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LIFE AGAINST NATURE

The Goldberg Circle
and the Search for a Non-Catastrophic Politics

Two days after Christmas Eve in 1934, Walter Benjamin wrote from San Remo to his friend, the historian of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem, that he had:

fallen into the headquarters of the genuine Magic Jews. For [Oskar] Goldberg has taken up residence here, and he has delegated his disciple [Adolf] Caspary to the cafés, and *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* [The Reality of the Hebrews] to the local newspaper stand, while he himself—who knows?—probably spends his time conducting tests of his numerology in the casino. Needless to say, I haven't engaged in conversation with this flank.¹

By distancing himself from Goldberg and Caspary, Benjamin helped to marginalise the so-called Goldberg circle from the history of philosophy that he himself became part of, for better or for worse. This was a missed chance for what could have been a fascinating dialogue with a current that theorised the possibility of abandoning the world of capital through a form of biological revolution.

According to Caspary, the course of capitalism as an industrialised economy showed clearly that "[t]he way of life of the masses, within an economy that produces by means of machines, must be proletarian, since even today the machine and not the 'order' [*die 'Ordnung'*] maintains the relation of capital. If the way of life of the masses remains as it is now then that means: justice is impossible. The relation between justice and machines is a utopia".² For Caspary, the machine is more than a mere instrument consisting of different parts that—taken as a whole—uses mechanical power to make particular tasks easier to perform. As we will see, it is a social mechanism bound to a specifically capitalist mode of production, which even produces a kind of "machine utopia"—*Maschinenutopie*—that is the necessary and deeply mystifying

1. Walter Benjamin & Gershom Scholem, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932–1940* (Harvard University Press 1992), 148.

2. Adolf Caspary, *Die Maschinenutopie: Das Übereinstimmungs-moment der bürgerlichen und sozialistischen Ökonomie* (Verlag David 1927), 79–80. All translations from this book are the author's.

horizon for an existence that can envision neither an economy nor a life beyond the factory.³ Anticipating the arguments of important theorists of technology after him, Caspary argued that machinery is not politically neutral, but rather an apparatus of proletarianisation tied to the production of surplus labour. This did not imply a naive primitivism, rather it raised the question of whether or not there is a more productive tool for the survival of the species than the machinery of industrial capitalism, whose catastrophic consequences for the biosphere Caspary predicted.

In this essay I shall probe the work on capitalism and technology developed by the Goldberg circle during the Weimar period which, with its economic crises and political turmoil, many argue is reflected in our own period of farcical but dangerous nationalist movements and protectionist trade wars. In doing so I will show how for this current, the critique of capital not only implied a strategy of secession but also an investigation of myth, philosophy, and religion that ultimately sought to formulate the possibility of a new anthropogenesis.

INTRODUCTION

The historian of myth Oskar Goldberg (1885–1952), the legal and economic historian Adolf Caspary (1898–1953), and their philosopher friend Erich Unger (1887–1950) became famous during the Weimar Period for their books on anthropology, economy, and religion edited by David Verlag. Between 1925 and 1933 they organised a series of seminars under the name *Philosophische Gruppe* [the philosophical group]. The meetings in Berlin were frequented by Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Karl Korsch, Robert Musil, Günther Stern (later Anders), Walter Benjamin and other prominent philosophers, poets, and revolutionaries. Today Goldberg and his circle are largely forgotten. Had it not been for Manfred Voigts's almost archaeological excavation of the work of Goldberg, Unger, and to a lesser extent Caspary, these three thinkers would probably still be unknown outside the circles of those specializing in either German Jewish thought or the avant-garde during the Weimar period.⁴

Bruce Rosenstock has recently published an important monograph on Goldberg that convincingly

3. Ibid., 77.

4. Manfred Voigts, *Oskar Goldberg: Der mythische Experimentalwissenschaftler: Ein verdrängtes Kapitel jüdischer Geschichte* (Agora 1992).

presents him as a prominent member of the vitalist tradition, emphasising the psychophysical basis of human thought.⁵

I have examined Goldberg's notion of humanity as what I call an animal of the infinite and discussed how the liberation of our species from his perspective could never be a simple affirmation of this life since it had to alter humanity's biological and sociological shortcomings.⁶ The Goldberg circle sought a way out of the long march into the domains of class, state, and civilisation which humanity, according to them, not only has been entrapped in, but increasingly could be identified with.

It may be the economist Adolf Caspary and his 1927 examination of Karl Marx's concept of machinery that make this current especially worth returning to in our time of climate catastrophes and the overall decline of capital. Through Caspary's reading of Marx, his critique of the Polish Marxist Henryk Grossmann, and the Goldberg circle's close connection to the poet and photographer Simon Guttmann, one of the founders of KAPD (*Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*), the group interacted with several milieus of revolutionaries during the Weimar period.⁷

Benjamin participated in the seminars organised by the Goldberg circle due to his interest in Unger, whose book *Politik und Metaphysik* [Politics and Metaphysics] from 1921 he enthusiastically described as the "most significant piece of writing on politics in our time".⁸ He based his essay "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" on Unger's philosophical interpretation of Goldberg's exegesis of the *Torah*, used Unger's examination of the concept of compromise in "Critique of Violence" and in the fragment "Capitalism as Religion" enigmatically wrote: "Overcoming of capitalism through migration [Wanderung], Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*".⁹

Decades before Jacques Camatte wrote "This world we must leave" and began to theorise the emergence of a *Homo Gemeinwesen*,

5. Bruce Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination* (Indiana University 2017).

6. Märten Björk, *Life Outside Life: The Politics of Immortality, 1914–1945* (Gothenburg University 2018).

7. For Caspary's critique of Grossmann see Adolf Caspary, 'Grossmann, Henryk: Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems. Zugleich eine Krisentheorie', *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 32 (2): 1930, 80–84.

8. Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem & Theodor W. Adorno (University of Chicago Press 1994), 172.

9. Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion' in *Selected Writings: 1913–1926* (Belknap 1999), 288–291. Here: 290.

and long before Paolo Virno defended his theory of a proletarian exodus from the social factory, Goldberg, Unger, and Caspary sought a secession from capital's "field of activities [*Wirkungsbereich*]"¹⁰ In practice this withdrawal implied the struggle for a "non-catastrophic politics" adequate to the tasks needed for survival in a world that had been ravaged by the first industrialised world war and was moving towards new disasters.¹¹

Recognising them as theorists of a secession from capitalism helps explain the Goldberg circle's closeness to Guttman, who was enthralled by Goldberg's religious genius and saved his writings after his death in 1953.¹² Their hope for an anthropological transformation of the human species and their theoretical work on myth, philosophy, and religion may seem foreign to the nexus of intellectuals belonging to the KAPD. Yet one of the party's other founders, the author and economist Franz Jung, defended an explicitly biological theory of revolution. In *Die Technik des Glücks* [The Techniques of Happiness], published in two parts in 1921 and 1923, he elaborated a theory of "the stream of life", arguing that the individual exemplar of the human species had become separated from the totality of biological existence.¹³ Similar to the ideas of others in his circle, such as Ernst Fuhrmann and Raoul Hausmann, Jung wrote that "*property and capital are the compromise of life, the living consciousness of the isolated [des Vereinzelten]*" and posited that the struggle against capital even showed that "the last motoric power source of human life is not yet released" since capitalism was an obstacle to the evolution of humanity.¹⁴ Not unlike Russian revolutionaries who speculated on a biological transformation of the human species through social change, such as the bolshevik Alexander Bogdanov and the theologian Nikolai Fyodorov, Jung thought that revolution could alter the natural conditions of human life.¹⁵

10. Erich Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik* (Königshausen & Neumann 1989), 148. All translations from this work are the author's. See also Jacques Camatte, 'This World We Must Leave' in *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays* (Autonomedia 1995), 137–180.

11. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 7.

12. For an introduction to Guttman's life and work see: Nicholas Jacobs and Diethart Kerbs, 'Wilhelm Simon Guttman, 1891–1990: A Documentary Portrait', *German Life and Letters* vol. 62 no. 4 (2009), 401–414. It is Richard Whelan who describes Guttman's interest in Goldberg's numerological speculations. See Richard Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography* (University of Nebraska Press 1985), 32.

13. Here I use the first volume: Franz Jung, *Die Technik des Glücks; psychologische Anleitungen in vier Übungsfolgen* (Der Malik Verlag 1921). All translations are the author's own.

14. *Ibid.*, 18 & 67.

In this context it is evident that the Goldberg circle is related to the left communist nexus and other avant-garde circles during the Weimar period that dabbled with biological ideas in a time when the discourses of race were becoming hegemonic. The group developed a new notion of life as an antidote to the politicisation of life that would culminate in the thanatopolitics of Nazism. Goldberg even used the *Torah* to depict the archaic Hebrew community of the five books of Moses as a missionary tribe that can be said to affirm what the Nazis called life unworthy of life, *Lebensunwertes Leben*, by living against the normalcy of nature that Nazism would exalt. We will see why this interest in ancient Judaism was—to use Camatte's description of ideas like these during the 1920s—not a mere "echo from the past".¹⁶ It was an intrinsic part of the group's attempt to initiate a debate on the necessity of a flight from the West in the time of Zionism, the general migration from the poverty, misery, and war in Europe.

The Goldberg circle was not oblivious to the blatant fact that the migration of the masses who abandoned the poverty of the old world did so in order to find jobs and survive as proletarians in a world market that made global migration possible. However, many of those who migrated also searched for ways to live outside the confines of the industrial system of capitalism, such as in phalansteries in the United States or the kibbutzim in Palestine. The Goldberg circle can be seen as a group strategising around the abandonment of capital or, to put it less dramatically, theorising a Jewish drop-out culture seeking to create alliances with the peoples living outside "the field of activities" of capital, in other words the industrialised countries of the West.

Today, the knowledge of how easily capital has subsumed its enemies leads even dependency theorists to argue for the impossibility of a delinking strategy. In this sense, any secession from capital may seem hopelessly naive. Not least because nowadays millions of the wretched of the earth are searching for a future in what is perhaps falsely deemed to be the core regions of capital. Still, Goldberg interpreted Caspary's reading of Marx as indicating that capitalism is less a totality subsuming everything in its midst than an anarchic, catastrophic system expelling workers from the immediate

15. See Boris Groys and Michael Hagemeister, eds., *Die Neue Menschheit – Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Suhrkamp 2005).

16. Camatte, 'Echoes of the Past' in *This World We Must Leave*, 181–250.

process of production and therefore producing its outside and slow demise. Thus, if, as it has been said, “subsumption cannot rigorously apply to historical periods per se, nor to anything beyond the immediate process of production” this is because capitalism has a centre, namely, the factory and the firm, and even more the industrial production these enterprises proscribe.¹⁷ Ten years after the Russian revolution, Caspary argued “the capitalist system is the necessary and adequate form of production with machinery, economically as well as politically. No revolution changes the imperialist politics of states or the proletarian way of life of the masses, since both are grounded in the coercion that the machine exerts”.¹⁸ Socialism and capitalism are from this perspective two facets of one and the same industrial world forming our species into a race of workers. Capitalism will never be able to produce a completely deindustrialised world; it will only generate the ruins of rust belts, the standardisation of economic life and the rise of new factories.

From this perspective, if a way out of capitalism is really being sought out, then the question of whether or not it is possible to move beyond what Joshua B. Freeman recently has called the Behemoth of industrialism is of utmost importance.¹⁹

Yet this question arises not only due to the fact that we are living in a world of species extinction and over-accumulation threatening life on the biosphere, but also because the world of capital has a distinct anthropological form. The Behemoth, Freeman writes, creates perhaps “not exactly a new man at one with the automatic machinery and industrial processes of the giant factory as envisioned, in their own ways, by Henry Ford, Alexei Gastev, and Antonio Gramsci. But a new man and a new woman nonetheless, with a time sense dictated by the needs of mass, coordinated activity and the rhythms of machinery”.²⁰ The Goldberg circle argued that this capitalist form of anthropogenesis had to be disrupted in order to make a way out imaginable. In fact they predicted that life under capitalism would be put into crisis by the catastrophic development of the machine world of capital itself.

17. Endnotes, ‘The History of Subsumption’, *Endnotes 2* (2010).

18. Caspary, *Die Maschinenutopie*, 83–84.

19. Joshua B. Freeman, *Behemoth: a History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World* (Norton 2018).

20. *Ibid.*, 319.

“The proletariat”, Goldberg wrote two years after the parliamentary victory of NSDAP, “is politically and biologically the weakest of classes”.²¹ This weakness does not mean that it is not rebellious or combative. It simply signifies that it is a supplement or surplus population, a *Zusatzbevölkerung*, “which lives due to the perfection and expansion of the machine, because only during the time of prosperous technical means of production more people can marry, more people can stay alive, and more people can be fed”.²² But this proletarianisation of humanity has a clear limit in the finite natural resources needed for the reproduction of the *noosphere* of capitalism that has spread over the earth’s crust. Goldberg asked: “What happens to the many, many millions of the technical surplus population when the machine catastrophe is here, when the factories stand still and the means of subsistence are withdrawn from the masses? In this case, these many millions will go under due to starvation since they are produced by technology’s increased leeway of life [*Lebenspielraum*]. We can predict how it will end: the raw material of the earth will end in the foreseeable future”.²³ A way out could only be revealed once the cycles of states and empires—with their pyramids, Chinese walls, Centre Pompidou, and Trump towers, or for that matter their Harrisburgs, Chernobyls, and Fukushimas—had been disrupted.

21. Oskar Goldberg, ‘Maimonides’ in *Zahl-engebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, edited by Manfred Voigts (Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), 123–217. Here: 215.

22. *Ibid.*, 214.

23. *Ibid.*

THE FIVE THOUSAND YEAR WORLD SYSTEM

For a period of time, Benjamin nurtured the hope that Unger would be a principal collaborator to his proposed review, “Angelus Novus”, but avoided a serious discussion with him because of his suspicion of Goldberg. This hostility was probably cultivated by Benjamin’s loyalty to Scholem, who had an estranged if not jealous relation to Goldberg. Goldberg became known in German Jewish circles and amongst religious scholars for his numerological reading of the five books of Moses published in 1908.²⁴ Yet what made Goldberg more widely famous was his massive exegesis, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer: Einleitung in das System des Pentateuch*

24. Oskar Goldberg, *Die fünf Bücher Mosis: Ein Zahlengebäude: Die Feststellung einer einheitlich durchgeführten Zahlenschrift* (Liebmann 1908).

[The Reality of the Hebrews: Introduction to the System of the Pentateuch], published in 1925, which Scholem described as biological kabbalism and even as “the classical work of Jewish Satanism”.²⁵

Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer found prominent readers in Franz Rosenzweig and Thomas Mann, while Goldberg’s later work, such as his book on Maimonides, fascinated Carl Schmitt.²⁶ Mann used Goldberg’s interpretation of the *Torah* as an inspiration for his four-part novel *Joseph and his Brothers* and based his portrait of the Jewish fascist Dr. Chaim Breisacher in *Doctor Faustus* on Goldberg.²⁷ Breisacher dreamt of a return to the world of ancient Hebrewdom, and was used by Mann as a symbol for the dangerous archaism that according to him had made Nazism possible. One might question why Mann, who himself had flirted with militarism and German nationalism, felt the need to use a Jewish thinker to depict the rise of Nazism. Yet the critique of civilisation that Goldberg and his circle defended was a violent rejection not only of Fascism and Nazism but also of the world that – according to him – had spawned these movements.

In a manner reminiscent of world system theorists, such as the late André Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, who have argued that “the contemporary world has a history of at least 5,000 years”, the Goldberg circle viewed empires such as Akkadia, Babylon, Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, and the long history of different Egyptian civilisations as the root of the capitalist system and the disasters it entailed.²⁸ This view of the contemporary world system as intrinsically linked to older modes of production – though as we will see, in a dialectical reversion also fundamentally different through the development of industrial machinery – can be part of explaining the Goldberg circle’s oscillation between anthropology of myth and political critique. In the series of books by Goldberg, Unger, and Caspary that was published by David Verlag between 1921 and 1927 under the heading “Theory, attempts at a

25. Gershom Scholem, *Briefe, Band I 1914–1947* (CH Beck 1994), 230 and Oskar Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer: Einleitung in das System des Pentateuch* (Harrassowitz Verlag 2005). All translations from these book are the author’s.

26. On Schmitt’s reading of Goldberg see Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life*, xxv.

27. For a detailed account of the relation between Thomas Mann and Oskar Goldberg, see Christian Hülshörster, *Thomas Mann und Oskar Goldbergs ‘Wirklichkeit der Hebräer’* (Klostermann 1999). See also the chapter ‘Thomas Mann und Oskar Goldberg’ in Voigts, *Oskar Goldberg*, 235–270

28. Andre Gunder Frank & Barry K. Gills, ‘The 5,000 year world system: An interdisciplinary introduction’ in *The World System: Five hundred years or five thousand?* (Routledge 1996), 3–55. Here: 3.

philosophical politics”, the group presented its critical anthropology of the course of civilisation.

The immediate political context of the series of books was not only the First World War, the first industrialised war which both the social democratic and the right-wing parties had endorsed in Germany, but also the period of hyperinflation that had begun in 1918. In March 1923, the Weimar republic plunged into a deep economic crisis, foreshadowing the great collapse of world capitalism in 1929. The mark could no longer be saved, and inflation rose drastically. Retail businesses began to hoard their inventories and refuse payment made in paper marks. At first, the stores in Berlin and several other cities were only open two or three days a week, and then subsequently, all over Germany, only on an hourly basis, and stock remained insufficient. As German Jews, Goldberg, Unger, and Caspary understood that the economic crisis would imply a dangerous radicalisation of centuries-old traditions of antisemitism. Their series of books edited by David Verlag was also an intervention in the debate on Zionism and the struggle for a Jewish homeland, as well as more generally a depiction of what they saw as the looming crisis of what I, with Gunder Frank, will call the five thousand year-old world system.

The first book in the series, Unger’s *Politik und Metaphysik* appeared in 1921 and defended an exodus from the industrial system of capital which was portrayed as unable to solve the basic problem of energy and food production through means other than coercion, war, and imperialism. “The economy”, Unger argued, “is by far the most extensive and plausible factor of explanation for almost all political affairs, the key to each party’s every action, to every statement, however abstract it seems”.²⁹ A way out must be sought that abandons the capitalist “field of activities” in its entirety. Otherwise, both the left and the right, tied as they are to the state, will reproduce “the politics of catastrophe” that is the destiny of the industrialised capitalist economy looming towards economic, ecological and entropic catastrophes such as the sixth species extinction that we know of today.

Politik und Metaphysik was supposed to be followed by a study on the concept of the people written by Goldberg, *Das Volk: Über eine dynamische Struktur in soziologischen Einheiten und die Theorie ihrer Formel* [The People: On the Dynamic Structure in Sociological Units

29. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 10–11.

and the Theory of their Formula]. This study would perhaps have explained Unger's argument that one must differentiate communities organised around economic interests grounded in a modern state from collectives that find a root in the psychophysical life of humanity that often clashes with the economy, such as in the hunger riots he witnessed in Germany after the war.³⁰ Instead it took four years until Goldberg's magnum opus *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* was published. This was an exegetical attempt to differentiate the *Torah* from the rest of *Tanakh*, the Jewish bible, by arguing that the former belonged to a period of myth and metaphysics rooted in the tribal life of prehistoric tribes that the other books in the Jewish bible did not depict.

Emphasising that the *Torah* belonged to a polytheistic and mythological order of archaic tribes Goldberg sought to understand ancient Hebrewdom as a break with the Mesopotamian and Egyptian empires which, from the perspective of Gunder Frank, can be viewed not only as the origin of written history but of the current world system itself. This made it important for Goldberg to differentiate between peoples [*Völker*] namely, the non-state archaic peoples of the world, and the non-peoples of the states [*Staate*], who are identified with the sedentary city civilisations in the *Torah*. It is important to note that for Goldberg, these sedentary civilisations embed humanity in nature rather than separate our species from it. For just "as the people is an instrument of *sublation* [*Aufhebung*], the state is an institution for the *stabilisation* of 'nature' and also for maintaining of the natural laws of normality".³¹ Here, one must note, the Goldberg circle clearly showed that their criticism of the rise of civilisation did not entail the hope of a return to nature. In fact, similar to some radical feminist theorists such as Shulamith Firestone, the group came close to arguing that it was the normality of human nature, not least sexual difference, that had forced humanity into the course of class and coercion in the first place.³² Yet I must wait to discuss this sublation or *Aufhebung* of the normality of nature which made an economic and even biological abundance possible. Here it suffices to note that it was in this rather late secession from civilisation itself, initiated by the Hebrews, that the Goldberg circle found an example of a rebellious community that used rites

³⁰.Ibid., 47.

³¹.Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 48.

³². Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (Verso 2015).

and taboos to alter biological life itself, which could inspire men and women to take up this withdrawal from the five thousand year-old world system. They did not seek an alternative in any primitive communism or what Marshall Sahlins has called an original affluent society, but in a rather recent withdrawal from the world of empires and states that we are still part of.³³ However, Goldberg argued that this secession must not only be a withdrawal from what humanity has become during the course of civilisation, but also from the life that made this history of coercion possible.

As problematic it may be, the Goldberg circle meant that the catastrophic politics of their times had to be understood in relation to what they saw as the normal course of human evolution. Our world has been evolving out of the banal and contingent effect of the violence inherent in nature itself, visible, for instance, in aging, death, and even the pain and danger of birth. In order to survive our species has become a creature that dwells in states, families, and other institutions that stabilise the catastrophic tendency of nature, which, through a long process of coercion, exploitation, and violence has coagulated as capitalism in modern times. From Goldberg's point of view, this stabilisation of nature through the state is not in any sense an eradication or sublation of natural phenomena such as aging, droughts, epidemics, the simple fact of biological death or for that matter sexual difference, but rather their equilibrium. With the advent of capitalism, it may seem like humanity has mastered nature, not least due to the abnormal population growth of our species that Caspary argued was a product of the development of the industrialised world. But this stabilisation of nature implies a violent pressure on the biosphere itself. This fact is visible in the proliferation of entropic processes driven by technological development, and more importantly for the Goldberg circle, the reduction of humanity to a species of proletarians entrapped in the industrialised world that workers are erecting all over the planet in order to survive as wage workers.

What Goldberg emphasised with his theory of the state as a stabilisation of nature, albeit in a manner many would deem as too general, was that every territorial state is tied to the natural resources that constitute the material basis of its economy. Thus, Unger's description of all modern political parties as interest groups dominated by the

³³. Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Aldine 1972).

imperatives of the economy had its ultimate historical condition in the rise of sedentary civilisation and the stabilisation of the catastrophic tendency of nature that accompanied it. From this perspective, growing states fighting for more accumulation are forced to exploit their natural resources, often resulting in environmental catastrophes. According to Goldberg, the stabilisation of nature as a resource for accumulation is the very decline to normality [*Verfall zur Normalität*] that the Hebrews sought to free themselves from by developing a new metabolic relation to nature through the customs, rites, and taboo systems depicted in the *Torah* and which severed them from the civilizations around them.

This bleak view on the course of human civilisation was the world historical background for Unger's intervention in the debate on Zionism, *Die staatenlose Bildung eines jüdischen Volkes: Vorrede zu einer gesetzgebenden Akademie* [The Stateless Formation of a Jewish People: Preface to a Legislative Academy], from 1925. On the basis of Goldberg's theory of the state as a stabilisation of nature and therefore a normalisation of its destructive character, Unger argued that it would be dangerous for the Jewish community to become part of the nation states that belong to the whole European world "which is nothing but an intermediate catastrophe".³⁴

He insisted that building such a state would subsume the Jews to the course of history that had entrapped many other peoples in its catastrophic form of life, and thereby sever the Jews' link to the prehistoric and archaic peoples and tribes of the world that also lacked territorial states: "The Jews should not overlook their singularly favourable position, namely, that since two thousand years they have materially been a people without history, the only one that can be free from being beaten by the fetters of the past and the reality of an empirical state existence that all other peoples have been beaten by".³⁵ Instead of building a state in the European sense, Unger proposed the construction of philosophical schools that would train Jews to develop a metaphysics for a stateless existence that should even seek alliances with the non-Western, archaic communities scattered around the world. This was a suggestion that Unger had already defended in *Politik und Metaphysik* but there these, what he called "metapolitical universities", were open for everyone

who sought to abandon the politics of catastrophe whose centre the Goldberg circle certainly found in the industrialised world.³⁶ In *Die staatenlose Bildung eines jüdischen Volkes* Unger was closer to Goldberg and emphasised the need to produce a new type of metapolitics for the Jewish community in order to habituate it to a life outside the European states.

This metapolitics, or what Unger also called metaphysics, was not a Gramscian insistence that, to use the words of a contemporary right-wing ideologue, "politics is downstream from culture". On the contrary, Unger was not afraid to reduce culture to economy. He saw all modern cultures and religions as epiphenomena and superstructures to the economic base of society. Like John Maynard Keynes, he even defined economy as a biological problem. For, according to the great economist, economy is nothing but a "struggle for subsistence, [which] always has been hitherto the primary, most pressing problem of the human race — not only of the human race, but of the whole of the biological kingdom from the beginnings of life in its most primitive forms".³⁷ When the Goldberg circle referred to the economy, they were most often referring to the primary sector of economic activity; in other words, the extraction of raw materials through activities like mining and agriculture, which laid the basis for the biological survival of our species.³⁸

But, what Unger wanted to emphasise in *Politik und Metaphysik* was that just as it is possible to change the economic management of needs, the needs themselves can be altered. In the long course of human history this has been done many times before through systems of rites and taboos, such as those described in the *Torah*. This interest in the plasticity of needs is probably one of the reasons why the group never developed a theory of the inequality or coerciveness of the community of the *Torah*, although they attacked capitalism as fundamentally unjust and coercive. What was for them a more urgent task than a sociology of injustice in prehistoric tribes was an anthropological research ultimately revealing that different economies have implied radically different ways to understand reality due to the ways of life they entail. This necessary relation between altering the economy of needs, which for Unger can be identified with politics, and understand-

36. Ibid., 52.

37. John Maynard Keynes, 'Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren' [1930] in *Essays in Persuasion* (W. W. Norton 1963).

38. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 21.

34. Erich Unger, *Die Staatslose Bildung eines Jüdischen Volkes* (Verlag David 1922) 19–20.

35. Ibid., 31.

ing the structure of reality, which Unger identified with metaphysics, is ultimately what the group tried to theorise, and why he called his book *Politik und Metaphysik*.

What the Goldberg circle called metaphysics was nothing but the science of understanding the conditions of possibility of what is, in other words the economy of being itself, and therefore, dialectically, what could be. In this sense, the group meant that a metaphysics, as a science of possibility, was an indispensable means for all serious politics and therefore a form of life and not solely a thought system. Metaphysical understanding was related to instincts as well as thought and in the end a lived reality that for the Hebrews took the form of the system of needs on the outskirts of civilisation that the *Torah* depicts and which made their tribe wage a war against existing human nature. The harsh cultivation of daily life that the laws and rules of the *Torah* prescribed was according to Goldberg therefore related to a metaphysics that revealed the plasticity of human life and being itself.

In sharp contrast to ancient Greek politics and classical ontology, which traditionally begin with the question of the state and the philosophy of being, Goldberg argued in *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* that the metaphysics of the *Torah* was grounded on a modal ontology needed for survival in the desert: “The world, as the epitome of everything that is, is composed of a finite and an infinite part”.³⁹ The finite part — namely what we take to be physical nature — is constituted by time, space, and the law of causality, and this can be identified with the processes that the states stabilise and normalise as being as such. For, Goldberg underlined, “[i]n contradiction to Kant, space, time, and causality are not forms of intuition, but rather the constitutive forms of finite reality”.⁴⁰ They constitute the domain of finite nature where humanity normally grounds its life, whereas the infinite part of reality is the realm of possibility preceding the realm of finite space and time as a domain that contradicts the laws of classical logic and implies a conflict with what seems to be nature as such.

The *Torah* portrays the world, Goldberg argued, as fractured between what in contemporary cosmology is called the domain of *res extensae*, which for Goldberg is the natural domain of everything material, spatial, and temporal, and the domain of *res potentiae*, the eternal

39. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 1.

40. *Ibid.*, 3.

and infinite domain of everything that could be.⁴¹ This notion that reality is not only, to use the famous words of Donald Rumsfeld, constituted by “known knowns” or “known unknowns” but also more importantly, “unknown unknowns”, had immediate political consequences for Goldberg. It suggested an extreme openness of the cosmos itself, most visible in the faculty of imagination of that animal Unger called an unfinished creature, namely, the human whose mental and practical life indicated that the facticity of nature, what is at hand and given, is not an exhaustion of reality. From this perspective, the realm of the possible is vaster than the realm of nature and this ontology of possibility was for Goldberg the world historical discovery of the *Torah* and enacted in the life forms described in the five books of Moses as a practical metaphysics aiming to alter nature. This did not imply that Goldberg thought that everything was possible in nature and therefore in society which is solely a natural fact in time and space. But it meant that he identified the systems of taboos in the *Torah* as technologies that were used to change society and nature. By differentiating nature as a sphere of actuality from the domain of potentiality whose entities, such as the paradise or the classless society, forever may only be thought or desired, he attempted not only to show the difference between the actual and the possible or for that matter what may only be thought or desired. He sought to avoid equating reality with what is actualised in time and space by arguing that the possible comes before the actual and thereby he could insist that what we take to be real can be consciously contested since it does not exhaust the modality of reality that human imagination indicates. This is, in the end, what the *Torah* teaches: it points to a modal ontology of the human imagination.

Goldberg’s cosmological interpretation of the *Torah* as a modal ontology is directly related to a more general understanding of reality as something plastic and changeable that became popular during the Weimar period. For example, Franz Jung insisted on the importance of addressing the relativity of the laws of nature itself — “We talk of law, since we feel it *in* us and not over us, while we carry and live with it, that is we are co-creators of this law” — and even argued that death itself may be abolished.⁴² It was certainly similar ideas that made it urgent

41. See Stuart A. Kauffman, ‘Res Potentia and Res Extensa Linked, hence United, by Quantum Measurement’ in *Physics and Speculative Philosophy: Potentiality in Modern Science* (De Gruyter 2016), 47–52.

for the Goldberg circle to challenge what the philosopher Alexius Meinong had already in 1904 called 'the prejudice in favour of the actual', namely, mistaking what is with what is given in time and space.⁴³ This identification of the real with what is given and actual is for Goldberg something of the ontological superstructure for the five thousand year old world system that now, as it is entering its decline, makes way for new systems of metaphysics and their attendant forms of life.

It was in this sense Unger argued that for the human who seeks to abandon the reduction of reality to what is given "metaphysics is not a luxury and superstructure that is not vital in itself; it is his own indispensable method—both typical and decisive for life and death—for ensuring that he and those like him can live together".⁴⁴ Metaphysics is, as we have seen, not merely theoretical but a communal form of life; a praxis needed for survival in order to uphold a certain kind of collective existence. This is why metaphysics for the Goldberg circle was best exemplified by the tribal communities of the prehistoric world rather than by the philosophical schools of antiquity that defended different metaphysical systems and which, as Pierre Hadot has shown, aimed to alter individuals' lives and not only explain the structure of reality.⁴⁵ Thus, even if ancient philosophy certainly was a practice altering the life of the student who followed the philosophical masters in the different philosophical schools—such as Platonism or Stoicism—these schools belonged to the course of civilisation or what Goldberg called the order of fixation.

From a more Marxist perspective one could say that philosophy is based on the scission between physical and mental labour through the advent of slavery and the break with primitive communism. The dissolution of this archaic world gives rise to peoples of culture—*Kulturvölker*—that populate the five thousand year-old world system, where the separation between metaphysics and politics, which was inconceivable for tribal and prehistoric communities according to Unger, culminates in a view of life where the given is what is. In the end, metaphysics is myth, since myth for Goldberg is not a story but a structure of reality. This structure is indicated in the stories we call

42. Jung, *Die Technik des Glücks*, 119–120.

43. Alexius Meinong, *Über Gegenstandstheorie & Selbstdarstellung* (Felix Meiner Verlag 1988), 3.

44. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 28.

45. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy* (Belknap 2004).

myths since they often are pointing to the lives and views on the cosmos of different archaic tribes. Myths should according to Goldberg therefore be interpreted as indicating how different archaic life forms altered nature in order to survive. They show that mythology indicates the technology of a construction of a people with the power to sublimate reality and thereby produce a form of life.

Goldberg's understanding of myth as a lived and practical system of metaphysics was explained in 1926, when Unger's *Das Problem der mythischen Realität: Eine Einleitung in die Goldbergische Schrift "Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer"* [The Problem of the Mythical Reality: An Introduction to Goldberg's Essay 'The Reality of the Hebrews'], was published in the series edited by David Verlag.⁴⁶ Here, Unger examined Goldberg's ideas that the possible or the domain of *res potentiae* is the larger part of the real, whereas the order of the actual—*res extensae*—is only the surface of this vaster reality of potentiality. He discussed what was implied by the fact that the Hebrews described this world of potentiality as the *Elohim IHWH*—the God of all gods, the creator God—and how the *Torah* catalogues an extensive list of extreme disruptions of the normalcy of nature. Unger shows how Goldberg aimed to develop a secular anthropology of miracles and explain why the metaphysics of the *Torah* implied, in contrast to other mythical systems, a transformation of nature itself.

The *Torah* separated the *Elohim IHWH* from nature and contrasted these two entities as a perfect and an imperfect order. The creator deity is the eternal potentiality of everything that can be, an eternal life, whereas the world is a finite and imperfect instantiation of this eternal modality plagued with the problems of life such as sickness, aging, death, etc., simply because finite nature cannot, by definition, be eternal and thereby perfect in the sense that it cannot die.⁴⁷ Yet the *Torah* was a myth that sought to mutate nature so that that finite and imperfect life could move beyond itself and thereby initiate an economy and even a biology of abundance, surely close to what Marxists would call communism, a classless and stateless society, but which was even closer to Jung's ideas in *Die Technik des Glücks*

46. Erich Unger, *Das Problem der mythischen Realität: Eine Einleitung in die Goldbergische Schrift "Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer"* (David Verlag 1926). All translations are the author's own.

47. This implies a fascinating political theodicy which I have discussed. See Björk, 'The Animal of the Infinite: Oskar Goldberg and the Science of Evil' in *Life Outside Life*, 217–284.

of a biological transformation of life. The Hebrews wanted to free themselves from what has been called “the prison house of human nature” and perhaps demonstrated the truth of the thesis that “‘socialism’ is to change society, ‘communism’ is to change the human” since for the Goldberg circle there was not only a historical but also an anthropological dimension of revolution.⁴⁸ In other words, society has changed a lot during the development of the five thousand year old world system, but what must change is human nature, which makes a civilisational animal of the human.

It was in this sense, Unger argued, that anthropological research into human history may indicate that not even the natural limits of a given society can be seen as impossible to change. Different ways of life can transform the finite and scarce resources of an economy into something reminiscent of the abundance of life that the *Torah* posited as being itself. But today, it can only do so through a critique of the economic process in which, Unger insisted, “the state becomes nature”, that is to say through a concrete interruption of the stabilisation of nature so radical that it forces “not only the state’s nature, but also the psycho-physical nature beyond its current endpoint”.⁴⁹ Thus for the Goldberg circle, metaphysics was a communal form of life seeking to disrupt the stabilisation of nature through a sublation of what we consider to be normal. Now, in a time where no such forms of life exist since most human communities are part of the five thousand year-old world system, the task, according to the Goldberg circle, is to develop a philosophical politics that can revive such a form of life from the internal crisis this world is moving towards through the advent of industrial civilisation.

TWO FORMS OF TECHNOLOGY

By juxtaposing anthropological studies of ancient religion and tribal communities and critical examinations of modern capitalism, Goldberg aimed to develop a “contemporary transcendental reality-research” of human life.⁵⁰ The philosopher Margarete Susman, an early interpreter of Goldberg, has clarified that the transcendental here simply means

48. Mario Tronti, *Con le spalle al futuro – Per un altro dizionario politico* (Editori Riuniti 1992), 136.

49. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 27.

50. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 16.

“the general” or the common characteristics of an epoch in a Kantian sense.⁵¹ By differentiating between the general anthropological conditions of the world of the *Torah* and the polytheistic period of myth it belonged to and those of the five thousand year-old world system, in other words the period of fixation, Goldberg could wager that it was possible to read the *Torah* as a manual for the birth of a new political order.

Goldberg agreed with the French school of anthropology, perhaps best represented by Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss – who helped Goldberg and Caspary to France after the *Machtübernahme* in Germany – that the basis of human social life may be found in archaic communities and ancient religion.⁵² However, against this school of sociology and anthropology that sought the invariance of human life, the Goldberg circle insisted on a crucial distinction between the *Gemeinwesen* of the archaic tribes and subsequent modes of human existence. Since they depicted different modes of life, Goldberg argued in *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* that the *Torah* had to be differentiated from the rest of the *Tanakh*. The five books of Moses depicted *Urjudentum* [ancient Judaism], “the doctrine which is contained in the oldest part of the Bible... The Bible is not an ideological unit. Its books extend over a period of 1,500 years”.⁵³ Thereby, if traditional theology belongs to the religion of faith and the rise of the religions of the fixated world, then *Urjudentum* belonged to the mythical epoch where humanity is differentiated into separate totemistic groups with distinct divinities and myths. These races or peoples, as Goldberg called them, implied different ways of working with nature, in other words, different ways of solving the banal problems of human life such as birth, death, the need for energy and food, and thereby they also produced different forms of mythical or metaphysical cosmologies. The tribes therefore demonstrated the intrinsic relation between metaphysics and politics.

During the archaic period of the *Torah*, Unger explained in *Das Problem der mythischen Realität*, there existed a myriad of tribes outside the vast orders of civilisations and “every people, every anthropological mode of being [anthropologische Art-Gemeinschaft] is a

51. Margarete Susman, ‘Vortrag über Oskar Goldberg’ in Goldberg, *Zahlengebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, 389–408. Here: 397.

52. On Caspary’s and Goldberg’s relation to Mauss see Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss: A Biography* (Princeton University Press 2006), 355

53. Oskar Goldberg, ‘Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer’ in *Zahlengebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, 299–304. Here: 299.

connection, a concentration, a summation of powers that imply a new attack on the natural order, that is, on the meaning of the human itself".⁵⁴ Unger explained that Goldberg's real discovery in *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* was an anthropology that emphasised our ways of working with the nature that surrounds us and which we are part of. Humanity is a species that moulds nature through different technical means, and in this sense our species is by necessity a creature that uses apparatuses, instruments, and other tools in order to domesticate nature. Technology is our metabolic relation to nature and this — what Friedrich Engels would call — labour produces what the Goldberg circle described, in accord with a long German tradition, as the domain of spirit, *Geist*. But in sharp contrast to the Hegelian tradition, they saw spirit as something much more living and vivid in the prehistoric world of the archaic tribes than in the rise of civilisation which would produce a form of humanity that increasingly comes to see *Geist* as nothing more than a simple set of drives camouflaging our struggle for power and survival. To an extent Goldberg, Caspary, and Unger can be seen as part of this modern current of suspicion that unveiled the ideological basis of our culture since they saw civilisation as a repression of life itself. Yet, they differ from Freudian and Nietzschean interpretation of reality through their ontology of life and myth.

It is telling that in *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, spirit is identified as the source of biological life as such, in other words with the *Elohim IHWH*, and Goldberg postulates that the *Torah* finds an inner divide [*Kluft*], between the dimensions of life and matter in nature.⁵⁵ Life is "the transcendence of matter" which means that all living, biological organisms exist in an ecstatic state in the sense that even the most basic life forms have some way to register what is outside them.⁵⁶ The fruit fly, for example, does not know that in the taxonomy of specific human communities it belongs to the species of *Drosophilidae*, but it can grasp information from its surroundings and in different manners adapt, survive, and in a rudimentary sense know or at least feel that it is living. It is in this sense that life for Goldberg is the power of potentiality, visible in the attempts of every organic being to survive. When this potency is given human form it is

54. Unger, *Das Problem der mythischen Realität*, 38–39.

55. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 5.

56. *Ibid.*

harnessed as a kind of second nature, such as in the tools and instruments that humans use as their natural means of interacting with the rest of nature.

The Goldberg circle saw the human animal as radically unfit for an immediate life in a specific habitat of nature, and it was therefore forced to use what the philosopher Arnold Gehlen called culture (a word that Goldberg eschewed) in order to compensate for its lack of natural instincts.⁵⁷ Humans have, due to their lack of strong instincts, no immediate relation to a specific habitat and must survive by developing metabolic technologies and institutions such as tools used to kill animals and domesticate plants, mythic forms of life that regulate existence, or for that matter states stratified by class, race, and gender. But if this proved for Gehlen that the human was a being of lack [*Mängelwesen*] that compensates its absence of immediate instincts that make other animals naturally fit into their habitat, for Goldberg it indicated not lack but rather the absolute plasticity of not only human life, but being itself. It even made him argue in a speculative manner that the human belongs to the domain of infinite potentiality, *Geist*, rather than finite nature. This difference from other animals was most visible in humankind's use of technology, first simply the technology of tools and then increasingly the use of specifically capitalist technology. However, the history of human existence suggested that the human of the five thousand year-old world system — the species of fixation desperately seeking to use technology to stabilise nature in order to survive — had to be differentiated from the humans of archaic tribes, since their technologies had a different metabolic relation to nature.

In a study from 1930, *Wirklichkeit Mythos Erkenntnis* [Reality Myth Knowledge], Unger developed Goldberg's fundamental differentiation of human life according to their different modes of interaction with nature.⁵⁸ Today our species often modifies and interacts with the world around us — and ourselves — through advanced technological instruments, and it seems unavoidable that our species is becoming a kind of cyborg that has permanently altered the world with its industrial technomass. As Unger wrote, "[t]he technology which mankind has created entails an entire world beside the natural

57. Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (Athenäum-Verlag 1950), 9–20.

58. Erich Unger, *Wirklichkeit Mythos Erkenntnis* (Verlag R. Oldenbourg 1930), 69.

[world]... which admittedly operates with the forces of nature, but only in order to guide them in the direction that humans want".⁵⁹ Still, for Unger, even if this form of capitalist technology is "the most powerful instrument... for taming nature, [it] is still not the most radical [instrument] that humanity can undertake to this end".⁶⁰ The most radical instrument is myth, or what is also described as metaphysics. Now we can see that myth and metaphysics are technologies to construct a people seeking to alter the metabolic relation to nature itself. For such a people — we remember — does not stabilise but rather sublates nature through a process of negation often concretised in mythic and religious patterns of life, such as in taboos that cultivate how we hunt, eat, have sex, and so on. This is why other metabolic relations to nature, or other forms of attacking nature (as the Goldberg circle described this relation in order to express their unromantic view of nature) have been and indeed may still be anthropologically possible.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

ONWARD BARBARIANS

The foundation of Goldberg's theory of myth as a technology to construct a people with the aim of sublating nature can be found in the chapter of *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* aptly entitled "The equation: Peoples=Gods=Worlds". Here Goldberg argues that a people enacts the life of a deity, for in the *Torah*, the *Elohim* — the Hebrew plural form for gods but which is also used to describe one deity such as the *Elohim IHWH* — is not, as in other parts of the *Tanakh*, related to the notion of humankind, "but most intimately linked to the concept of the *people*, and... the god for the people has an eminently *biological* significance".⁶¹ The people is the collective life form of a tribe which cultivates a world that can be identified with its symbolic representations and ritual habits ordered by the rules and laws of their gods, *Elohim*. These divinities can, in turn, be identified as the biological centres, ancestry [*Abstammung*], or point of origin [*Abstammungszentrum*], of specific tribes and peoples. In other words, a god is the communal existence that ties the order of humans to what Goldberg called *Geist*, but only through mediation by a specific totem animal or plant that structures its metabolic relation to nature.

61. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 16.

In an article on totemism from 1927, Caspary explained how this totemistic theory of deities as the pattern for communal life is related to the openness of our species as beings of *Geist* in the sense that we can imitate different gods and therefore have distinct relations to the natural world (and therefore to ourselves as psychophysical beings part of nature): "They who come from a water-totem can live in water. For this is the special biological ability of the fish. But humankind has the capacity to develop all biological abilities — thus also this one".⁶² By accepting different totems and gods as their own deities, tribes of men and women alter and therefore sublimate their psychophysical and metabolic constitution in relation to the natural element — the *Abstammung* or *Abstammungszentrum* — that they are connected with through their deity.

62. Adolf Caspary, "Was ist Totem?" *Der Querschnitt* no. 7 vol. 3 (1927), 187–189. Here: 189

Obviously, the relation is also reversible: by living in a specific manner in a specific habitat the tribe can adopt an animal or plant as their deity. The deity is the praxis of the people, but this did not imply that the gods did not exist according to the Goldberg circle. It simply meant that the existence of gods is a form of real abstraction, a power that could ground men and women in a specific communal life through the rules of a specific totem or fetish, which is not that dissimilar from how a collective entity such as a city or a nation exists as something more than the praxis that constitutes it, since it is a totality with a life of its own. However, in sharp contrast to these later real abstractions, myths are a way to sublimate rather than stabilise human nature. Pointing to ethnological evidence showing that shamanic and totemistic rituals and myths often involve the donning of animal skins and performing dances in imitation of animals, Caspary argued that these rites can be interpreted as the channelling of the power of the gods into a specific way of existence. Since a god is nothing but a specific community's sublation of nature, it is equivalent to the community's way of life. This cultivation of a totemistic life in relation to a deity is therefore essentially a psychophysical technique since "[t]he core of totemism... consists in a relation of man to the animal — his totem" and this implies a transformation of life in relation to the animal or plant that the tribe imitates.⁶³ In other words, totemism is a technology used by tribes to acquire specifically those instincts which Gehlen thinks that human life lacks,

63. Ibid., 187.

but that may be needed to survive in a specific habitat. We could say it is a transformation of our species into something other than a *Mängelwesen* [being of lack] and thereby a way of sublating nature.

One can easily see that like later anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, the Goldberg circle described myth as a form of technology of the body that connects the tribe to the domain of *Geist* through the mediation of nature. Goldberg sought remnants of these kinds of techniques and his studies in medicine as a student even led him to Nepal where he conducted research for his dissertation on yogi practices and rituals, *Die abnormalen biologischen Vorgänge bei orientalischen Sekten* [The Abnormal Biological Processes in Orientalist Sects], such as the reduction of respiration and heart rates.⁶⁴ It is this sublation of nature, in other words the transformation of the psychophysical and metabolic constitution of human existence, which is increasingly lost in the period of fixation that, today, has its centre in the West due to the victory of European capitalism. Goldberg would without doubt agree with Lévi-Strauss that in regard to “the connection between the physical and the mental, the East and the Far East are several thousand years ahead [of Western civilisation]; they have produced the great theoretical and practical summae represented by Yoga in India, the Chinese “breath-techniques”, or the visceral control of the ancient Maoris”.⁶⁵ In a similar manner, Lévi-Strauss’ claim that the “West, for all its mastery of machines, exhibits evidence of only the most elementary understanding of the use and potential resources of that super-machine, the human body” echoes Goldberg’s critique that the five thousand year old world system has resulted in a loss of the mythological techniques that have been used to sublimate rather than stabilise nature.⁶⁶

Technology and myth are therefore different instruments, different ethnologies, different metaphysics, even – confusingly – different technologies producing diverging ways to work with humanity’s metabolic relation to nature. Traditional technology produces the *homo faber*, the animal which lives in the world of states of empires that – in hindsight – seemingly moves towards contemporary capitalism and its world of factories, whereas myth differentiates our species into

64. Unfortunately this dissertation is lost. See Voigts, *Oskar Goldberg*, 28–32 for more information about this period of Goldberg’s life.

65. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Unesco 1958), 27.

66. *Ibid.*

a myriad of psychophysical groups with different totems and what Goldberg called biological centres. In other words, technology is related to what Goldberg calls the state and its stabilisation of nature as an economic resource needed for survival, whereas myth is related to the people that alters the need of human economy in relation to a sublation of nature.

This is why from Goldberg’s perspective, the rise of the world of fixation implies an anthropological homogeneity, since without the communities of prehistoric tribes, there are no biological centres, no totem gods, and therefore no mythical peoples sublating rather than stabilising nature. Only a few years after Adolf Hitler’s electoral success Goldberg even wrote sarcastically: “Life is but a barren remainder, the contemporary groups of life are also rudimentary. What meaning do peoples and races have today? The truth is: none at all”.⁶⁷ All contemporary races and peoples are “born out of geopolitical and economic interests” rather than grounded in the ancestries of deities and gods, which constituted different mythological communities.⁶⁸ Humanity is certainly not unified but the competing nations and conflicting classes that divide our species are nurtured by the same abstract, economic interests that the decline to the normality found in wage labour and machine production entails.

Paradoxically, for Goldberg, race is the mythical and ethnological relation between a people and the deity which acts as its ancestry [*Abstammung*]. To belong to a race is to have one’s ancestry outside oneself. It is not, we have to remember, to stabilise nature through some form of *Kraft durch Freude* [Strength through joy], or socialist eugenics, but to disrupt life and make it fundamentally abnormal. It is evident that the Goldberg circle intervened in the political debate on race and biology during the Weimar period and after the rise of Nazism, since they blatantly rejected the existence of races during the fixated period. In Germany, before 1914, “racial hygiene had been decisively rejected by the Imperial administration as a violation of prevailing ethical codes and of personal liberty”.⁶⁹ However, it became institutionalised and accepted in academic and other public institutions during the Weimar Republic, not least due to the hard work of prominent scientists and visionaries like Ernst

67. Goldberg, ‘Die Bibelkritik’, 293.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Paul Weindling ‘Weimar eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm-Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Social Context’ →

Haeckel, the physician Wilhelm Schallmayer, the biologist and eugenicist Alfred Ploetz (founder of the Society for Race Hygiene, the first eugenics society in history).⁷⁰ All of them argued before the Weimar period for the necessity of a politics that secured the health of the nation, and indicated the importance of viewing the state as what the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén, famous for coining the terms biopolitics and geopolitics, called a “form of life”.⁷¹

Schallmayer openly professed his belief in a biological politics [*biologische Politik*], in order to secure the hygiene and health of the people of the German Empire.⁷² He identified a conflict between supposed racial interest [*Rasseinteresse*] and social interest [*Sozialinteresse*].⁷³ At the same time, Schallmayer, who was a socialist, openly rejected Aryan ideologies as pseudo-scientific. It was therefore not only fascists or right-wing militants who spurred the eugenics movements and became heralds for the biopolitics of Nazism; some argued that eugenics could even be used for liberal or progressive aims by securing the health of a population.⁷⁴ Other more utopian scientists, such as the Lamarckian biologist and revolutionary socialist Paul Kammerer, developed a program of organic technology with the purpose of transforming human evolution itself. Together with the pacifist and sociologist Rudolf Goldscheid, Kammerer professed the need of a revolutionary *Menschen-Ökonomie* [people economy] altering the biological substrate of the proletariat.⁷⁵

It was in the context of this debate that the Goldberg circle intervened with their rejection of the need to cultivate the normality of nature, but also with their theory of myth, which had become an explicitly political concept due to Georges Sorel’s writings. Four years after the NSDAP had taken power in Germany, Goldberg attacked this revival of myth writing, apropos Sorel and Friedrich Nietzsche, that when

Annals of Science vol. 42 no. 3 (1985), 303–318. Here: 304.

70. Ibid.

71. See Rudolf Kjellén, *Staten som livsform* (Hugo Gebers Förlag 1916).

72. See the chapter ‘Biologische Politik’ in Wilhelm Schallmayer, *Beiträge zu einer Nationalbiologie* (Hermann Costenoble 1905), 65–150. All translations from this work are the author’s own.

73. Ibid., 67.

74. The polymath scientist J.B.S. Haldane, famous for his work on physiology, evolutionary biology and mathematics, was, for example, a herald of a biopolitical theory from a Marxist perspective, but he also understood the danger of eugenics. In his book, *Heredity and Politics* from 1938, which violently attacked the race politics of the Nazis as unscientific and irrational, he noticed for example that ‘the English National Council of Labour Women has recently passed a resolution in favour of the sterilization of defectives, and this operation is legal in Denmark and other countries considerably to the “left” of Britain in

they “call the peoples of an age marked by the absence of metaphysics... to intoxicate themselves to tragic heights, then it is not the old and true myth... it is rather the ‘Myth of the twentieth century’ which is destined to do little more than push the masses to pseudo-bacchanalian rage”.⁷⁶ Referring to the antisemitic propagandist Alfred Rosenberg’s *The Twentieth Century Mythos* from 1930, Goldberg made clear that the rise of Nazism—or for that matter the theories of Sorel and Nietzsche—were not in any sense a revival of a pre-modern, archaic, cultic world of the *Torah*, where what he called the old and true myth could be found, but technological *Kunstprodukte* [artificial products].⁷⁷ In fact, “the old and true myth” was, as we will see, much younger than the course of the fixated world that Nazism and other modern totalitarian movements belong to. What is important here is that when Golderberg attempted to study the different totemistic peoples who imitated the *Elohim*, he found they had nothing in common with Nietzsche, Sorel or Rosenberg’s theories.

Thus, while Mario Tronti showed *operaismo*’s deep debts to Sorel by insisting in *Con le spalle al futuro* [With the backs turned towards future] that “contrary to what everyone thinks, the fault [la colpa] of communism is the fault of modernity [del moderno] according to Nietzsche and Hölderlin: that of not being able to generate new gods”, Goldberg did not seek to conjure new deities.⁷⁸ He would certainly agree with Tronti that a critique of capital must be a critique of modernity—since capitalism is the modern world *tout court*—and he would also concur that the failure of communism was its failure to take a form that was different from modern, capitalist industrialism. But his theory of myth was a rejection ...of the world that not only made the philosophy of Nietzsche and the politics of Rosenberg and Sorel possible, but the very idea that gods could be generated as *Kunstprodukte*.

In this regard, the Goldberg circle was radically primitivistic. This

their politics’. Haldane criticised these and similar positions but professed his loyalty to a politics of heredity by arguing that the increase in our knowledge of biology and genetics may ‘fully justify the application to man of certain measures which have led to improvements in the quality of our domestic animals’. See J.B.S. Haldane, *Heredity and Politics* (Allen and Unwin 1938), 9.

75. See Paul Kammerer, *Lebensbeherrschung: Grundsteinlegung der organischen Technik* (Mönistische Bibliothek 1919) and *Höherentwicklung und Menschenökonomie: Grundlegung der Sozialbiologie* (Klinkhardt 1911).

76. Oskar Goldberg, ‘Die griechische Tragödie’ in *Zahlengebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, 267–286. Here: 285.

77. Ibid.

78. Tronti, *Con le spalle al futuro*, xiv.

is also why their theories of the sublation of the metabolic relation to nature had little in common with, for instance, Kammerer and Goldscheid's socialist Lamarckism which sought to use vaccines and similar technologies to defend the proletariat's biological *Meschenökonomie*. For them, socialism had to be a biological technology used to free the working class from the barbarism that capitalism entailed for the life of the exploited. This was visible through war but also, Kammerer and Goldscheid argued more controversially, through the supposed low quality of life produced by an uncontrolled heredity. In contrast, the work of the Goldberg circle did not move towards such eugenic fantasies, and neither did it entail the choice between socialism and barbarism with its implicit support for the rise of civilisation. Instead, in the last book published in the series edited by *David Verlag* in 1927, Caspary defended the need to locate the commonalities between socialism and capitalism in order to find a solution to the problem of capital somewhere else than in the progress of history.

In this book *Die Maschinenutopie: das Übereinstimmungsmoment der bürgerlichen und sozialistischen Ökonomie* [The Machine Utopia: The Point of Reconciliation between Bourgeois and Socialist Economies], Caspary argued that a proper reading of Marx had to come to the following conclusion: "without the machine the proletariat cannot live at all, and with it he can only live like a proletarian". Socialism and capitalism are simply two sides of the same process of industrialisation with all it entails: wars, proletarianisation, and imperialism due to its need to develop and reproduce its machine-based civilisation. It is this world that has to be abandoned if humanity is to be able to live as something other than a species differentiated in classes, nations, and states. In the same drastic manner, Camatte and Giorgio Cesarano later would argue, humanity stands before the choice between the withdrawal from the course of civilisation and the destruction of the species. At least in this sense, the work of the Goldberg circle pointed to a war cry later heard in the 1950's and which in a sense mediated the Abrahamic primitivism of Goldberg's group during the Weimar period and the hedonistic vitalisms of France 1968 and Italy 1977: "Onward barbarians!"⁷⁹ But, it is important to note, if this cry was directed to the "rough, pagan race" of the working class, Goldberg and his friends thought that it was necessary to take a different route.

79. Amadeo Bordiga, 'Avanti, barbari!' *Battaglia Comunista* no. 22 (1951).

They did not heed the political romanticism of leftist circles who have been neither particularly effective in combating capitalism nor correct in their prophecies of its coming end. From the perspective of Goldberg, Unger, and Caspary these currents are stuck with the problem of predicting what cannot be predicted, and the feeble attempts of trying to control what cannot be controlled. Humanity has lapsed into the course of civilisation and every way out has been defeated. Yet perhaps we can read the Goldberg circle as proposing that in such a situation their "transcendental research of reality", that is the research of the general anthropological and not only economical characteristics of a society, could help those who seek to transform the scarcity of life into a material abundance in order to find "the building blocks for a new humanity".⁸⁰ A metaphysical investigation of the transcendental—that is, general—conditions of human existence could help define what Caspary described as "the givenness character of society" [*der Gegebenheitscharakter der Gesellschaft*] in his rejection of both socialism and capitalism.⁸¹ His work indicated the need for a philosophical explanation of the structures that constitute the specific metaphysical and anthropological form of a society. The machine is one such structure, which not only shapes capitalism but life and the human imagination itself. By examining the machine as part of constructing "the given" of capital, Caspary also hinted that a reconfiguration of the machine world of capital would transform human life. Let us therefore see how for Goldberg, anthropology was not only a search for what humanity is today, but also how different segments of our species can separate themselves from the anthropological machine of capital.

80. Franz Jung, *Bausteine für einen neuen Menschen. Über Wilhelm Reich und Ernst Fuhrmann* (Edition Moderne 1982).

81. Caspary, *Die Maschinenutopie*, 95.

NO GOLDEN AGE, NO PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM

Partitioning human life out into a myriad of languages, life forms, and religions, and therefore into different totemistic orders during the mythical period was not a search for a lost paradise free from coercion and violence in any simple sense. The Goldberg circle certainly had a great admiration for prehistoric cultures that bordered on hatred

towards the West, but this did not imply a romantic view of archaic life. Unger remarked on the power relations that constituted the basic form of tribal hierarchy: "In the most primitive order of human community, the principle of hierarchy for the mode of organisation of society was only *physical* or primarily physical: the strongest in the tribe was the most powerful. That is objective and sensible".⁸²

Thus, if the group admired archaic peoples and even gave them a crucial role in their discussions of a potential secession from the world of capital, they did not argue, as contemporary anthropologists such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski come close to doing, that archaic communities as they are in themselves can teach us something about how we can live outside the course of civilisation.⁸³ Nor did Goldberg portray nature as a realm of peace we should return to, such as Camatte and to a certain extent also Giorgio Agamben have done.⁸⁴ They knew that nature as what they called an imperfect order implies the violence to eat or to be eaten that is rightly lamented as a form of war.

If war and violence is certainly not a state of nature, as Thomas Hobbes argued in his apology for the state, then violence, killing and war are still part of human natural life since natural life according to Goldberg is inherently violent by being fundamentally finite and therefore prone to conflicts among the species that are part of it. And even though tribal war amongst so-called prehistoric peoples, as the anthropologist Pierre Clastres has argued in his critique of Hobbes, may be a way for tribes to curb the rise of the state and therefore destroy the accumulation of power, war is still war and therefore violence and coercion from the perspective of the Goldberg circle.⁸⁵

In fact, Clastres may be right that an inversion of the Hobbesian bond that "institutes itself between men to 'a common Power to keep them all in awe'" in order to save us from the state of violence in nature is found among pre-historic tribes who use war, torture, and violence to inhibit the accumulation of power—for example by torturing soldiers of one's own tribe in order to keep them subjugated to the community rather than making them leaders after a battle.⁸⁶ But

82. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 31.

83. Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World* (Polity 2017).

84. See Giorgio Agamben, *Il Regno e il Giardino* (Neri Pozza 2019).

85. See the essays in Pierre Clastres, *Archeology of Violence* (Semiotext(e) 2010).

86. Pierre Clastres, 'Archeology of Violence: War in Primitive Societies' in *Ibid.* 237–277. Here: 240.

as Rosa Luxemburg had already argued in her important theory of the basis of civilisation, "The Dissolution of Primitive Communism", the equality of archaic people seldom extends beyond the tribal group.⁸⁷ Perhaps even more importantly in our times of identitarian communitarianism and rise of nationalist movements, she insisted that the equality guaranteed by war and violence through the destruction of the accumulation of power is easily disturbed by nothing but the same war and violence.

The hope for a repetition of a tribal culture of violence, recently professed by the French collective Jane Doe in the thought provoking essay "Éléments de Décivilisation" published on *Lundi Matin*, and by the anthropologist Peter Harrison in *The Freedom of Things*, is from the Goldberg circle's perspective sympathetic but insufficient.⁸⁸ This scenario leaves open the possibility that one tribal group could become so effective and merciless that it could use its conquest over other tribes in order to exploit them, perhaps as slaves. In this way, the division between mental and physical labour and in extension private property could re-emerge. The same violence that, according to this theory, for a period upheld the *Gemeinwesen* of tribal communities could therefore easily become the basis for an economy of slavery. This, according to Luxemburg, is actually what has happened: the war and violence that hindered the accumulation of power became itself the starting point for slavery and therefore class and civilisation.

Interestingly, one can interpret Goldberg's reading of the *Torah* as a similar attempt to explain the rise of the state. But for him, the question of an equality of tribes or a form of primitive communism was not a real problem. Goldberg was neither Marx nor Rousseau and neither was he Luxemburg nor Clastres. When it comes to the question of violence and coercion he had a completely unromantic view of what he called the mythical period. There was no shimmering equality in the world of tribes, nor was there by necessity any primitive communism. There were only modes of life that were harnessed against the normality of nature and, he argued, the experiments of

87. Rosa Luxemburg, 'The Dissolution of Primitive Communism: From the Ancient Germans, and the Incas to India, Russia, and Southern Africa, from *Introduction to Political Economy*' in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (Monthly Review 2004), 71–109.

88. See Jane Doe, 'Éléments de Décivilisation' *lundimatin* no. 183, March 22, 2019. Peter Harrison, *The Freedom of Things: An Ethnology of Control* (TSI Press 2017).

early Hebrewdom showed the possibility to alter nature in an even more radical way than totemism could engender.

If the famous anthropologist, religious scholar, and imperial apologist Sir James George Frazer, today seldom cited in the world of anthropology but a key figure during the 1920's, had argued that totemism was neither universal nor possible to discern in ancient Semitic religion but "an institution peculiar to the dark-complexioned and least civilised races of mankind", Goldberg included *Urjudentum* [ancient Judaism] in this order of archaic peoples.⁸⁹

However, he did separate the rituals and taboos of the *Torah* from the totemistic rites of other archaic peoples. From Goldberg's perspective, the *Torah* is an essentially anti-totemistic myth, a system of laws and rites that did not give the Hebrews the ability to imitate the way of living in a specific natural habitat, personified by a totem, in order to sublimate their existence as what with Gehlen can be called *Mängelwesen* [being of lack]. Rather, the *Torah* — he argued in a manner that for many would disqualify him as a neutral anthropologist — describes how the Hebrews aimed to tap into *Geist* itself. The *Torah* was the document of rituals that made the Hebrews able to live close to the God of all gods, the *Elohim IHWH*, who they thought was seeking to become present in the world, as the potentiality of life itself, namely, in the dimension of *Geist*. This is what the covenants between God and the Jewish tribe were about according to Goldberg.

This is why the Hebrews did not find their ancestry or biological centre outside themselves in a totem, but beyond the domain of nature as such. Here Goldberg identifies nature as the normalcy of hereditary biology and the political world which, according to his controversial claim, it belongs to. During the mythical period, that is before and in the beginning of the emergence of the five thousand year-old world system, it was easier to live outside the world of empires in the wilderness of the desert. Therefore from Goldberg's point of view it was a historical contingency that made Abram, a Chaldean who abandoned the Mesopotamian city Ur with his family, become Abraham, "the progenitor" and "the founder of a new community of life vigorously opposed to the ancestral biology" that Goldberg identified with the normalcy of nature.⁹⁰ In sharp contrast to other mythical communities,

89. James George Frazer, *Marriage and Worship in Early Societies: A Treatise on Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. IV (Cosimo Classics 2009), 14.

the Hebrews did not affirm *this life* or find their ancestry or biological centre outside themselves in a totem, but beyond the domain of nature as such in what they called the creator God, the *Elohim IHWH*. When Abraham abandoned his old community, he was "prepared to sacrifice all that comes with it. He adopts the circumcision, is ready to slay his son, and does far more by sacrificing his former *Elohim*".⁹¹ All this proves for Goldberg that Abraham is ready to act *against the normalcy of his own ancestry*, the Chaldean city of Ur, which had the ram as its totem. In doing so, Abraham initiated the sublation of nature that is foreign to the world of the state.

By sacrificing the heavenly ram instead of his son Isaac, Abraham does not only offer his own, original totemistic god. He also breaks the taboo of his original people and institutes a community which abolishes human sacrifice and seeks to sublimate nature. The circumcision symbolises how Abraham and his people wrested themselves free from all ancestral biology, including the transcendental biology of the totemistic peoples. For Goldberg, Abraham invites all humans to join his new people — a missionary tribe — and worship him who is "*in principle enemy to every order of nature*" — the God that confronts the gods of nature who can only entangle us in life as it is even if they can, as we have seen, sublimate a specific part of nature.⁹²

The story of the covenant in the *Torah* is therefore the story of a people seeking to leave the world of states and thereby to open all of humanity to a new form of anthropogenesis since the Hebrews, according to Goldberg, were a missionary tribe. This is not because "one needs Adam and Eve, but not revolution, for the creation of new man", as another forgotten philosopher of life from the Weimar period argued, but, because as the story of the *Torah* clearly reveals with all its cruelty, secession implies conflict.⁹³ At least in this sense, the problematic word revolution — seldom used by the Goldberg circle — could describe the disruption of capital that the group sought through a form of exodus.

By arguing that God did not in any sense elect Abraham, Goldberg claims that the theology of election is nowhere to be found in the *Torah*. It was Abraham who found a way to open a part of creation for the divine and thereby cultivate the Jewish life form that still today,

90. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 79.

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*, 34.

93. Ernst Fuhrmann, 'Ergebnisse' in *Neue Wege* book 6 (Wilhelm Arnold, 1957), 3–155. Here: 164. All translations from this book are the author's.

Goldberg thought, has a relation to this ultimately failed attempt to leave the world of civilisation. Abraham was willing to adopt the task of God to liberate nature from the frailties and death of normal existence: "It is the special facet of the old Hebrew metaphysics that, despite its this-worldly nature, it is an action which is *hostile* to nature in the most radical sense, and whose principle of morality is: *contra naturam vivere, to proceed against nature*".⁹⁴ To proceed against nature is to proceed against the normalcy of a human nature that has become so fixated that it lays the basis for the machine world that Caspary attacked in *Die Maschinenutopie*. This normalcy has, in the end, humanity itself as its basis, or rather what the Argentinian philosopher Fabián Ludueña Romandini has recently called the cult of physis.⁹⁵

The cult of physis, from the Greek word for nature *phúsis*, is the metabolic and technological relation to nature that humanity ultimately is. Not even the totemistic communities can make this cult of physis abundant since nature, according to Goldberg, is imperfect, that is dangerous, finite and thus threatening all life with extinction. In a manner reminiscent of the biologist Peter Ward, who in 2009 defended his so-called Medea hypothesis which emphasises the inner destructiveness of the process of life, the Goldberg circle described the possibility of extinction as inherent in nature itself for "[w]hoever believes that there must be life on Earth is wrong".⁹⁶ By being a process that adapts to its surrounding environment, responds to stimuli from the outside world, reproduces itself metabolically, the group would concur with Ward that life is inherently "a slave to a process called evolution".⁹⁷ This "Darwinian life", as Ward calls it, is the only life we know of, and it is according to him so inherently destructive and unstable that "it is life that will cause the end of life itself, on this or any planet inhabited by Darwinian life, through perturbation and changes of either temperature, atmospheric gas composition, or elemental cycles to values inimical to life".⁹⁸ At the same time, Ward notes that humanity has "the odd distinction of being the only ones that either know or care" about this destructive character of life.⁹⁹

94. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 90.

95. Fabián Ludueña Romandini, *Arcana Imperii: Tratado metafísico-político* (Miño y Dávila 2018), 28.

96. Goldberg, 'Die Bibelkritik', 293.

97. See Peter Ward, *The Medea Hypothesis: Is Life on Earth Ultimately Self-Destructive?* (Princeton University Press 2009), xxi.

98. *Ibid.*, 35.

From the perspective of the Goldberg circle, the Hebrews tried to mobilise this odd distinction of caring about life as a life form, challenging the normalcy of human organisation by setting out to make a form of material abundance possible. This implied that the rituals and taboo system of the *Torah*, such as the description of that which is impure, *tumah*, and that which is pure, *taharah*, were seen by Goldberg as technologies to solve "the problem: how can one be freed from one's ancestry, from the biological functions, from sexuality... without this leading to the necessity of leaving the domain of the finite reality".¹⁰⁰ Goldberg wanted to show how the laws and rites in the *Torah* were real, but failed, instruments to create a humanity capable of liberating itself from biological functions, from death, and even from sexuality and birth. In this sense it seems obvious that the Goldberg circle's critique of nature and civilisation was a critique not only of gender but of sex itself, pushing us to accept the plasticity of biology.

We must remember that during the period of the *Torah*, giving birth was dangerous, and the fact that what traditional Jewish and Christian theology call the fall cursed Adam and Eve with birth and work reflects this violence of normal nature that continues and is stabilised in the life of the state and the family. Thus for Goldberg, the cycles of birth and death are also the trajectory of the civilisation that has culminated in the machine world which he saw as a menace to life itself. Here we can also note another similarity between modern anthropology, especially the work of Levi-Strauss, and the Goldberg circle, since they viewed the question of anthropology from the viewpoint of energy, the scarcity of resources, and the imperfect condition of life itself.

Behind anthropology, Levi-Strauss argued, there is an even more primordial *entropology* which shows how every human group's struggle against entropy is structured by its use and consummation of energy.¹⁰¹ It is this entropological origin of civilisation that the Hebrews challenged by tapping into a new source of energy, and this implies that the *Torah*, from Goldberg's perspective, is not in any sense a classical source for our civilisation, or the story that begins the emergence of modern subjectivity. The *Torah* simply reflects the ordinary human process of anthropogenesis that Abraham sought to

99. *Ibid.*, XV.

100. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 274.

101. Claude Levi-Strauss, *A World on the Wane* (Hutchinson 1962), 397.

escape by living against the normality of human nature. Goldberg was explicit that according to the Torah, the origin of this normal life, the stabilisation of nature through the gradual development of the state as an entropic machine is much older than Abraham. The state, as a catastrophic way of dealing with the problem of entropy inherent in all life, is “ancient, since it stands in the beginning of history. It is even older than the metaphysic itself. That shows the birth of Cain, at whose arrival Eve believes that she has birthed... an IHHW-human, whereas she in reality has received the ‘first born of fixation’, the ‘property’-human Cain”.¹⁰² From the point of view of this reading of the *Torah*, Cain, the first murderer, farmer, property owner, and city builder is the mythological description of what civilisation has made of the human, whereas Abel represents the Hebraic metaphysics that Abraham seeks to take upon himself as the creator of a tribe that breaks with what Goldberg calls the property owning humanity of the fixated age.¹⁰³

If the origin of the state according to the *Torah* is ancient, and even has its beginning in the emergence of the race of property owners, namely the humanity symbolised by the figure of Cain, it is evident that the five books of Moses do not depict a golden age for Goldberg, and neither are they a description of what Marxists would call primitive communism. What fascinated the Goldberg circle with the *Torah* was that it described a rather recent exception to the normal course of a human life which has been structured by private property to the extent that most attempts to build another economy have failed. It indicated that the anthropogenesis of our species is a political problem that has to be solved through a psychophysical and ultimately biological revolution. Ultimately, the five thousand year-old world system finds its origin in the constitution of our species as what in the *Torah* is identified with “the whole generation of ‘Cainites’, the farmers, technicians, and city builders” who surrounded the Abrahamic people with the civilisation that finally also subsumed this nomadic community and turned Judaism to what Goldberg called a world religion or a religion of humanity.¹⁰⁴ The task, according to the Goldberg circle, is to once again disrupt the normal course of civilisation and thereby harness what Tronti has called “*differenza umana*” [human difference].¹⁰⁵ Indeed, for them,

102. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 274.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.

this disruption must be repeated in order for humanity to find a way out of the catastrophic politics of civilisation and the possible extinction it implies.

105. Tronti, *Con la Spalle al futuro*, 14.

HUMAN DIFFERENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF ANTHROPOGENESIS

What the Goldberg circle is ultimately trying to predict in their work is the problem of anthropogenesis as a conscious political task that not only separates our species from the material community of capital but aims to change the basis of capitalism’s entropic structure. In fact, when Goldberg, Unger, and Caspary predict schematically that humanity has three anthropological choices, they are trying to envision three different political modes of combating the entropy that disrupts every organisation of life with chaos and decline. It is important to note here that Goldberg viewed the concept of humanity with great suspicion and saw it as part of the civilised world of fixation, so humanity is here simply the name for specific groups and tendencies belonging to our species whose actions, Goldberg believed, could determine the future for humankind as such.

Firstly, humanity can live in relation to specific parts of nature, with all its finite creatures, in a totemistic manner, and become a species of peoples who have their ancestries outside themselves. This is certainly better than life in civilisation, according to the Goldberg circle, but it is not enough. The totemistic divinities are described in the *Torah* as archetypes of different biological behaviour that certainly modify and sublimate specific parts of normal nature but that cannot alter nature as such: “The archetype of normal biology goes... far back, it is established in the world structure: in this way, however, the normal ‘biological’ organism arises. Hence, there can be no true new creations based on biology”.¹⁰⁶ This is why the archaic life forms of prehistoric cultures were, ultimately, not only unable to solve the problem of scarcity but, as Luxemburg would argue, were too easily led into the path of coercion and violence that implies the emergence of the state as a stabilisation of the entropic tendency of nature. These communities are nothing but different cults of physis whose nature has to be sublated in order for life to continue.

106. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 285.

Secondly, humanity can, just as it has done, decline to the normality of property owners and city builders. It thereby ends the period of myth by becoming a race of *homo faber* that stabilises the entropic destruction of human life inherent in nature through the advent of capitalism as an industrialised system. This marks the beginning of the decline to normality that moves humanity to the peak everything situation that the Goldberg circle had already warned of in the 1920's.

Thirdly, humanity has the possibility of opening a new anthropogenesis, hinted at in the life form the Hebrews took on as they set out to sublimate the normal course of nature and produce a new human community. This would, Goldberg argues, entail a form of economic abundance needed in order for humanity to survive beyond the capitalist mode of production, which lays the ground for a coming "machine catastrophe". The hope of the Goldberg circle is ultimately that this new kind of existence withdrawing itself from the civilisational basis of capital would restructure the entropological constitution of human life through an abundance that, as a stubborn Marxist argued in 1957, would even promise "the eternal life of the species".¹⁰⁷

However, Caspary argued thirty years earlier in *Die Maschinenu-topie* that such an abundance would not be possible through the continuation and maintenance of the existing industrial civilisation — not even through a form of worker's management, that would, as some have recently argued, at best entail the "forming a workers' council on the deck of the Titanic. They would be self-managing a sinking ship".¹⁰⁸ Real material abundance could only be produced through a confrontation with the current existence of capitalist machinery as coagulated surplus value [*geronnener Mehrwert*], and therefore through a reconstruction of the modern factory world that has pushed the millennium-old world system to its entropic conclusion.¹⁰⁹ In this sense, Goldberg, Caspary, and Unger differ from Gunder Frank and ultimately concur with Marx that something has fundamentally changed with the advent of the capitalist mode of production. It implies a real human difference that must be understood in its specifics.

107. Amadeo Bordiga, 'Il programma rivoluzionario della società comunista elimina ogni forma di proprietà del suolo, degli impianti di produzione e dei prodotti del lavoro' *Il Programma Comunista* nos. 16 and 17 (1958). All translations from this essay are the author's.

108. Endnotes, 'The Holding Pattern' *Endnotes 3* (2013).

109. Caspary, *Die Maschinenu-topie*, 15.

THE ADVENT OF THE BEHEMOTH

In a manner similar to some of the most interesting readings of Marx's *Capital*, Caspary argued in *Die Maschine-utopie* that capitalism is first of all an agrarian revolution; a process of industrialisation stratifying humanity into divergent and antagonistic classes; a Behemoth as much as a Leviathan whose "occupation of the world" certainly should be related to the West and therefore, Goldberg argued, to a form of "Europeanisation" of the planet.¹¹⁰ This Europeanisation, Caspary insisted, would entail the globalisation of class struggle since "the existence of a proletariat questions the current social order theoretically as well as practically" and, through the deepening of the contradictions of capital, "the *legal question* of the distribution of goods" will be transformed into "the *question of existence* for the current existing society".¹¹¹ The revolution is now at the horizon.

This hypothesis was founded on the experiences of the Russian revolution in 1917 and the uprisings in Germany around 1919. But contrary to the positions of the traditional left and the different segments of the workers' movement, Caspary stated in the opening sentence of *Die Maschinenu-topie*: "We only want to make one single fact known: that the mass misery of the proletariat is necessarily posited by means of production through machinery — but without the proletariat itself being able to dispense with the machine as a means of production".¹¹² This was an unambiguous declaration of the political programme of the Goldberg circle: collective ownership and planned production of the factory civilisation will not in themselves surpass the world of capital. What had to be questioned both practically and theoretically was "the point of reconciliation between bourgeois and socialist economy" — *das Übereinstimmungsmoment der bürgerlichen und sozialistischen Ökonomie* — and this was for Caspary nothing but the material infrastructure of capitalism and consequently, what he called (with Marx) machinery. The expansion of the modern machine system, in other words industrialisation, is inseparable from proletarian immiseration, radicalised entropic disorder, and class conflicts that move societies towards revolutions, wars, and other catastrophes.

110. See Silvain Piron, *L'Occupation du monde* (Zones Sensibles 2018) and Goldberg, *Maimonides*, 215.

111. Caspary, *Die Maschinenu-topie*, 5.

112. *Ibid.*

One must tread carefully when stating this, since a machine is not a tool [*Werkzeug*] for Caspary, a “means of production” used since “it saves time”.¹¹³ On the contrary, the machine is “not, like the tool, a simple means for the production, but also at the same time its *motor*”.¹¹⁴ It is an apparatus that is created together with and even for the world market. This is important, because the machine, as the physical motor of the specifically capitalist mode of production of surplus value, is not produced because it saves time but “since it can produce *more* products” than a tool in a specific period of time.¹¹⁵ “The machine”, Caspary clarifies “also saves time — for each single product that can be produced faster with machines than without them”, but that is “not its utility”.¹¹⁶ Its utility is to make an industrialised world market possible and thereby the time saved by the machines produce the need for new labour in order to uphold this factory system. Thus, Caspary continues: “If the demand remained the same, that is, if the production figure remained the same, the machine would not be profitable, because it saves too much time for the individual product. The machine produces so fast that in the case of constant demand, the production of the machine itself would take more time than the non-mechanical production of goods”.¹¹⁷ This implies (1) that the machine is impossible without a global infrastructure that has the market and the explicit goal of accumulation for accumulation’s sake as its condition of possibility, and (2) the machine is not built to make work easier for workers per se, even if this may be its indirect consequence, but in order to be the motor for the production of more and more commodities in a specific time period.

These two points are essential, since they imply that Caspary’s argument diverges in significant ways from those Marxists who primarily view the machine as an instrument that saves necessary labour through out the whole history of capital. Against this position, he writes that “the machine is produced economically as surplus value, that is, the production of machines does not have the character of ‘necessary’ but surplus labour. The machine did not emerge due to the pressure to save necessary labour, it emerged because the army of free workers that was not used for the necessary labour [for the reproduction of the goods needed for survival of the proletariat as such],

113. *Ibid.*, 72.

114. *Ibid.*, 71.

115. *Ibid.*, 72.

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Ibid.*

was at free disposal” and therefore could be hired to build machines and operate them.¹¹⁸ This is why the machine is an instrument for an economy based on surplus labour that cannot continue to exist exactly as a machine, i.e. as a motor rather than simple means for capitalist production, without necessarily reproducing the division of labour that characterises capitalism and that is produced through primitive accumulation of capital.

With the rise of capitalism, all existing workers and all existing means of productions are liberated from their shackles and turned to wage labour or capital, and at this stage of the primitive accumulation there are not many machines and machine-like complexes such as modern factories. But, as Robert Brenner has shown, the transition from feudalism to capitalism was made possible due to a form of agrarian capitalism in which, Caspary argues, a surplus population in relation to the older mode of production could arise. Workers could now be employed not only to produce food and similar commodities needed for immediate survival, that is for the reproduction of necessary labour, but for the production of machines.¹¹⁹

This, Caspary continues, entails three things for the development of industrialised capitalism:

(1) The extraction of surplus value is made possible without specifically capitalist machinery, since it is produced through primitive accumulation; for instance through the production of absolute surplus value, i.e. long days of work on the field with the help of pre-capitalist tools. Capitalism was therefore first of all a form of agrarian capitalism primarily composed of landlords, free tenant farmers and wage labourers. This, in turn, implies (2) that the wage is reduced to the societal cost of what is needed to reproduce the life of the worker so that there can be a difference between necessary and surplus labour in the process of production in order for surplus value to be possible. Thus, (3) Caspary continues, “with the primitive accumulation of capital, surplus value is already posited: for the first machine is ‘coagulated surplus value’, i.e., since the first machine can only be built if the total labour power in society (the proletariat *class*) can produce more than is needed for its own preservation”.¹²⁰

The enclosures that made land private and that forced people to find employment on the growing market of

118. *Ibid.*, 71

119. *Ibid.*, 13

120. *Ibid.*, 15

jobs in order to survive made it possible to employ workers for the production of machines. There was enough food to produce a relative surplus population in relation to the workers needed for the reproduction of the life of the proletariat. This division between proletarians producing consumer goods [*Verbrauchsgüter-Proletarier*] and proletarians producing machines [*Maschinen-Proletarier*] structures the life of capitalism as the production of surplus labour and, through the population rise, of more workers. This is the advent of the Behemoth and the reason why capitalism has become an industrialised world. It is this world that the Goldberg circle wanted to abandon through a secession so radical it would make room for what with Tronti can be called a new human difference through an economy beyond the order of machines. But is this possible or even desirable today when human life is entrapped in its own civilisational development to the point that every attempt to dismantle it seems to imply extreme political and economical threats to human existence? Can one perhaps read Caspary as not arguing that technology itself is the problem? Maybe he is indicating that what must be solved is the transformation of technology to a machine complex, namely, to the motor of a production based on the difference between necessary labour and surplus labour, so that a deindustrialised world can be unleashed from the bosom of our hyper-industrialised capitalism?

TO LIVE CIVILISATION TO ITS END

At the end of *Die Maschinenutopie*, Caspary defends the importance of understanding “the givenness character of society”, that is what characterises a society as a specific, given society.¹²¹

He relates this examination to the economy and main- 121. *Ibid.*, 95.
tains once again that the foundation of the modern capitalist economy is not profit or value production per se, since this was also characteristic of the agrarian capitalism that precedes the modern capitalist production, which is born with machinery as “coagulated surplus value”. The basic structure of capital, and its socialisation as a planned economy in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, is rather the industrialised Behemoth that the capitalist mode of production process entails. Correspondingly, in 1927 Caspary argued against the Marxists who thought industrialisation

would lead to communism: “The way of life of the masses, within an economy that produces by means of machines, must be proletarian” and the “relation between justice and machines is a utopia”.¹²² But why is such a relation utopian? Doesn’t the expansion and social character of the machine precisely 122. *Ibid.*, 79–80.
as “coagulated surplus value” liberate living labour from the production process and thereby indicate the possibility for economic abundance and a liberation of humanity from unnecessary drudgery and work?

No, Caspary argues, for “technology cannot replace human labour power gratuitously: machines must—by however few people—be operated, the material for the machines must always be produced... the machine never digs the raw material itself, this must also be brought to the most differentiated machine complex”.¹²³ The general tendency of capitalist ma- 123. *Ibid.*, 25.
chinery as “coagulated surplus value” is according to Caspary not first of all to save labour time, that is to diminish necessary labour, but rather to relocate the saving of labour time in the production process where machines have been introduced to another part, for example to the miners who gather the materials needed for the production of the machines. Machines must be produced and reproduced by workers and this implies work, and thereby machines not only posit the possibility of an economy based on surplus labour. They also reproduce the necessity of the labour that reproduces the machines that, in some production processes makes labour superfluous, but which as instruments for capital reproduces an economy based on surplus labour. For even if the workers producing and reproducing machines may be numerically fewer than before, i.e. not only the construction of engines for cars may need fewer workers due to automation, but the production and mining of the minerals needed for this automation may, for different reasons, employ fewer workers, still, the machine is the physical motor for the existing market and exchange relations just as they are the condition of possibility for production through machinery.

Now we have to remember the difference between a tool and machine: both certainly save time in the work process, but according to Caspary the machine is the physical instrument needed to reproduce a market based on surplus labour. It is in this sense that the machine

cannot be viewed as an instrument that simply reduces necessary labour and thereby produce the possibility for economic abundance: this is the machine utopia that has to be demystified. Obviously, the automation of industry by way of machines such as the conveyor belt or different kind of robots, or the development of modern capitalist machinery needed for the transportation of commodities, such as the engines needed for airplanes, cars, and trains, help produce commodities faster and faster in a specific time period for a specific production process, thereby making proletarians redundant in specific industries and sectors of the economy. But, Caspary contends, this same development that creates a surplus class also reproduces the basis of the economy, accumulation for accumulation's sake, as well as creates the need for new work in new industries and sectors of the economy. Thus, even if it cannot be denied that the general tendency of modern capitalism is the production of what has been called an enormous abject population in favelas and deindustrialised regions of the world, this surplus population will for a long time exist alongside an industrial class entrapped in the factory civilisation of capital.¹²⁴ In this prognosis, Caspary seems to be right, since while the surplus population is growing worldwide, the data from the International Labour Organization shows, for instance, that 29 percent of the global workforce worked in the industrial sector in 2010, significantly higher than the figure from 1994 of only 22 percent.¹²⁵ The Behemoth of contemporary industrial capital is certainly declining since more workers nowadays are employed in services than in the industries, but the industrialised world is still a fact, not at least through the industrialisation of the service sector, and will according to Caspary be a fact as long as capitalism exists since capital entails a civilisation of factories and machines.

When Caspary makes this basic point in *Die Maschinenutopie*, namely, that a machine is an apparatus for the reproduction and expansion of surplus labour rather than only a mechanism that reduces necessary labour, he comes close to the argument of one of the most interesting contemporary theorists of technology: Alf Hornborg. For decades, Hornborg has defended a thermodynamic understanding of what he calls "machine fetishism", which he differentiates from simple "commodity fetishism", by seeking to reveal that "[i]ndustrial machines

are social phenomena. These inorganic structures propelled by mineral fuels and substituting for human work *could not be maintained* but for a specific structure of human exchange".¹²⁶

"The machine", Caspary wrote as early as 1927, can "only be produced when the goods are not produced for needs but for the market" and therefore "when the market is not dependent on the individual, but when the individual is dependent on the market". This is of crucial importance according to Hornborg, since it indicates that machines are not in any sense productive in themselves. They are only productive if they are put to work in an expanding economic process that necessitates accumulation for the sake of accumulation.

Thus, Hornborg can help us explain Caspary's thesis that machines are not simply mechanical tools primarily diminishing necessary labour but motors for a production based on surplus labour. The banal mystification of this process, the denial of the fact that machinery is first and foremost the physical infrastructure of a social relation that reproduces the need for more surplus labour, produced by the global stratification of the production process itself, implies for Caspary the generalisation of "machine utopias" amongst capitalist ideologues as well as socialist intellectuals. These utopias, and according to Caspary they were utopias in the most banal sense, namely, fantastic descriptions of something fundamentally unreal, are based on what Hornborg would call a fetishistic view of machines that does not register the web of power relations they not only are embedded in but which they also necessarily reproduce.

For Caspary, in 1927, the belief that the industrialisation of the Soviet Union would push humanity out of the exploitation of wage labour was perhaps the best example of such a machine utopia. But our contemporary world's fantastic theories that an acceleration of the productive forces would move us beyond capital reproduces according to Caspary the same form of utopianism.

From this perspective, the global proletariat that loses time and therefore life by being entrapped in the world of factories, mines, and sweatshops—or for that matter seeks jobs in these complexes—cannot exist as a proletariat without the continuation of the use of capitalist machinery and the energy resources it requires in order to be

126. Alf Hornborg, 'Machine Fetishism, Value, and the Image of Unlimited Good: Towards a Thermodynamics of Imperialism' in *Man: New Series*, vol. 27 no. 1 (1992), 1–18. Here: 13.

124. Endnotes, 'An Identical Abject Subject?' *Endnotes 4* (2015).

125. Freeman, *Behemoth*, xiii.

maintained. As Hornborg argues, not only is it “well known that the quantities of energy dissipated per person vary enormously between individuals of different countries and classes”. These differences “are generated and reproduced through the joint operation of the world market and globalized technologies”.¹²⁷

The consumption — whether proletarian or bourgeois — of the commodities of this world market, and the production process that makes it possible, stratifies the proletariat into distinct segments of *Verbrauchsgüter* and *Maschinen-Proletarier*. Not seldom these groups can have contradicting interests due to the differences in, for example, the use of energy. This is why it is not only essential to relate what has been called “the history of separation” to the industrialisation of the world. One must also, Caspary argues, view proletarian and capitalist consumption as a way to reproduce the machine-induced differentiation of the proletariat. This process has, at least until now, made international solidarity problematic and easily forced socialist states into imperialist projects such as wars or forced industrialisation.¹²⁸

This is why machinery, for Caspary, is not “the means of production” that satisfies existing needs but “the *motor* of production” that posits capital by producing new needs adapted to the capitalist economy. Machinery is the sheer infrastructure of the capitalist mode of production that produces not for the sake of needs but for the accumulation of profit. However, by doing so machinery produces a humanity whose needs are related to the continuation of capitalism as a machine civilisation. Caspary writes “in this way, the machine — which has arisen as a surplus product [*Mehrprodukt*] above and beyond necessary labour — becomes the means of production necessary for life. If indeed the machine does not serve to satisfy existing and necessary societal needs but rather implies their amplification; if the machine is not determined to be used in a specific economic sector but rather to develop a new economic sector, if the machine does not follow the need that it satisfies, but rather precedes it — then it only fulfils its essential determination in the cases when it produces needs whose satisfaction are necessary, but which cannot be satisfied without the machine”.¹²⁹ Here we find another crucial difference between the tool and the machine: the tool is

127. Alf Hornborg, *Nature, Society, and Justice in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge University Press 2019), 124.

128. Endnotes, ‘A History of Separation’ *Endnotes* 4 (2015).

129. Caspary, *Die Maschinenutopie*, 74–75.

produced to satisfy a pre-existing need, such as making labour easier, whereas the machine produces more and more needs that can only be satisfied through the continuation of the use of machinery — the need to take a cheap flight did not exist before the airplane was used for tourism for instance — and it is in this sense that the machine according to Caspary produces a distinct form of life with specifically capitalist needs. This development also explains, according to Caspary, why “both the capitalist and the proletariat have an economic interest in the machine: it produces either their profit or their means of existence”.¹³⁰ The proletariat as a proletarian, that is as a class enforced to sell its labour in order to survive, and the capitalist as a capitalist, that is as an owner of capital, have immediate interests in the continuation of the capitalist machine complex since this is the infrastructure that guarantees the survival of the poor and the luxury of the rich.

If this diagnosis is true, then it is not strange that the development of capital according to the Goldberg circle did not move towards a messianic negation of the negation. There is for them no real movement laying the basis of a society free from exploitation through the development of machinery. This is the machine utopia of Marxism that must be demystified so that the social question can be delinked from the infrastructure of capital that capitalism according to Caspary should be identified with. It was in relation to these discussions that Unger already in 1921 had argued that the “assault against the ‘capitalist system’ is forever in vain *at the site of its validity*. Capitalism is the most powerful and unfathomable of all systems, and can integrate every objection in the *domain* of its *power-to-be* [*In-Kraft-seins*]. To raise anything against capitalism, it is first of all imperative *to go outside its field of activities* [*Wirkungsbereich*] because inside it can answer all counteraction”.¹³¹ The field of activities of capital was the machine world Caspary examined and the logic behind Unger’s idea of a secession from the capitalist system through mass migration — *Völkerwanderung* — was based on the wager that the forced proletarianisation that the factories implied could produce a need for an exodus of all those urging for a life beyond the factory. This may, as I have already argued, seem far-fetched today in our world of planetary industrialism and global markets where a job seems to be the only way to survive. But at

130. *Ibid.*

131. Unger, *Politik und Metaphysik*, 48.

the same time, this theory of flight was also based on the suggestion that the fundamental yet inner exteriority to capital, namely, the living labour that must be subsumed as work in order for capital to be accumulated, would increasingly be expelled from the world of factories due to the development of the productive forces. For, as we have seen, even if machines constantly produce the need for new labour in mining, extraction of fossil fuel, and so on, they also produce unemployment and precarity, today visible in the rust belts of the world, through the production processes they revolutionise. This was the double process of capitalist development that Caspary examined, subsumption and expulsion of labour, and both facets of this process would imply catastrophes that could produce a need for a life outside the Behemoth of the industrialised world and the surplus population it creates.

The Goldberg circle came close to describing a situation in which the proletariat had to confront its own condition as a surplus population [*Zusatzbevölkerung*], a class whose survival as a class was tied to the continuation of the machine world of capitalism, since the catastrophic politics of the capitalist system would clash with the interests of the workers as biological beings.¹³²

Commenting on *Die Maschinenutopie*, Goldberg stated in 1935 “to foresee the end of the modern machine system, one does not need to wait for the few hundred years that important reserves of raw material—coal, petroleum, etc—still suffice”.¹³³ It is enough to witness that “the costs of mining raw material are becoming so expensive that their extraction will become economically impossible—long before the raw materials are literally finished”.¹³⁴

We know today that this has not happened, since for instance shale oil extraction has kept the price of oil low, but the development of these kinds of technologies could, from the perspective of the Goldberg circle, only strengthen their thesis that there is no machine based solution to capitalism’s social question, since the continued use of fossils would increase the catastrophic tendency in nature that capital unleashed. The group argued that the looming machine catastrophe would show that the psychophysical condition of the human being did not coincide with the social function it was given as a worker, citizen, consumer, and so on. Beyond and outside the *noosphere* of the capitalist production and consumption lies the primordial world of

biological nature, which shows itself in every hunger riot, in every struggle for a better life and, more essential for the Goldberg circle, in the flight over every border. Thus, if there is a way out of capital this is because the trajectory of the productive forces implies an exhaustion of the finite natural resources needed not only to sustain the machine-based civilisation’s production of profits, but also life as we know it. Such an exhaustion, which Goldberg wrongly thought was imminent, would pitch the Behemoth against the state to the point at which there is, as it has been alleged, “no functioning Leviathan”.¹³⁵ In such a situation, where the state is in a deep crisis and the metabolic and irreparable rift between humanity and the rest of nature will divide the life of the proletariat itself, a secession would not only be possible, but necessary from Goldberg’s perspective. But if Unger is right that in order “to raise anything against capitalism it is first of all necessary to go outside its field of activities” one must ask what these fields of activities are in order to envision the Goldberg circle’s exodus out of this world

The activists in the left communist party close to the Goldberg circle, the KAPD, who argued that a secession of capital had to begin from the knowledge of workers, certainly thought that this field of activities was nothing but industrial work. Only the workers had the practical know-how that could make the factory, which Caspary saw as capital’s domain of operativity, inoperative. But to make something defunct is one thing, it is quite another to produce a form of life that would push humanity beyond the classes that stratify it. From the Goldberg circle’s perspective, the self-management of the machine civilisation would have been as impossible as its planned management proved to be. But there is still the *differenza umana*, which not only reveals that there are other ways for our species to exist than as a class of proletarians and capitalists or for that matter as a conglomerate of prehistoric tribes. A serious anthropology of the present exposes much more subtle distinctions and can perhaps even disclose how machines could, with the jargon of Caspary, be turned to tools through some kind of process of delinking worlds, spheres, and lives from the community of capital. For this to be possible, the Goldberg circle insisted, proletarians, separated from each other due to their immediate interests in the continuation of the machine civilisation of

135. Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!* (Black & Red 1983), 143.

132. Goldberg, *Maimonides*, 214.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

capital, have to move beyond every machine utopia and, even more importantly, find a point of unity beyond their need to exist as what they are today: workers, citizens, members of specific religions or cultures, and so on.

New needs and desires for change have to be created on the basis of needs and desires specific to the anthropological form of the proletariat, namely, the workers inhabiting the factory world Caspary sought to decipher. According to the Goldberg circle, such a feat was possible because of the radical plasticity of human life itself. This is why Caspary enigmatically claimed that even if there is no prospect of building a just society on the world of existing machines, and at the same time no possibility of returning to an agrarian idyll (a primitivistic option the Goldberg circle explicitly refused), there *“is the power of organic life*. But this power is not accessible to contemporary humanity [der gegenwärtigen Menschheit] in a conscious way, it belongs to the capricious nature that has been withdrawn from

humanity”.¹³⁶ What contemporary humanity has no access to is a conscious cultivation of our natural, psychophysical needs and desires into a process of

sublation and negation, rather than into the simple stabilisation of the subjectivities we are today. While this need to ground economy on life itself may seem like their most speculative position, it in fact reveals that the Goldberg circle was part of the politicisation of life during the Weimar period which, as we know, Nazism triumphed over. In the period both before and after the German revolution of 1919 social change was seen by many on both the left and the right as a biological revolution. In order to understand the quote above on the power of organic life we have to remember that history, for the Goldberg circle, was the history of different anthropological forms and therefore different ways of cultivating the needs of human life. This is less fanciful than it may seem since it simply implies that different organisations, such as what Marxists call parties, may cultivate existing needs and even produce new ones.

It was by stressing the plasticity of human needs that Goldberg thought—probably vainly—that the particular community described in the *Torah*, grounded on the power of organic life or what he called *Geist*, could reveal a universal task to the millions who were or would become stateless and propertyless: the possibility of a life

136. Caspary, *Die Maschinenutopie*, 101.

beyond class and capital. In a manner that is reminiscent of an Italian Marxist who in the 1950’s wrote that a classless and stateless society would bring humanity close “to what ancient religions, stuttering of humanity, with an ingenious and vital babble called the world of the spirit”,¹³⁷ the Goldberg circle examined to what extent particular forms of human community could express the political and biological potential of a species whose evolution reveals its absolute inability to become identical with one specific kind of natural or social world.

The paradoxical construction of a particular political community that would express this organic openness of a species without a specific natural habitat is the basis of the work of the Goldberg circle, and indicates what for them was the most fundamental problem: what kind of anthropological form would be able to produce such a community? Behind every anthropology there is an even more primordial entropology, and therefore an economic order that explains how we can live, either as a species that stabilises the entropic tendency of nature or sublates it. This, it seems safe to say, will probably not imply the construction of a people incarnating *Geist* itself. But it may give some parts of our species fragmented into classes the power to live civilisation to its end, so that human life may—if not move beyond the five thousand year-old civilisation of class, sex, race, and other misfortunes—at least weaken its power over the living as well as the dead.

What may change, according to the Goldberg circle, is the metabolic relation to nature. Goldberg, Caspary, and Unger hoped that such a transformation could cultivate communities powerful enough if not to exit but at least indicate a future rejection of capital’s field of activities; a contemporary example of this could be the global youth movement, Fridays for Future, that Greta Thunberg has spurred or the Gilets Jaunes in France which, according to the sociologist Anne Steiner, was characterised by the production of new needs.¹³⁸ Whatever such a movement is, it must ask the difficult question of whether or not there is a possible new use of what Caspary called machines as tools that does not exactly unleash an inherent tendency in capitalism, but rather organises its decline,

137. Amadeo Bordiga, ‘Sorda ad alti messaggi la civiltà dei quiz’ // *Programma Comunista* no. 1 (1956). Author’s translation.

138. Anne Steiner, ‘La seule réaction syndicale à la hauteur des événements serait un appel à la grève générale illimitée’ *Le Media Presse*, 14 Jan 2019.

so that the power of organic life can move beyond the catastrophic politics of the Behemoth.

In the context of malfunctioning Leviathans and declining Behemoths, capital might give way to a truly deindustrialised world where the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom could be rethought and re-enacted in a new sublation of nature. Such a world would only be possible through a new economical, technological, and political imagination that, in the vein of Goldberg and Unger, searched for the possibility to cultivate the organic needs of those clashing against the five thousand year old-civilisation that no longer has any need for them or, for that matter, desperately seeks to integrate them in the firms and factories of capital. Not in order to live outside this world—this was already impossible for Goldberg, Caspary, and Unger—but perhaps to indicate the need for a way out by transforming machines to tools. This could imply the creation of organisations not unlike the philosophical schools that the circle wanted to build in order to examine new ways to think about the history of our species and the possibilities of life and technology.

These academies could perhaps generate a joint perspective beyond simple minded radicalism by bringing together those perspectives that contain the technological know-how needed to alter our entropological relation to nature, but which currently reproduce the machine utopia of capital, with those currents that criticise every attempt at the self-administration of the industrialised world, but which have no real answers on how we can find a way to leave that world behind. Together these two perspectives might reveal the necessity for a non-catastrophic politics that would, as Unger said, wed metaphysics and politics into a community generalising the need to move beyond the catastrophes of the current world system while at the same time developing the practical means for the pursuit of such a path. This search for a “non-catastrophic politics” would certainly not be able to dismantle the infrastructure of our machine civilisation as such, such a primitivistic fantasy would imply a catastrophe in itself. Yet perhaps it could produce those techniques of happiness that Franz Jung had sought and which the Goldberg circle hoped could spawn a new anthropogenesis.