographie*), “are not fulfilled in one lifetime, but through an entire series of generations following one after the other” (*Selbstbiographie und Antrittsrede über das Naturrecht*, ed. Alfred Bauemler [Halle/Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1927], p. 25). It is the individual’s duty to respect and prolong tradition, and tradition is also the principal basis of authority and social order (GW, vol. 8, p. 494). “Tradition and social discipline are correlates. You cannot have one without the other. Where tradition is not honored”—and Bachofen means by that where the individual has emancipated himself from every constraining law of the community—“you find there is also no discipline” (GW, vol. 1, p. 45). Piety, respect for what transcends the individual—religion, in other words—constitutes the “content of all political wisdom and the firmest basis for the flowering and happiness of a great commonwealth” (GW, vol. 1, p. 33). The individual, in the sense of the individual person, the individual group within the community (for example the “people” as distinct from the magistrates and patricians), or the immediate present (as distinct from the historical continuity of the community) must always yield to the totality. For Bachofen the freedom of the individual and the “isolation that inevitably accompanies it,” which Overbeck believed could be the starting point of a new morality and a new wisdom (see CK, pp. 286–87), are only symptoms of decline and ruin.

Even Burckhardt could acknowledge that “along with its many dark sides” his own age had some advantages, notably its “enormous receptiveness” and openness to an immense variety of different cultures and artistic styles. The nineteenth century, according to Burckhardt, was uniquely favorable to the development of art history as a discipline (Introduction to his lecture cycle on art history at University of Basle, 1874–1890, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Emil Dürr *et al.* [Stuttgart, Leipzig, Berlin, 1929–34], vol. 13, p. 23). Bachofen’s conser-

vatism excludes the possibility of any positive attitude to his own culture. He could never have said, with Overbeck, that what always inspired him and “binds him to the present century” was the century’s striving to achieve freedom. He could never have considered, as Overbeck did, that his task was to liberate humanity from all forms of deisdaemonia (CK, pp. xix, 290). On the contrary, where Overbeck claimed that a future humanity would learn to live without religion, Bachofen dreamed nostalgically of bygone times when human life was permeated by religion.

Overbeck’s highest values were the individual and freedom—and his recognition of limits to these was intended only to protect them from destruction. Bachofen’s highest values were community and order. Overbeck’s criticism of the modern begins with an unreserved embracing of it; what he criticizes in the modern, in Strauss, in Harnack, in the new faiths and the new ideologies is their failure to go the whole way, their half-heartedness, their compromises. The strength of his desire to “pursue truth and at the same time avoid cynicism” (SB, p. 155), the complete absence of any nostalgia for a lost past, which he in fact never had, rule out for him the temptation to seek consolation for the miseries of the time or for the all-too-sober truth in esthetic dream-images. In Bachofen’s work, on the other hand, the evocation and representation of a glorious elsewhere, supposedly discovered in the remote past, but almost certainly associated in his mind with the old Biedermeier Basle of his youth, has a consoling as well as—with respect to the modern—a critical function, as Bachofen himself often acknowledged. The vanished world of ancient Greek civilization, he once wrote, in which “man walked hand in hand with the forces and all the phenomena of nature . . . was so much closer to the beginnings of human kind, had a far keener consciousness of the common origin of all things . . . and stood in friendly and respectful relation to the powers of the entire universe.” For the pioneer mythologist, as for Overbeck, “our defection from the old and our falling away from it are irreparable.” The disenchanting modern world will never recover the relation to nature and to the Gods of the ages of myth. “But as memories of youth shed a golden glow over age, so can the spiritual riches of that ancient world shed a last beneficial ray of light on the colorless desert of our world” (GR, pp. 54–55).

Bachofen found several occasions to voice his criticism of his compatriot Burckhardt’s aestheticism. But with him, too, unhappiness with modern life and longing for different conditions, which he believed had existed in the past, easily led to a kind of exoticism, an aesthetic pleasure in the spectacle of antiquity, a flight into fantasy. The present reality of aesthetic experience provided consolation for the misery of present social reality and the loss of a better past reality. In a letter to his friend Meyer-Ochsner he told of being in Paris on August 14, 1864.

It was the day before Napoleon's national holiday [to celebrate the Italian campaign]. The crowds seethed and heaved in the streets to the point that I longed to be back among the peasants and the snows of Aeschi. How pathetically mediocre all that imperial brilliance seemed to me. But I had the Campana Museum, and so in the year 1864, I was able to spend many a day among the Etruscans (GW, vol. 10, letter 188).

And so criticism and discontent ended in pleasure and enjoyment. Bachofen even acknowledged that the pastness of the past facilitates such pleasure and enjoyment. Ruins and desolation, which offer no resistance to the imagination, are preferable to living reality. "The relics of past greatness speak louder to heart and mind than the glory of presently existing wealth and power, and I cannot believe that Corinth in the days of its greatest prosperity would have excited my expectations more than the little city of today with its two thousand souls and its poor wooden houses" (GR, p. 68).

This kind of Romantic longing and compensation was firmly resisted by Overbeck, and with it the tendency to aestheticism. "I have been a dreamer only in prose," he once said of himself (SB, p. 109). His language has none of the enchantment of Bachofen's. Its power lies rather in its refusal of all poetry, its austere commitment to the greatest possible honesty.

Nevertheless, Overbeck's radicalism was tempered by an anti-Romantic realism that was curiously compatible with the legendary irony and caution of his "provisional" home. While asserting the freedom and autonomy of the modern individual, he also emphasized that limits are placed on all human, and in particular on all individual endeavor. "Man did not create the conditions of existence, and he cannot alter them. . . . Certainly no idea can alter them for modern man" (CK, pp. 280–81). The universe is not the product of our thinking. Pessimism and optimism, "rejection of the world and adoration of it are equally defensible. . . . For that reason man has nothing higher or better to do with the world than to acknowledge it and accept it as it is, and to let the idea of the irrelevance of his judgment of it sink thoroughly into his mind" (CK, p. 29; see also SB, p. 165). Realism, Overbeck explained, "is the effort to grasp the world rationally from within its humanly understood boundaries." We can, of course, try to "place ourselves beyond the world in our efforts to understand it," but it is not obvious that this has yielded more satisfactory results than we can get by "keeping our thinking within worldly limits."

The early Christians could disregard these limits because they did not participate in our rational, critical, and historical culture, but believed the end of the world was at hand. To the degree that we "of the present age" no longer share that belief, the attempt to transgress the boundaries of the real transforms man into a "Lebenskünstler"—that is to say, it produces an aestheticist subjectivism that makes our relation to life, as Kierkegaard also held, thoroughly inauthen-

tic. With his idea of the superman, Overbeck claimed, even Nietzsche had fallen victim to the Philistine idealism which, because of the close connection between modern individualism and “the educated German middle class,” had always attached to individualism and which Nietzsche himself had persistently combatted (CK, p. 287). For if reality is not made or transformed by theories and philosophies, if nothing was ever created “either by an idea or by a word,” then “the idea of an idea will be even less able to achieve what no idea could. . . . What heroes could not do, hero-worship will certainly not accomplish” (CK, p. 281). Nietzsche’s use of aphorism, which Overbeck acutely perceives as intimately related to his individualism, also comes in for criticism. The truth communicated in aphoristic writing would be “more securely and more simply appreciated, if time were taken, and given, to found it carefully. . . . The possibility of contradiction, that sword of Damocles which hangs over whatever one tries to found or demonstrate, is less dangerous than the congenital infirmity with which whatever lacks a real foundation enters the world, however meteoric and lightning bright that entry may be. In aphorism, the individual relies on his own power more than is permitted him for his activity in the world” (CK, p. 283). Great things are achieved only through individuals, but not through individuals only. “The individual has to find his place in the world. If it comes to a conflict, it is the individual who will bear the cost. These are truths that modern individualism is often in danger of forgetting” (CK, p. 287).⁴

Overbeck’s curiously modern antimodernism comes close at times to being indistinguishable from a kind of conservatism that could not have been displeasing to those in the Basle elite who had already been unexpectedly gratified by his attack on liberal theology. Since David Strauss’s so-called modern religion offers no genuine consolation for human suffering, but only abstract metaphysical ideas, since it is vastly inferior with respect to its social and ethical teachings to traditional Christian doctrines, such as those of Augustine (CHT, p. 115), since it has nothing to propose but a disguised egoism which in fact leaves every human being as isolated and abandoned as before—even its champions acknowledge that it “could only be a religion for the middle class” (CHT, p. 119)—“there is no reason,” Overbeck suggests, “to share the haste and ruthlessness with which it would have us cast off the bonds of community that the old faith provided” (CHT, p. 118). Overbeck speaks almost like a Basler when he recalls the value of community structures and beliefs:

Today in particular, when the nations are becoming ever stranger to each other, the classes of society threaten to become ever more opposed and hostile, and individuals themselves suffer from a disquieting indifference to every form of community that is not based on material advantage, it is of inestimable value that at least the appella-

tion of “Christian” should hover over this entire fateful scene of dissolution, like a kind of categorical imperative, by which it stands condemned (CHT, pp. 118–19).

One ought not to forget perhaps the advice given to his landlady by the professor of theology, who wrote of his own first year of theological study at Leipzig that all he got out of it was the loss of what still remained of the faith of his childhood (SB, p. 122). The best thing she could do, Overbeck told Anna Baumann, was to continue believing as strongly as she could, since doubt does not bring happiness; as for the works of his fellow lodger Nietzsche, he did not recommend that she read them (*Overbeckiana*, vol. 1, p. 192).

A number of factors might be adduced to account for the differences between Bachofen and Overbeck, the native son and the immigrant: generation—Bachofen was twenty-five years older than Overbeck and still belonged to the Romantic generation; education and career—Bachofen was a jurist and classical scholar, who had been raised on the ideals of Humboldtian neohumanism and embittered by the revelation of their impracticality, whereas Overbeck was trained as a theologian and Church historian; social background, standing and expectations—as a young man from one of the wealthiest and most prominent merchant families in the city where he was born and lived his entire life, Bachofen had fully expected to play a leading role in his community and throughout his life remained intensely interested in politics, despite the failure of that expectation, whereas Overbeck came from a relatively modest middle class family whose many migrations had rendered it virtually rootless, stumbled into theology as the most obvious entry into professional life, and, having realized that he was not cut out to be a pastor, can never have expected to have anything other than an academic career. On the basis of Berndt Moeller’s controversial thesis about the different turn taken by the Reformation in the northern German kingdoms and principalities, where relations between church and state were always troubled and ambiguous, and in the free cities of southwestern Germany and Switzerland, where religion and community were always seen as intimately connected, one might also be tempted to investigate whether a difference in emphasis between the German Lutheran tradition that was most familiar to Overbeck, notably its persistent suspicion of all institutionalization, and the Swiss Reformed tradition, in which Bachofen was raised, might not also have contributed to divergences in outlook and sensibility in the two scholars.⁵

In the end, however, one must be struck more by the similarities than the differences. Both Bachofen and Overbeck stood in a no man’s land, from which they could neither go back nor go forward.⁶ Both challenged the pieties of their time, but neither was ready to lead a crusade on behalf of a new worldview or world order. As the theologian of a *deus absconditus*, Overbeck

kept rattling the spoon in the bowl to show that it was empty, to borrow an image Günther Anders once used of Kafka. He left the working out of a new worldview to future generations. Bachofen was a man of renunciation. For him too, no way back was possible, and he looked on the way forward with grim foreboding. Bachofen's ambiguities allowed his work to be exploited by the most widely divergent groups, on the left as well as the extreme right, and there is enough uncertainty about Overbeck's final meaning to have permitted his work to be interpreted—by Karl Barth, for instance—as a challenge or provocation to Christianity rather than an out-and-out rejection of it.⁷

As transitional figures, neither scholar could be properly “at home” anywhere, but if there was any city in Europe that they could feel a certain affinity with, it probably was Basle—always a place of transit and *Spedition* (transshipment or forwarding), neither French nor German nor even unequivocally Swiss but a so-called *Dreiländerecke* with something of all three, economically progressive, even daring, but culturally and, for most of the century, politically conservative. One cannot help reflecting that while Nietzsche could not settle in Basle but left it in 1879 for a career of wandering that ended a decade later in madness, both Bachofen and Overbeck remained to the end of their days in the city Nietzsche finally came to think of as “the unhappy breeding ground of all my ills” (Letter to Overbeck, May 3, 1879).

NOTES

1. See also *Heinrich von Treitschkes Briefe*, ed. Max Cornelius (Leipzig, 1914–20), vol. 3, p. 375, letter of 28 October 1873.

2. See on this point Alfred von Martin, *Nietzsche und Burckhardt*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 1942), p. 19.

3. See also “Die Grundgesetze der Völkerentwicklung und der Historiographie,” *GW*, vol. 6, pp. 416–18. On the idea of history as a drive toward ever higher spirituality, p. 431.

4. On the relation of individual and species (*Gattung*), see *CK*, pp. 280–81.

5. On the alleged difference between North German Lutheranism and the Reformed tradition of the Swiss and South German cities, see Berndt Moeller, *Reichstadt und Reformation* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962) and “Deutschland im Zeitalter der Reformation” in *Deutsch Geschichte*, 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985) pp. 68–69, 90–93. On the greater social content of the reformed doctrines of Bucer, Zwingli, and Calvin, as compared with Luther, see also Wilhelm Pauck, *The Heritage of the Reformation*, new ed. (Chicago: The Free Press, 1961), especially ch. 5 (“Luther and Butzer” [orig. 1929]; Herbert Lüthy, “Variations on a Theme by Weber,” in *International Calvinism: 1541–1715*, ed. Minna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 368–90; Hans Baron, “Calvinist Republicanism and its historical roots,” *Church History*, 8 (1939), pp. 30–42; Ernst Troeltsch, *Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), vol. 2, pp. 590–92 *et passim*. On the debate around Moeller's thesis, see Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation and the Cities* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 7–9 (“Trends in Reformation Research”), and Kaspar von Greyerz, “Stadt und Reformation: Stand und Aufgaben der Forschung,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 76 (1985), pp. 6–63.

6. On Overbeck as “Denker des Übergangs,” see Arie Nabrings, “Theologie zwischen Mythos und Reflexion. Franz Overbecks Diagnose,” *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 36 (1980) pp. 266–85.

7. On interpretations of Bachofen, see my *Orpheus philologus: Bachofen versus Mommsen on the Study of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983 [*Transactions*, vol. 73, pt. 5]), pp. 1–7, and “Basle. Bachofen and the Critique of Modernity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 47 (1984), pp. 136–85, esp. pp. 138–40. For divergent interpretations of Overbeck, see for example, Karl Barth, “Unsettled Questions for Theology Today,” in his *Theology and Church, Shorter Writings 1920–28*, trans. Louise P. Smith (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962), pp. 58–73 (originally a review of Overbeck’s *Christentum und Cultur* [1919]); Hans Schindler, *Barth und Overbeck: ein Beitrag zur Genesis der dialektischen Theologie im Lichte der gegenwärtigen theologischen Situation* (Gotha: Klotz, 1936); and John Elbert Wilson, “Die Zweideutigkeit in Franz Overbecks Aussagen über sein Unglauben,” *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 40 (1984) pp. 211–20.