

Ernst Wiechert's Poet's Faith and Art Philosophy

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Over the course of his life, Ernst Wiechert increasingly distanced himself from metaphysics and also made this clear by criticizing its Christian-capitalist-rationalist manifestations and the associated phenomena of modernity. This raises the following question: what, if any, alternative approaches to the question of religiosity did Wiechert develop? Additionally, what do such approaches reveal about his attitudes towards metaphysics and modernity? I would like to develop the thesis here that his approach to God or religious experience can be understood as a poetically and intellectually free unfolding of a "Dionysian Pantheism" influenced by Nietzsche, Goethe and Hölderlin. Wiechert's "poet's faith"² could therefore be seen as an echo of this intellectual current within cultural modernism that seeks alternatives to Christian-capitalist-rationalist metaphysics. Since Wiechert rejects the healing of the world from a (metaphysical) principle³ as misleading, I will discuss in how far we can even speak of a post-metaphysical stance here. His "altered faith"⁴ ponders renewal through a God without a name, whom Wiechert calls enigmatically the "Dark One" and whom he as a poet bestows as "flame" and "dawn" from the "whole". Wiechert thus seems to strive for a healing recovery from metaphysics (not its rejection or overcoming), which he seems to understand as the expression of a wound that is the suffering of fear, and even describes as a "message of evil"⁵ in the form of rationalism. Wiechert's poet's faith aligns with his philosophy of

¹The nuanced meaning of this term as it applies to Wiechert's work will be explained further below.

² Ernst Wiechert: *Moderner Dichterglaube*, in: *Es Geht ein Pflüger übers Land*, Munich, pp. 180-185.

³ Wiechert rejects the idea of trying to understand or heal the world from a principle or a system. See his letter to Kapp in: Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft - oder: Die (Brief-)freundschaft zwischen dem Dichter Ernst Wiechert und dem Ökonomen Karl William Kapp*, Nordhausen 2017, p. 70. Here he also expresses his gratitude to Goethe for the insight "That no name deceives me, that no dogma limits me." This corresponds with his statements in the autobiography that the "whole" not only saved him from "falling prey to the dilettantes of the market", but also from succumbing to the "fatal error that the world can be explained and understood from a 'principle'." Ernst Wiechert: *Jahre und Zeiten. Erinnerungen*, in: *SW*, Vol. 9, p. 352. See also p. 201 ("the healing of the earth from the famous one principle, the process that stands at the threshold of all the calamities of this world") and p. 205 ("fatal passion to heal the world from one principle").

⁴ "All dogmas repelled me, and the faith I later regained was different from what the church demanded." Ernst Wiechert: *Wälder und Menschen*, in: *SW*, vol. 9, p. 132.

⁵ Wiechert in Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 86.

art⁶, which seeks to reduce suffering through courageous love. The world is made better through "islands of consolation"⁷ and "the moving of hearts"⁸.

1. Turning to Pan as an alternative to Christianity

As far as I know, Wiechert did not use the term Dionysian and mentioned pantheism rather rarely, but in an emphatically positive way⁹. Pan, on the other hand, features prominently in his works¹⁰: "Perhaps Pan has been the dearest and truest of all gods to me all my life..."¹¹ Wiechert writes, and continues "when only Pan was around me in the silence of my forests, that deep and believing trust in the beautiful splendor of paganism remained with me [...] [which stretched] over the human heart when Eros touched and filled it."¹² However, Pan¹³ is located as the god of the forest and nature in the wake of Dionysus, is known for his lust and was literally "demonized" by Christianity. One reason for avoiding mentioning the Dionysian, despite the above-mentioned notable sources of inspiration from German intellectual life, may be that it had already degenerated into an ambivalent literary cliché¹⁴ during Wiechert's lifetime. In addition, the above-mentioned important German poets and thinkers who were associated with Dionysian pantheism were increasingly appropriated for National Socialist purposes, so that unencumbered and uncorruptible intellectual vehicles were needed to follow the trace of God on their paths. Another reason for Wiechert's increasingly sparse use of the name of God lies in his maturing realization that such a name is not of primary importance for what he is searching for and describing poetically and intellectually. Provided that my following interpretation of Wiechert's attempts to follow the trail of God without

⁶ "[...] art was never anything other than a light for those walking in darkness, a consolation for the desolate, and who gave their whole being and nature to 'making difficult hours gentle". Ernst Wiechert: *Über Kunst und Künstler*, in: *SW Vol. 10*, p. 422. "In the artistic [...] what the inscrutable had charged us with: goodness and bravery, helping and healing, being moral in a deeply immoral world." p. 205 in *Jahre und Zeiten*.

⁷ "[...] to form a quiet semblance of comfort for two or three people. Only from such small islands can a small world of people of good will be built up very slowly." Cf. Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 69 f.

⁸ Wiechert in Berger: *ibid*, p. 99.

⁹ See, for example, the brief mention in *Jahre und Zeiten*, pp. 360, 414. Wiechert sees pantheism as an "ancient part of the beginning of humanity, a remnant of that beautiful paganism in which the universe was conceived in a deeper and more modest way than in all monotheistic religions". (*ibid*. p. 360).

¹⁰ See, for example, Wiechert's work title "The Flute of Pan", chosen for a collection of novellas.

¹¹ Wiechert: *Jahre und Zeiten*, p. 360.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 268.

¹³ See the entry "Pan" on Wikipedia [accessed 8.3.2024]: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_\(mythology\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_(mythology))

¹⁴ Max L. Baeumer: *Das Dionysische - Entwicklung eines Literarischen Klischees*, in: *Colloquia Germanica*, Vol. 1, Tübingen/Basel 1967, pp. 253-262.

name as the unfolding of a Dionysian pantheism is perceived as sufficiently robust, it could also contribute to an understanding of what Wiechert meant by the concept of the "whole" in later works such as *Years and Times* and by the title *Missa sine Nomine*.¹⁵

Wiechert's distancing from Christianity finds exemplary expression in the following moments and texts:

1) In his dispute at Hufgymnasium, in which Wiechert opposes all authority (state, church, school, parental home), showing little respect for religion teachers in particular, passing this attitude on to his pupils and having school devotions criticized in class.¹⁶

2) In his statement that he had found a "changed faith" after inner clarification.¹⁷

3) In his commitment to a "modern poet's faith", which, beyond the lack of freedom, narrowness and relative superficiality of Christianity, describes a deeper God as ground of Being or "father" of the poets.¹⁸

4) Through his correspondence with the former student Karl William Kapp, in which he proclaims his apostasy from all things Christian, with the exception of "Love is the greatest of them all".¹⁹

5) In his evocation of the "whole" in *Years and Times* as the highest and most authoritative experience of Being, which he found predominantly in the experience of nature, in music, with unique people and love - not in the church or the lecture hall.²⁰

6) Through his reverence for his "faithful companions", of whom Goethe and Hölderlin had either rejected Christianity or had become weary of it.²¹

7) In the statement that poetry - not Christian faith - is the "ultimate gain"²² of life.

¹⁵ Ernst Wiechert: *Jahre und Zeiten. Erinnerungen*, in: SW, vol. 9, pp. 333-800 and *Missa sine nomine*, in: SW, vol. 6, pp. 7-441.

¹⁶ Christian Tilitzki: *Abschied vom Hufengymnasium*, in: Leonore Krenzlin/Klaus Weigelt (eds.), *Ernst Wiechert im Gespräch - Begegnungen und Einblicke in sein Werk*, Schriften der Internationalen Ernst Wiechert Gesellschaft, Vol. 4, Berlin/New York 2010, pp. 59-85.

¹⁷ "All dogmas repelled me, and the faith I later regained was different from what the church demanded." Ernst Wiechert: *Forests and People*, p. 132.

¹⁸ The relevant passage begins as follows: "It was not always good for this digging in the shafts of God that Christ was born, and even less good that Christianity arose from his seed." Cf. Ernst Wiechert, *Moderner Dichterglaube*, p. 182.

¹⁹ Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 69.

²⁰ Ernst Wiechert: *Jahre und Zeiten*, pp. 352, 358, 360, 374, 403, 415 f., 419, 421 f., 506, 593, 597 f., 663, 666, 668, 671, 740, 773, 782.

²¹ Ernst Wiechert: *Von den treuen Begleitern*, in: SW Vol. 10, pp. 894-906.

²² *Ibid*, p. 901.

8) In the prominently placed quotations from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, both in his *Farewell Speech to School Leavers* in 1929 and in two speeches at the University of Munich²³, which stand in the context of the philosophy of the overman and the associated overcoming and criticism of the Christian faith.

9) In the insight, also derived from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, that the "old tablets are no longer sufficient to write the new time on", which is easily recognizable as a criticism of the Decalogue and the Judeo-Christian value system of the West.²⁴

2. Wiechert's "Altered Faith" and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*

We will now trace Wiechert's commitment to a "changed faith" by first tracing his quotes and references taken from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, which are prominently placed in his speeches to the German youth and are a kind of self-confession. When Wiechert wrote the first of these speeches in March of 1929²⁵, he was already in his fourth decade, i.e. at a more mature age in which, as is well known, he had already come to terms with several difficult experiences²⁶. Nevertheless, this period is still characterized by his intellectual metamorphosis during the 1920s, moving towards a humanitarian world view, which culminated in his major life crisis of 1929²⁷. Wiechert's reception of Nietzsche can therefore not be described as an immature intellectual love affair. Rather, it is the result of a lengthy, extremely serious and, due to personal crises, existentially necessary confrontation for him. The quotations and references to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* run throughout Wiechert's first three speeches to the German youth and can also be found in the correspondence of the last years of his life. Because Dionysus as God constitutes the metaphysical foundation of Nietzsche's philosophy, which contains an alternative to and a critique of Christianity, this is the first building block of my above-mentioned thesis. It should be mentioned at the outset that Wiechert's interpretation of the Dionysian seems to have changed in the last decade of his life.

²³ Ernst Wiechert: Abschiedsrede an die Abiturienten, in: SW, vol. 10, pp. 340-348, *Der Dichter und die Jugend*, ibid. pp. 349-367, *Der Dichter und seine Zeit*, ibid., pp. 368-380.

²⁴ Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*. S. 70.

²⁵ Ernst Wiechert: Abschiedsrede an die Abiturienten, in: SW Vol. 10, pp. 340-348.

²⁶ Notably his experiences as soldier during WW I, his recovery from nationalistic resentment of the postwar order, the death of his first-born son, his mother's suicide. (cf. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Wiechert)

²⁷ Notably the separation from his first wife and her following suicide, and his dismissal as teacher at Hufgymnasium.

Instead of Nietzsche, Hölderlin's approach to the Dionysian divine seems to have become a source of inspiration. The effects and significance of this change will be discussed below.

The following quotation in Wiechert's speech to high school graduates in 1929 comes from "Part 3 of Zarathustra's Preface"²⁸ : "I implore you, my brothers,' said Zarathustra, 'remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of supernatural hopes! What is the greatest thing you can experience? This is the hour of great contempt. The hour when you say: 'What lies in my happiness? The hour when you say: 'What lies in my virtue? The hour when you say, 'What is my righteousness?'"²⁹ These calls to reject belief in supernatural hopes, to strive beyond and aim higher than personal happiness, virtue and justice radically questions not only Christian faith, but also modern hedonism, utilitarianism, socialism and the entire metaphysical doctrine of virtue.

This is followed by "Part 4 of Zarathustra's Preface"³⁰ : "[What is great about man is that he is a bridge and not an end:]³¹ What can be loved about man is that he is a transition and a downfall. I love those who do not know how to live, except as perishing. I love the great despisers because they are the great worshippers and arrows of longing for the other shore. I love the one whose soul is wasted. I love the one who is ashamed when the die is cast for his happiness. I love the one who chastises his God because he loves his God. I love all those who are heavy drops, falling one by one from the dark cloud that hangs over men. They proclaim that the lightning is coming and perish as proclaimers."³² Wiechert omits long passages from this fourth part of the preface to Zarathustra before the last sentence, probably due to lack of space, and also does not quote the final sentence that immediately follows, which contains the mention of the overman: "Behold, I am a herald of lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud: but this lightning is called the overman."³³ Instead, he says it in his own words, slipping into the role of Zarathustra without the quotation marks of a quotation: "My friends, I do not say 'Farewell! But I do say: 'Live as apostles!'"³⁴

²⁸ The 3rd part of Zarathustra's preface in: Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None, Basel Edition. Last editions, Volume XI, Frankfurt/M. and Basel, 2013, pp. 8-12.

²⁹ Wiechert: Abschiedsrede, p. 348.

³⁰ For the 4th part of Zarathustra's preface, see Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, pp. 12-14.

³¹ Ibid. Wiechert omits this initial part of the original quotation.

³² Wiechert: Farewell speech, p. 348.

³³ Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 14.

³⁴ Wiechert: Abschiedsrede, p. 348.

The above makes it clear that Wiechert adopts the positions and even the role of Zarathustra and calls on his students to become apostles of the overman. But this is done without using this name and without identifying Nietzsche as the author in these direct quotations. Wiechert's later formulated attitude (see below) of avoiding mentioning a name for God in the "altered faith" is already evident here. Instead, the lightning already points here to the nature of Dionysus and thus the region of the divine, which in later years is also understood as flame. The way in which it is quoted suggests that Wiechert felt little to no distance from these words and the underlying philosophy and therefore passed them on to his students as a legacy. It can be assumed that the listeners of the speech were at least familiar enough with these words to recognize them as quotations due to the previous mention of Zarathustra, or at least did not misunderstand them as Wiechert's own words. Research³⁵ has already shown that this speech not only had negative professional consequences for Wiechert, but must be seen entirely in the context of his personal year of crisis, which was a culmination of several years of professional and private conflicts and crises. Expressed positively and including statements from Wiechert's autobiography, this commitment to Nietzsche's Dionysian Zarathustra can be equated with his personal transformation towards "true humanitas"³⁶, which meant a self-liberation from false authorities that were no longer credible. We can conclude that Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* provided Wiechert with guidance in times of crisis. It also encouraged him to pursue his own path as artist despite the challenges and the resistance he faced from conventional traditions. He also wanted to pass this on to his students because, as a poet, he felt particularly connected to young people. This in turn is rooted in his reading of Nietzsche's Dionysian faith, as will be shown below.

3. "Love" and "God" (without a name) instead of "Superhuman" and "Antichrist"

After the caesura of National Socialism, Wiechert's *Speech to German youth*³⁷ uses the terms "Übermensch" and "Antichrist"³⁸ for the first time explicitly and with a clearly negative connotation. It is therefore important to interpret these passages precisely in order to clarify what they mean.

³⁵ Christian Tilitzki: Abschied vom Hufengymnasium, pp. 59-85.

³⁶ Wiechert dates his path from resentment to true humanitas to the decade between the end of World War I and his farewell speech in 1929, see Ernst Wiechert: Jahre und Zeiten, p. 543.

³⁷ Ernst Wiechert: Rede an die Deutsche Jugend, in: SW, Vol. 10, pp. 381-411.

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 386, 389, 395, 400-402, 404-406. The following quotations from Wiechert's speech refer to these pages.

They describe how the "Übermensch" sneaks into the wasteland in "cloaks and disguises or steals away to commit suicide". Wiechert also believes that the Übermensch would have been "driven back into the cave if the Germans had held the word sacred during the 12 years of National Socialism". Precisely because "the word proved to be too weak", Wiechert wants to make a new start with love and by "digging up God", "no matter what name you give him". In view of the text passages that speak of "Übermensch" and "Antichrist" exclusively in the 3rd person singular, it is likely that Wiechert is referring to the National Socialist interpretation of "Übermensch" and "Antichrist", which has nothing to do with the Nietzsche's meaning of the word or Nietzsche's philosophy. The following text passages clearly do not refer to Nietzsche or Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, but to a National Socialist actor or actors who distorted and misappropriated Nietzsche's words for their own political purposes "[...] the 'overman' had realized that there was nothing more to fear from this people."³⁹ "In these twelve years [...] justice had died, truth, freedom, humanity. The way had been cleared for the final goals of the 'overman'".⁴⁰ It is also very unlikely that Wiechert distanced himself entirely from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* with these statements, as he was still adopting Nietzsche's ideas in his correspondence in the last years of his life⁴¹. This is all the more so since love and the struggle with the divine make up a considerable portion of *Zarathustra*, and Nietzsche's philosophy in general, and therefore do not contradict Wiechert's call to the German youth. Nietzsche is aware of a god who remains unknown at first and is then addressed as Dionysus.⁴² Wiechert states that the name of God is not important as long as it is only dredged up again, which leaves open which God is involved here, as long as love is at its basis. It remains to be clarified what Wiechert means by love, or how it might be distinguished from more traditional definitions. Nevertheless, it can already be said here that this criticism of the "Übermensch" and "Antichrist" possibly contains something of a warning or self-criticism in Wiechert's words. This would consist in the fact that even Nietzsche's philosophy - like Christian dogma and scientific theories - could be exploited for National Socialist propaganda if it was based only on words or names and not on love. This shows how Wiechert's skepticism regarding the naming of God culminates in it being replaced by love as a ground of the

³⁹ Ibid. S. 389.

⁴⁰ Ibid. S. 391.

⁴¹ Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 70.

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche: *Klage der Ariadne*, in: Wolfram Groddeck (ed.): *Friedrich Nietzsche, "Dionysos-Dithyramben"*. Volume 1: Textgenetic edition of the preliminary stages and fair copy, Berlin/New York 1991, pp. 143-146.

poet's faith. At this point it still remains unclear whether Wiechert remains attached to a metaphysical understanding of love or not.

4. Alleviating suffering through comforting and courageous love

We will explore the question of what kind of love Wiechert means below. However, it should already be pointed out here that Wiechert's *Farewell speech to the school-leavers* in March 1929 already linked Zarathustra's call for the apostleship of the overman with a call for "less". Nietzsche is already interpreted here in a very unique way, as the alleviation of suffering through courageous love is placed at the center: "But it is necessary that there be a little less tears in the world, a little less injustice⁴³, a little less violence, a little less agony [...] that the community of the humiliated and insulted be diminished."⁴⁴ Wiechert also seems to borrow his call for less suffering from Nietzsche's Zarathustra. He says that as a teacher he tried to "take something from his pupils instead of giving them something" - above all "fear"⁴⁵ - and implores them to "live bravely" and "not live well"⁴⁶. Nietzsche's Zarathustra learns from the sage⁴⁷ that taking can be more important than giving. This can easily be understood as a blatant criticism of the New Testament's "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), because it challenges us to redefine and reflect on what should actually be taken or given. Nietzsche's Zarathustra also evaluates bravery as good and emphasizes its advantages over compassion and elevates it above charity.⁴⁸ It is about loving bravery and letting love consist of bravery and using such love to attack those who instil fear.⁴⁹ Wiechert's *Ethics of Less*, formulated in 1929, thus already seems to be influenced by Nietzsche's Zarathustra, which propagates brave love as a response to human suffering. Through bravery, Wiechert's love becomes something courageous that is associated with action and the heroic, which alleviates fear.

Wiechert's interpretation of Nietzsche in the sense of a call for less is, despite some reformulations and additions, in continuity with his first speech at the University of Munich (1933),

⁴³The demand for less injustice while at the same time disparaging justice in the Nietzsche quote above also shows that Wiechert seems to distinguish between the pre-Christian values of "justice and law" and the more Christian value of "fairness".

⁴⁴ Ernst Wiechert: *Abschiedsrede*, p. 347.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁴⁷ Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): *Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, section "Vom Krieg und Kriegsvolke", p. 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, section "Von alten und jungen Weiblein", p. 76.

which calls on the young to "preserve silence, renew what is tired, revere what is great and love what is suffering".⁵⁰ Silence is mentioned here for the first time and not only functions rhetorically as a demarcation from the racket of National Socialist propaganda, but also ontologically means, on the one hand, the source of the renewal of the tired in man. On the other hand, "silence" refers to a presence that is not a thing and cannot be reified. Thus, it is only through silence that a view of the truly great becomes possible, which is by no means to be confused with loud and vulgar propaganda, but on the contrary is obscured by it. For the first time in Wiechert's speeches, there is now a call to love what is suffering and not just to alleviate suffering. This becomes understandable if man himself is understood as a suffering creature, as in Nietzsche's Zarathustra. In Wiechert's interpretation of Nietzsche, it is therefore very much a matter of reducing human suffering (especially that which consists of fear) through brave and comforting love for this suffering.

Wiechert expresses here for the first time, with Nietzsche's Dionysian Zarathustra in mind, the relationship between love and suffering, which initially appears dissonant and paradoxical. It is now important to see the differences both to pre-Christian Greek approaches and to the Christian tradition, where human suffering is given a positive function and value, arising either from its potential for knowledge or its potential for transformation. In Aeschylus, for example, we find the claim "to learn through suffering" and in Christianity it is said that those who follow Jesus are bound to suffer like he did. The latter suffering is understood as divine, as it brings us closer to our true humanity, which on the one hand makes us happy, while on the other makes us suffer even more from social conditions due to the humanity we have gained.⁵¹ In contrast to this, Wiechert decidedly calls for suffering to be alleviated and thus reduced through comforting and courageous love, so that love has a saving power. For Wiechert, love of suffering is therefore neither masochism nor justification, rationalization or re-evaluation of suffering. Wiechert does not see suffering in a positive light or reevaluate it, as do those who justify suffering through a function of knowledge, happiness, redemption or even destiny. On the contrary, Wiechert postulates that the love of suffering is in fact the alleviation of human suffering, which, following Nietzsche, he sees as being primarily rooted in fear. Love is not seen as the cause or beginning of suffering, but on the contrary as a consoling recovery from suffering. This recovery from suffering through comforting and

⁵⁰ Ernst Wiechert: *Der Dichter und die Jugend*, p. 367.

⁵¹ Eugen Drewermann/Michael Albus: *Die Grossen Fragen - oder: Menschlich von Gott reden*, Ostfildern 2012, pp. 83, 101.

courageous love corresponds to Wiechert's philosophy of art, which is a kind of healing art. Both can be described as "Dionysian" according to Nietzsche's thought, since they see brave love as an art of transforming suffering⁵². This philosophy of art is also expressed in Wiechert's commitment to the "highest and ultimate wisdom of the Orient and Occident", that only "small islands of consolation"⁵³ and the "moving of hearts"⁵⁴ by people of "good will"⁵⁵ can change the world for the better. Wiechert's understanding of love would thus also encompass *philia* (friendship).

This speech in 1933 closely links its ethical postulates with a quote from Nietzsche that can already be found in the 1929 speech mentioned above but is now even used as a motto. It is the quote from the section "On the Land of Education" from Part 2 of *Zarathustra*⁵⁶: "I want to make it good for my children that I am the child of my fathers."⁵⁷ In the *Farewell speech to the school-leavers* (1929), this quote is significant because it is the only time in Wiechert's four speeches to German youth that the name "Nietzsche" is mentioned. And Wiechert only says here what needs to be made good by criticizing the striving for "more and more", which is easily recognizable as a characteristic of capitalist, technically and industrially accelerated, scientifically rationalized and ideologically divided modern democracy: "more money, more high speed-trains, more parties, sects, associations, world views"⁵⁸. Wiechert resolutely counters this "more" with his aforementioned "less". In its radicality, this is still relevant in today's capitalist consumer and throwaway society, with its commercialized culture industry, its technical hyper-acceleration and intensification of all work and life processes, and the increasing fragmentation of society and the party landscape.

Parts of this calls for less are reformulated in Wiechert's fourth *Speech to German youth* (1945). Here, as in 1933, he calls for "love for the suffering creature"⁵⁹ and also adds "truth, justice and freedom"⁶⁰, whereby freedom and truth are added here for the first time. Interestingly, Wiechert replaces "love for the suffering creature" with "humanity"⁶¹ in two lists of values. This gives an indication of his understanding of love, which is not borrowed from some sectarian dogma or

⁵² Umberto Eco, *History of Beauty*, Rizzoli: New York, 2007 (3rd Printing).

⁵³ Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 102.

⁵⁶ Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): *Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 56-59.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59 and Ernst Wiechert: *Abschiedsrede*, p. 349.

⁵⁸ Ernst Wiechert: *Abschiedsrede* p. 347.

⁵⁹ Ernst Wiechert: *Rede an die Deutsche Jugend*, p. 405.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

religion. Wiechert wants to place love at the new beginning of all endeavours after the caesura of National Socialism and World War II. Now, one might get the impression that this is in contrast to his earlier borrowings from Nietzsche's Zarathustra, which strives and calls for compassion to be overcome (see in particular the chapter on the compassionate⁶²). However, the suffering of the overman and his nonetheless perpetual love of life is one of the great themes of Zarathustra, so that Wiechert's call need not stand in contrast to it. For compassion and love for the suffering creature need not be the same thing. Wiechert's call to "love the suffering creature" could mean the love of the overman for life described by Nietzsche, which also consists of human suffering. Wiechert's *Speech to the German youth* (1945), in continuity with his speeches of 1929 and 1933 discussed above, calls for the reduction and alleviation of suffering through love. However, he now goes one step further and calls for "suffering for love".⁶³ This may suggest a re-interpretation that would now also allow for the above-mentioned Christian interpretation of suffering or the interpretation that love is the cause of suffering. But it is more likely that Wiechert remains true to Nietzsche's Zarathustra but perhaps in a changed way. As we will see below this new and changed formulation may best be understood in the light of Wiechert's increasing mention of Hölderlin instead of Nietzsche. It may also be viewed as an expression of his unfolding healing recovery from the wound of metaphysics overall, including the principles of Christian and Nietzschean metaphysics, which no longer rejects or denies them and thus does not aim at overcoming any more. This does not exclude the possibility that the formula "suffering for love" still means a kind of brave love, which is not deterred by suffering and can even bravely take suffering upon itself, thereby having a comforting and thus healing effect. The question of causal sequence between love and suffering is not Wiechert's focus. This is also how the passage from his autobiography should be understood: "that all my love belongs to this poor man [...] because he is one who suffers out of love."⁶⁴ For, this love that endures suffering and thus comforts describes Wiechert's seven-year metamorphosis into a "truly liberated human being". This emphasis on transformative healing in the co-constitution of love and suffering neither intends to make love the cause of suffering, nor does it justify suffering. Instead, love remains a brave power that is able to take suffering upon itself and thus comfortingly alleviate it. This corresponds not only with Wiechert's philosophy of art (see above), which transforms the world as a kind of

⁶² Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Frankfurt a. M., 2012, pp. 99-101.

⁶³ Ernst Wiechert: *Rede an die Deutsche Jugend*, p. 405f.

⁶⁴ Ernst Wiechert: *Jahre und Zeiten*, p. 206.

healing art in the direction of the good. In addition, Wiechert seems here, like Hölderlin's hymn *Andenken* (see below), to poetically combine three areas of life that strive to hold on to something lasting in the transient (love, heroic deed and poetry), whereby, according to Hölderlin, only poetry succeeds in doing this.⁶⁵

5. Wiechert's "rescue from the deepest pain" through the "free heart" of Goethe's *Epimenides*

Wiechert ties the invocation of love as humanity in the *Speech to the German youth* (1945) to the notion of the "free heart"⁶⁶, which is considered the indestructible foundation for this turning point in German history. The latter is a quote from the festival play *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, which Goethe wrote after the defeat of Napoleon for the occasion of another political turning point in Germany: "Komm wir wollen Dir versprechen/Rettung aus dem tiefsten Schmerz/Säulen, Pfeiler kann man brechen, aber nicht ein freies Herz." With May 18, 1814, the first day of Goethe's intellectual engagement with the *Epimenides* project⁶⁷ also coincides with the later birthday of Ernst Wiechert, who also quotes *Epimenides* in his poem "Der 60. Geburtstag, 18. Mai 1947"⁶⁸. In the last line of this poem, Wiechert quotes from Goethe's *Epimenides* "Rescue from the deepest pain" and describes this as the highest good and goal of his poetic endeavors. Indestructible love - understood as a "free heart" (see also "freedom" in Wiechert's speech to the German youth in 1945) - should rescue us from the deepest pain. Wiechert thus derives his self-image as a poet from Goethe. This reference to *Epimenides* also seems particularly fitting, as Epimenides initiated the construction of the altar of the "unknown god" in ancient Athens and is referred to as a pre-Socratic poet.⁶⁹

Goethe's *Epimenides* was not a popular success in the post-Napoleonic, nationalist restoration phase, not least because of its undercooled and merely lip-synched nationalism and outmoded individual-personal understanding of freedom.⁷⁰ *Epimenides*' concept of freedom is not democratic and, in addition to peace, only invokes the personal inner freedom of conscience, love and faith.

⁶⁵ Cf. Valk, Thorsten: Das dunkle Licht der Dichtung - Zur Kunst des Erinnerens in Friedrich Hölderlins Hymne *Andenken*, p. 3. Accessed on 1.6.24: [http://www.goethezeitportal.de/fileadmin/PDF/db/wiss/hoelderlin/andenken_valk.pdf]

⁶⁶ See Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Theo Buck: *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, Goethe Handbuch, Frankfurt a. M., 1996, p. 341.

⁶⁸ Wiechert links his poem "Der 60. Geburtstag, 18.5.1947" with Goethe's *Epimenides* through the quote in the last line: "als 'Rettung aus dem tiefsten Schmerz'". Cf. Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, pp. 44, 82.

⁶⁹ See Wikipedia. Accessed online 7/18/2024: [<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epimenides>].

⁷⁰ Theo Buck, *ibid.* p. 348 f.

That this understanding of freedom need not be apolitical is also shown by its use by the *White Rose* resistance group, which in 1942 used *Epimenides* quotes, in particular the call for freedom, on leaflets for its call for passive resistance against the Nazis.⁷¹

This gives rise to the conclusion that, for Wiechert, love as an expression of the freedom of the heart is not only brave. It is also saving and indestructible as the highest power of being. Moreover, it seems to be a pagan-antique, but in any case pre-Christian love and freedom in the sense of its proponents Nietzsche and Goethe. Accordingly, Goethe's *Epimenides* embeds the Pauline virtues of faith, hope and love as an allegorical group of three in a symbolic gesture in further groups of three: war, cunning, oppression as well as muses, unity, genii/choirs.⁷² Wiechert's understanding of love is thus inspired by both Nietzsche and Goethe. It is fitting that Nietzsche described Goethe as the embodiment of Dionysian faith⁷³ due to their shared Spinozism: "Such a free spirit stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, believing that only the individual is reprehensible, that in the whole everything is redeemed and affirmed - *it no longer denies...* But such a belief is the highest of all possible beliefs: I have baptized it with the name of *Dionysus*. - "⁷⁴ Following Nietzsche's interpretation, Wiechert's freedom and love would be synonymous with Goethe's and thus also redeemed by "the whole" (see below). However, in addition to Spinoza's pantheism, Goethe's "liberated spirit" is also based on his experiences during his trips to Italy. His *Venetian Epigrams*, for example, demonstrate that Eros was indispensable to Goethe's freedom movement as self-awakening and self-renewal.⁷⁵ This is consistent with Wiechert's quote mentioned at the beginning, which mentions Pan and Eros together. According to Plato, Eros was the strongest and most original of all the gods, who had brought together the primordial parents Gaia and Uranos, and is therefore the unifying force among all that divides. The Roman trivialization of Eros to Cupid is only a dim representation of this cosmic power.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Ellen Pilsworth: Goethe's Politics and Political Uses: Nazi and Anti-Nazi Readings of Des Epimenides Erwachen, Oxford German Studies, vol. 52, issue 1, 2023, pp. 15-27 and 23-26.

⁷² Theo Buck, *ibid.* p. 348.

⁷³ In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Nietzsche regarded his and Goethe's admiration for Spinoza as the basis for their shared Dionysian faith. Compare Paul Bishop: Aesthetic Life and Tragic Insight in Nietzsche's Use of Goethe, in: *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 39, issue 1, thematic issue: Goethe, p. 61.

⁷⁴ Giorgio Colli/Mazzino Montinari (eds.): Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 6, Berlin/New York, p. 152.

⁷⁵ Sabine Appel: *Im Feengarten - Goethe und die Frauen*, Munich, 1999, p. 319.

⁷⁶ Eugen Drewermann/Michael Albus "Die Grossen Fragen", p. 52.

Whether Christian love in the form of agape, which is distinguished from philia (friendship) and eros, is now excluded and belittled by Wiechert's confession of the God Pan, or remains somehow included in a changed way, is an open question. For even in his "changed faith", Wiechert held on to Paul's words "love is the greatest of them all" to the very end⁷⁷. Consider, for example, that the call to alleviate the suffering caused by fear is also reminiscent of the New Testament account of the miraculous healings of Jesus of Nazareth. It is said there that he was sent as a "physician to the sick" and his work is interpreted as the healing of guilt complexes caused by fear⁷⁸. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Wiechert - instead of human faith in God's love for people to overcome fear - emphasizes bravery as the essence and basis of love to alleviate fear. In doing so, he tends to tie in with pre-Christian traditions such as classical antiquity, in which bravery is a virtue. Moreover, this completely free, liberated and liberating love ("free heart") seems to be the same love that he placed above the word and naming of God in his *Speech to German youth* (1945). This, in turn, seems to be a rather clear nod towards a healing recovery from Christian metaphysics. Wiechert's love as freedom could thus be something like the post-metaphysical ground for his "changed faith" and "modern poetic faith". Although, according to the wording of the objective of "healing", the "free heart" seems similar to a Christian "faith in freedom"⁷⁹, they remain nevertheless different in terms of content. One emphasizes courageous love powered by free movements of the heart whilst the other emphasizes a freely chosen faith in the Christian God's love.

6. Wiechert's "Dawn" and "Flame" from Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Ecce Homo

Wiechert's references to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* began in the context of his personal and professional crisis year of 1929, i.e. during his metamorphosis towards "true humanitas". At this time, he saw his graduating class of school leavers as part of a new post-war and post-inflation generation. He perceived them as searching for and needing a resilient orientation beyond traditional conventions in a time still characterized by social, political and economic turmoil. It is therefore all the more significant that Wiechert made such a central commitment to Nietzsche in this existential

⁷⁷ Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, p. 69.

⁷⁸ For this interpretation, see Eugen Drewermann: *Jesus von Nazareth - Befreiung zum Frieden - Glauben in Freiheit*, Düsseldorf/Zürich (6)2001, especially section II, 3b) "Wunderheilung oder: Gesandt als 'Arzt zu den Kranken' (Mk 2,17)", pp. 259-299.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

situation for him and his students. For this confession is also a self-confession to Nietzsche's Dionysian Zarathustra. It gave Wiechert an important orientation and stability that defied the crises. And, he publicly propagated it several times, despite the expected negative consequences. However, not only for himself, but above all for young people, the youth as his audience and addressee. As a poet, Wiechert felt a special affinity with young people⁸⁰, who are "shining with the glimmer of dawn" thanks to their "unconditional striving for a better, fairer and nobler world, their pious reverence for the altars of humanity, their chivalrous attitude towards the weak, the suffering and the defeated".⁸¹ The "dawn" thus attributed to the youth and thus also to the kindred poet himself is also a clear reference to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Here, in the third part of the already quoted section "Of old and new tablets", it says: "It was also there that I read the word 'Übermensch' from the path, and that man is something that must be overcome, - that man is a bridge and not an end: blissfully praising himself for his noon and evening, as a path to new dawns"⁸². In this respect, it also becomes clear why Wiechert must have understood Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* as the basis for the future as the new, constantly renewing and thus eternally young age. For Nietzsche perceives Dionysus as an unknown demi-God becoming God, who is thus a future and future-giving God who is approaching man or towards whom man is unfolding.

Wiechert's speech at the University of Munich in 1935, which called for distance from the Nazis, concludes in the same spirit with a quote from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*:

"Yes, I know from where I am,
Unsatisfiable like the flame
I burn and consume myself.
Light turns all I touch,
Ashes all I leave behind,
Flame I am for sure"⁸³

Again, this Nietzsche passage seems to function as a self-confession or as an important support, since it refers to the area of self-assurance or self-discovery. The title *Ecce Homo* alludes to two

⁸⁰ Wiechert developed his thoughts on the kinship of youth and poets in his speech of July 6, 1933, *Der Dichter und die Jugend*, held in the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Munich.

⁸¹ Ernst Wiechert: *Rede an die Deutsche Jugend*, p. 391.

⁸² Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): *Friedrich Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 67.

⁸³ Giorgio Colli/Mazzino Montinari (eds.): *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, p. 367 (no. 62). Ernst Wiechert: *The Poet and his Time*, p.380.

classical references at⁸⁴: The exclamation "ecce homo" (Behold, what a man!) by Pontius Pilate about Jesus standing trial.⁸⁵ And Nietzsche subtitled one of his writings of the same title "*How to become what you are*", referring to Pindar's second Pythian Ode: "Become who you are through self-knowledge"⁸⁶, which Nietzsche had already quoted in earlier works. In his preface, Nietzsche states that "he wants to explain to the world who he is so as not to be confused. He contrasts the greatness of his task with the smallness of his contemporaries, who had misjudged him. He was not a popanz, 'rather a satyr [...] than a saint', not a sage, not a world redeemer or improver, not a fanatic or idealist; as proof, he quotes several passages from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as he does frequently in the book"⁸⁷.

The flame is again reminiscent also of lightning, which, as already mentioned in *Zarathustra*, denotes the overman. As will be shown in more detail below this ties in with Hölderlin's poetry, which was also dear to Nietzsche and Wiechert. Here lightening is heavenly or sacred fire. It is the realm of the divine in the form of Dionysus, to whom a lightning-like being is ascribed as a demigod. Nietzsche became acquainted with Hölderlin's references to Dionysus at school and shaped them into his metaphysical philosophy of Dionysus.⁸⁸ In "Become who you are", Nietzsche's philosophical attempt to turn Dionysian becoming into human existence by will, i.e. through a courageous love of life despite the painful and labyrinthine process, resonates.⁸⁹ As an unknown becoming God⁹⁰, Dionysus is an uncanny ground of Being and the origin of a single willful becoming that constantly creates new worlds, thereby destroying old ones, and thus increases into ever higher willfully created actualizations of human potentials. Nietzsche's philosophy calls on us to accept this God by discovering our artistic nature and creatively shaping this process of becoming. And Wiechert as poet seems to largely agree with this in 1935.

⁸⁴ This paragraph on Nietzsche's Ecce Homo contains information from Wikipedia [accessed: 8.3.2024]: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecce_homo_\(Nietzsche\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecce_homo_(Nietzsche)).

⁸⁵ Joh. 19, 5: ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

⁸⁶ Giorgio Colli/Mazzino Montinari (eds.): Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke, vol. 6, p. 255. For the ancient model, see Pindar, Pyth. 2, 72: γένοι' οἷος ἐσσι μάθών.

⁸⁷ This quote is from Wikipedia (accessed 22.03.2024): [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecce_homo_\(Nietzsche\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecce_homo_(Nietzsche))

⁸⁸ Rüdiger Safranski: Nietzsche. Biographie seines Denkens, Munich/Vienna 2000, p. 81. Hölderlin's influence on Nietzsche is discussed in more detail on p. 292f in Safranski, Rüdiger: Hölderlin - Komm! ins Offene, Freund! Nietzsche also became aware of the Dionysian in Goethe: "And in Nietzsche, absolute reality is the Dionysian, in the words of Goethe, which Nietzsche quotes: 'an eternal sea, a changing weaving, a glowing life'" (see p. 72 in: Rüdiger Safranski: Nietzsche. Biographie seines Denkens, Munich/Vienna 2000.

⁸⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche: Klage der Ariadne, in: Wolfram Groddeck (ed.): Friedrich Nietzsche, Dionysos-Dithyramben, pp. 143-146.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Furthermore, Wiechert's criticism of the old tablets⁹¹, which he repeated in his correspondence right up to the end and which were inadequate for the new age, is again a fairly clear reference to the third part "Of old and new tablets" from Nietzsche's Zarathustra.⁹² Here, the 12th commandment is a repetition of the commandment taken up by Wiechert in two speeches, as already shown: "In your children you shall do well that you are the children of your fathers."⁹³ While Nietzsche's call for new tablets is linked to the "re-evaluation of all values", Wiechert calls in 1945 to honour above-mentioned values (truth, justice, freedom) and for the world to be transformed for the better through people of "good will". This indicates again Wiechert's unique and unfolding adaptation of Nietzsche's philosophy within his poet's faith, which will be clarified below. The same applies to the question of whether Wiechert's call for less suffering, like Nietzsche's "revaluation of all values" as "overcoming", remained in a kind of metaphysical antithesis⁹⁴ to the metaphysical value positions of Christian-capitalist-rationalist modernism or whether he increasingly aimed to recover from them in a healing way. In any case, his student K. William Kapp believed that Wiechert was concerned with the "renewal of eternal values"⁹⁵. This interpretation emphasizes continuity in renewal, i.e. the revitalizing continuation and preservation of a certain tradition, which is even supposed to be eternal in some sense. We will discuss below which tradition this could be, how it and its eternity are to be understood, and what the return to its still present beginning could look like. Following Kapp's interpretation, it is clear that Wiechert neither aimed at breaking with all traditions in the sense of a tabula rasa with a subsequent new beginning, nor with a simple reversal of a tradition into its opposite. Yet, the term "values" suggests that Kapp may have seen the contribution of his former teacher Wiechert as part of the metaphysical tradition of the West, i.e. Plato's first philosophy of values⁹⁶. What speaks for and against the appropriateness of this interpretation will be discussed in more detail below.

7. Wiechert's faith from "illuminated darkness" and

⁹¹ Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 70.

⁹² Ludger Lütkehaus/David Marc Hoffmann (eds.): *Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 65-91.

⁹³ *Ibid.* S. 75.

⁹⁴ For this interpretation of Nietzsche, see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I (1936-1939)* ed. Brigitte Schillbach 1996; *Complete Edition, Section I: Published Writings, 1910-1976, vol. 6.1*, Vittorio Klostermann.

⁹⁵ William K. Kapp: *Wiechert als Erzieher*, in: *Bekenntnis zu Ernst Wiechert. Ein Gedenkbuch zum 60. Geburtstag des Dichters*, Munich 1947: p. 18.

⁹⁶ Ivo De Gennaro (ed.): *Value - Sources and Readings on a Key Concept of the Globalized World*, Leiden/Boston, 2012, p. 34.

Hölderlin's memory from "dark light"

For Hölderlin, on the other hand, Dionysus as a *demi-god* is a mediator for the poets to the gods and to the "coming god".⁹⁷ Accordingly, Hölderlin sees it as his task as a poet to openly expose himself to the fire of the demigod Dionysus in the "Night of the Gods" and thus, as a seeker of God, to find the trace of the gods. Hölderlin is one of Wiechert's "faithful companions", who expressly adopts the "proud words" from his poem *Andenken* as "rearguard words" of the poets against the "intelligent, the purposeful, the actively successful": "What lasts is bestowed by the poets".⁹⁸ This would mean that Wiechert agrees with Hölderlin that the poet through heavenly fire bestows the lasting ground of Being through poetry. Wiechert appears to suggest that this happens in Hölderlin's "night of the gods" since he mainly includes night and evening songs in his *Von den treuen Begleitern*. This dual unity (fire and night) is also evoked by the opening section of the third verse of the hymn *Andenken*, which is topically related to Dionysus as a wine that unites heaven and earth⁹⁹: "But let someone, hand me the fragrant cup, full of the dark light, so that I may rest". This suggests that, for both Hölderlin and Wiechert, Dionysus stands for the balance between the "cosmic spheres" and the "all-encompassing reconciliation of opposites".¹⁰⁰

In *Modern Poets' Faith*, Wiechert writes, in contrast to Christianity, that poets want "God's flame" and "not his light" and are guided by something invisible that "is in the dark" and which they "have to make brighter"¹⁰¹. In the "broken God language", which is "the harvest of a hundred thousand years", lies the "dark testimony of a fourth dimension".¹⁰² By the "fourth dimension", Wiechert seems to mean Time, which is revealed by the poet's language as an illuminated darkness. By means of his "broken God-language", the poet thus establishes the lasting ground of Being for humanity, which as a testimony contains both bright flame *and* darkness, both of which are divine. For Wiechert, this darkness itself, whether with or without a name, is God as the dark "earth", the eternal source, the

⁹⁷ Rüdiger Safranski: Hölderlin. Komm ins Offene, Freund! Biography, Munich 2019, p. 209ff. Brigitte Schillbach (ed.): Heidegger, Martin (1996) Gesamtausgabe, I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976, Vol. 6.1, Nietzsche I. Vittorio Klostermann. Susanne Ziegler (ed.): Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1934/35, in: Martin Heidegger: Gesamtausgabe. II. Volume 39: Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine", Frankfurt 1989, pp. 188-189.

⁹⁸ Ernst Wiechert: *Von den treuen Begleitern*, p. 894.

⁹⁹ Thorsten Valk: *Das dunkle Licht der Dichtung - Zur Kunst des Erinnerens in Friedrich Hölderlins Hymne Andenken*, p. 12, accessed online on 30.5.24.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, accessed online on 1.6.24.

¹⁰¹ Ernst Wiechert: *Moderner Dichterglaube*, 181, 183.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 181 f.

deeper, mysterious and indestructible ground of poetry: "No matter what name God has among poets. ...Goethe did not want to name him...for Rilke he was the 'Dark One'. ... But for all of them he was the dark, cool earth into which they dipped their roots. Storm was their everyday life, frost and heat, hunger and the axe of their neighbour. But their blood rose from the dark, from the sheltered and indestructible..."¹⁰³

Accordingly, the poet, with the help of the demigod Dionysus, not only creates the lasting ground of Being as "broken God language" *in* the dark, but also *from* the dark. This darkness thus becomes brighter without disappearing or losing its mysteriousness. And the illuminating poetry itself, as a "dark testimony", has a remnant of the darkness from which it comes. Thus, for Wiechert, the illuminating divine flame and the divine darkness are two enduring powers of Being. Light and dark do not mix to form the resultant grey color of modern oblivion of being. Wiechert explicitly rejects Christian theology in relation to light ("not its light") and thus indirectly also its understanding of darkness.¹⁰⁴ Wiechert's "modern poet's faith" with regard to the relationship between light and darkness seems to be in the tradition of Heraclitus' philosophy, at least if one follows Heidegger's work on Heraclitus and Hölderlin. Although Dionysus is named by Heidegger as Hölderlin's favorite demigod, he is also identified as a simple biological natural cycle of becoming and passing away. Following Heidegger, Hölderlin's and thus also Wiechert's bright flame *from* darkness would be more akin to a coexistence of concealing unconcealment, or a mysterious dual unity of Being as *Becoming*.¹⁰⁵

For Hölderlin, the Dionysian search for the gods in the night of the gods led to a "*coming god*"¹⁰⁶. He seems to address this in the poem "Der Einzige".¹⁰⁷ Would it therefore be possible that Wiechert's last novel *Missa sine Nomine* (1950) is a mass for this god without a name? This would be supported by his *Modern Poet's Faith* ("Goethe would not name him") and his *Speech to German youth* (1945), which dismisses the name for the "God to be unearthed" as unimportant or at least of no primary importance. However, it should also be noted that Albert Schweitzer, for example, described Jesus

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 180 f.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Sloterdijk discusses the greyness of metaphysics and modernity as the result of a shift towards grey zones, as well as the treatment of darkness in Christian theology as unconvincing: *Wer noch kein Grau gedacht hat - Eine Farbenlehre*, Frankfurt a. M., 2022, chapter 3, pp. 121-170.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger: *Complete Edition - II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944*, Vol. 55, *Heraklit - Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens - Logik. Heraclitus' Doctrine of Logos*, Vittorio Klostermann, 1979, p. 19ff, p. 160ff.

¹⁰⁶ Friedrich Hölderlin: *Brot und Wein*, 3rd stanza, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Berlin/Darmstadt, 1956, p. 277.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 323-326.

as "nameless"¹⁰⁸ and that Lao Tzu had already said before him that "the name that can be named is not the eternal name"¹⁰⁹. Dionysus is also referred to as *Polyônomos*, as he had up to 110 epithets¹¹⁰. This helps us to better understand the manner, meaning and purpose of Wiechert's use of "without name".

8. Wiechert's "Ganzes" and Hölderlin's Hen Kai Pan

For a better understanding of Wiechert's "changed faith", his mass without name, and unnamed God, we will now look at his concept of the "whole". Wiechert's autobiography uses the "whole"¹¹¹ throughout. However, as mentioned at the beginning, this occurs without any specific reference to Spinoza's pantheism, despite the positive mention of pantheism (see above). Is Wiechert's understanding of the "whole" free of the metaphysics whose traces can still be found in Goethe's and Hölderlin's early Dionysian pantheism due to their reception of Spinoza? Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion* is an expression of the ἐν καὶ πᾶν (known in German as "Hen Kai Pan" and translated as "One and All"), which was an invention of German Graecomania. This became such a firm cliché and topos in the "pantheism controversy"¹¹² that Friedrich Schleiermacher was able to coin the phrase: "Pantheism is the secret religion of the Germans."¹¹³ Goethe was also prompted by this controversy, which partly revolved around his poem *Prometheus*. He developed his own interpretation of pantheism, which affirms the becoming of Being as a whole, in the main agreeing with Spinoza.¹¹⁴ Yet, somewhat different from Spinoza's rationalism he calls for a philosophy that "elevates and secures our original feeling, as if we were one with nature, and transforms it into a deep, calm contemplation."¹¹⁵ The late Goethe and Hölderlin seem to have converged in their fundamental view of the unity of nature.¹¹⁶ Hölderlin interprets the Hen Kai Pan in *Hyperion* still

¹⁰⁸ "He comes to us as an unknown and nameless person..." - Albert Schweitzer: *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, p. 630, quoted in: Drewermann, Eugen, 2001, *Jesus of Nazareth – Befreiung zum Frieden – Glauben in Freiheit*, 6th edition, Düsseldorf/Zurich, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Lao Tzu, quoted in: Eugen Drewermann/Michael Albus: *Die Grossen Fragen - oder: Menschlich von Gott reden*, p. 161.

¹¹⁰ See Wikipedia [<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysos#Beinamen>].

¹¹¹ For the numerous references, see footnote 18.

¹¹² Max L. Baeumler: Hölderlin und das Hen Kai Pan, in: *Monatshefte*, Vol. 59, 2, 1967, pp. 137 f., 140.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 137 f., 146.

¹¹⁴ See Rüdiger Safranski: *Goethe - Kunstwerk des Lebens*, Frankfurt a.M., 2019, chapter 16.

¹¹⁵ Max L. Baeumler: Hölderlin and the Hen Kai Pan, pp. 137-138.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 137f., 135.

more metaphysically as "to be one with everything" in the sense of the unification of man and nature¹¹⁷. Influenced above all by Schiller¹¹⁸, he sees this sense of oneness as being created by Beauty which evokes love and can be bestowed by poet's as lasting ground of Being. In *Hyperion*, Hölderlin writes: "To unite ourselves with nature into an infinite whole, that is the goal of all our endeavours, whether we want it or not."¹¹⁹

In light of this, it is possible that Wiechert's conception of the "whole" in his autobiography *Jahre und Zeiten* is more in line with Hölderlin's late work due to the lack of positive reference to Spinoza's rationalist pantheism and the rejection of "principles" and "rationalism". It may be understood as part of a unique romantic-pantheistic tradition of specifically German Spinozism. The latter exhibits clear differences to Spinoza's rationalist philosophy and is rather prefigured in the poetic-cosmogonic view of a divine unity of nature in pre-Socratics such as Heraclitus and Parmenides. Correspondingly, Hölderlin's late work has been interpreted as post-metaphysical¹²⁰ and "unity as wholeness" was identified as its defining structural element¹²¹: "In Hölderlin's *Andenken*, the poet alone is characterized by a perception of wholeness. [...] The poet bestows something lasting, since out of a supreme consciousness he combines everything that is isolated into a wholeness and thus restores that original unity [...]."¹²² The "whole" is described by Wiechert as a kind of supreme event of Being¹²³, which establishes a qualitative and binding measure for human existence. The "whole" reveals itself to Wiechert in unique moments that are eventful and unpredictable and usually occur in connection with music, nature or special people.

The "whole" is repeatedly distinguished from calculating rationality and dissecting science. In Wiechert's work, it thus functions as an alternative to the central metaphysical foundation of Western modernity. Wiechert is certain that the "destroyed image of man" originates from the time

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 144.

¹¹⁸ See Friedrich Schiller "Über Anmut und Würde" 1793, in Schiller - Ästhetische Schriften, Tempel Klassiker - Schillers Sämtliche Werke, Vierter Band, Tempel Verlag, Leipzig.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 137 f., 142.

¹²⁰ For this interpretation of Hölderlin, see Martin Heidegger's work: Susanne Ziegler (ed.): Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1934/35, in: Martin Heidegger: Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944. Vol. 39: Hölderlin's hymns "Germanien" and "Der Rhein", Frankfurt 1989.

¹²¹ Max L. Baeumler: Hölderlin and the Hen Kai Pan, pp. 137 f., 147, FN 14.

¹²² Cf. Thorsten Valk: Das dunkle Licht der Dichtung - Zur Kunst des Erinnerns in Friedrich Hölderlins Hymne Andenken p. 11, accessed online on 1.6.24.

¹²³ This view follows Martin Heidegger's post-metaphysical "event thinking". Peter Trawny (ed.): Zum Ereignis-Denken, in: Martin Heidegger: Gesamtausgabe. III. section: Unpublished essays, lectures, thoughts, volume 73,2, Frankfurt 2013.

"when it fell out of the great cosmic context, put reason on the throne and wanted to be like God"¹²⁴. This opened humanity up to the "message of evil".¹²⁵ This rejection of the metaphysics of rationalism certainly points in the direction of a post-metaphysical understanding of pantheism and the whole. In addition, Wiechert seems to date the destroyed image of man to the rise of the Western metaphysics of modernity to world domination. Namely, the transitional phase from 1500 (end of the Middle Ages and beginning of capitalism) to 1648 (end of the Thirty Years' War), which was characterized by increasingly extreme excesses of violence.¹²⁶ This modern rationalism, known as classical rationalism and primarily associated with Spinoza, Descartes and Leibniz, also has precursors in ancient metaphysics. For example, Plato's philosophy can be seen as an early influence.¹²⁷ It is therefore questionable whether Wiechert might be referring the opening of the "message of evil" to the beginning of metaphysics in antiquity after all. His distancing from Christian dogma, the church, and "his light" within his modern poetic faith would speak in favor of this earlier point in time. Also his denying the healing of the world from a principle suggests a non- or post-metaphysical stance. In addition, he shares the thesis that the German catastrophe in the 20th century is causally linked to idealism¹²⁸, which is not only connected to Kant and Hegel, but also in turn goes back to antiquity with Plato.

But does Wiechert really avoid a metaphysical counter-movement based on pantheism of the "whole". This might ultimately merely be a dialectical antithesis or an attempt to re-evaluate and overcome, but which would remain tied to metaphysics precisely because of this? An answer to this question could be found in Wiechert's text "*modern poetic faith*". Against the background of the "whole" described as eventful, Wiechert's poet's faith would be an attempt to differentiate itself from Christian metaphysics and scientific reason as the metaphysics of modernity. It could be a continuation of pre-Christian and pre-Socratic traditions, possibly even, as described above, in the tradition of Heraclitus' philosophy of light or Hölderlin's post-metaphysical late poetry. However, Wiechert's poetic faith seems to be described as *modern* possibly because it is addressed to a modern audience with modern means of the thinker and poet, within a specifically modern context,

¹²⁴ Wiechert in Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, p. 86.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Since Calvin, economic success based on rational, calculating capitalist accounting has also become proof of divine election. Cf. Fabian Scheidler: *The end of the Megamachine. A brief history of a failing civilization*. Alresford, 2020, pp. 63-71 and 203.

¹²⁷ See Wikipedia on June 4, 2024: [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism>].

¹²⁸ Wiechert in Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*.

in order to familiarize them with alternatives to metaphysical foundations. After all, Wiechert, not unlike Hölderlin, also underwent an intellectual development in which a still metaphysical understanding of pantheism only gradually seems to have given way to a more eventful understanding of the "whole" and a dark God without a name. Perhaps he wants to take his modern readers there by inviting them to follow this development. The autobiographically documented and eventful "whole" could thus be understood as a post-metaphysically inspired source of *modern* poetic faith, which creates a unity from the duality of illuminating flame and darkness. In this respect, Wiechert would also have freed himself from an anti-attitude towards cultural modernism, since he apparently recognizes it as a spiritual vehicle on the way to the post-metaphysical "whole". In Wiechert's poetic faith, the characteristically modern would thus be in the renewal or new beginning as a turn towards and standing within an original ground that is still issuing forth. This enables to comfortingly heal the tradition of metaphysics as a kind of spiritual wound ("message of evil").

Following this view, Wiechert's recovery from metaphysics with modern cultural means, inspired by the "whole", could also be communicated in his call for "Truth" in his *Speech to German youth* (1945). According to Wiechert's autobiography, truth definitely does not mean any scientific knowledge or findings in the modern sense, and certainly not the explanation of the world from a principle or system.¹²⁹ On the contrary, Wiechert believes that the "whole" saved him from this false conclusion throughout his life. For Wiechert, truth therefore means something more like existential truthfulness based on authenticity. Wiechert's statement that poetic truth - now understood with Hölderlin as the lasting ground of Being - is the "ultimate gain of life"¹³⁰ fits in with this. He views it as man's task, by means of poetry, "to gain the narrow space in his face on which God could rest when his feet were tired"¹³¹. And is it not this very poetry as the contemplation of the whole in truthfulness that signifies authentic "freedom" and that "move hearts" in order to create a better world on a small scale¹³². This freedom movement of the heart could be understood as a spontaneous action because it builds brave islands of consolation to alleviate suffering as an expression and proof of its truth, which consists of love. Wiechert's art emerging from the whole

¹²⁹ Ernst Wiechert: *Jahre und Zeiten*, p. 352.

¹³⁰ Ernst Wiechert: *Von den treuen Begleitern*, p. 901 f.

¹³¹ Ernst Wiechert: *Missa sine Nomine*, SW, vol. 6, p. 145.

¹³² Wiechert considers his attempt to move the world or a mass of people to do good to have failed. Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, pp. 30, 70, 79.

would thus be a mass without a name as a lasting ground for Being made of truth as love. It seems especially significant that Wiechert bravely clings to his philosophy of art and "believes in his stars", even though he is convinced that the Occident is doomed.¹³³

9. Concluding Discussion

The investigation has demonstrated how Wiechert's "changed faith" is oriented towards the Dionysian pantheisms of Nietzsche, Goethe and Hölderlin. According to his student K. William Kapp, social conditions can be criticized and humanitarian alternatives formulated on the basis of these poets and thinkers.¹³⁴ Kapp finds the ethical core of this humanitarian alternative in his call to reduce suffering through love for the suffering creature. Similar to Wiechert, he sees it as incompatible with the capitalist mechanisms of the free market economy.¹³⁵ Kapp sees in this ethic a renewal of "eternal values", probably on the basis of the value concepts "truth, justice, freedom" cited by Wiechert. He thus seems to view his teacher as part of the metaphysical value tradition since Plato. However, the renewal of something "eternal" could also mean that this must be non-metaphysical at its core, as metaphysics has neither been eternal nor will it be. It seems that Wiechert has approached such a non-metaphysical belief on the basis of a pre-Socratic-pantheistic understanding of the "whole". This could certainly form an *eternal* source of renewal through poetry as dawn and flame that fuel a courageous love for the suffering creature. Wiechert's final call to the German youth is for this non-metaphysical love, which is more original than the word or principles. Love would thus be the path and the goal, which consist of completely free, brave, indestructible, healing, but also suffering, saving and comforting movements of the heart. These occur magically-truthful and holistically-divine through a letting-be of the whole, and enable the emergence into nobleness.¹³⁶

¹³³ "[...] that the Occident is drifting faster and faster towards a distant downfall [...]" in Sebastian Berger: *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, 70. Cf. also similar statements *ibid.*, pp. 74, 86.

¹³⁴ Kapp, K. William, *The Humanization of the Social Sciences*, edited by John E. Ullmann, Roy Preiswerk, University Press of America: Lanham, London, New York, p. 74.

¹³⁵ William K. Kapp: *Wiechert als Erzieher*, pp. 12-23. Kapp criticizes capitalist bookkeeping, cost accounting and accounting as a "system of unpaid costs", as environmental damage is passed on to the general public and future generations.

¹³⁶ Wiechert's interpretation of love as non-metaphysical is derived from Heidegger's event thinking, *ibid.*, p. 916.

Wiechert would thus be in the tradition of the Graecophile German discourse network of the 18th and 19th centuries. In this Dionysus and pantheism stand for different attempts and ways of searching for the divine and God and signify a turning away from Christian-capitalist-rationalist metaphysics. Following Martin Heidegger's philosophy¹³⁷, Wiechert could have moved post-metaphysically (without principle) towards a coming ultimate God without a name. In this he might have followed Hölderlin with his quest to bestow a lasting ground of Being in his *Missa sine nomine* inspired by the romantic-pantheistic experience of the eventful "whole" that he autobiographically vouched for. Against this, Nietzsche's lasting influence seems to sit uneasy and could potentially be interpreted as an inconsistency within Wiechert's faith and philosophy or art. His notion of "people of good will"¹³⁸ seems to remain partially rooted in the tradition of Nietzsche's metaphysics of will. At the same time, Wiechert maintains the distinction between good and evil, which is inconsistent with Nietzsche's philosophy. Conversely, Hölderlin's poetology is "purposeless" derived from favour or fortunate coincidence of the "whole", which is immortalized in poetic thought. This could be interpreted to mean that Wiechert's recovery from metaphysics either stopped halfway and ended in an incongruous contradiction. Or, one could see it as Wiechert trying to combine both positions in accordance with Goethe's *Epimenides*: "Letting be amidst strong will".¹³⁹ Perhaps he perceives the poetic recovery from metaphysics as an ongoing responsibility that requires both qualities. As a kind of healing art for the suffering of fear, this does not allow for a final perfection but rather requires constant efforts to open up spaces of possibility for the favor of freedom and silence, in which love can unfold.

¹³⁷ See Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche and, in comparison, his interpretation of Hölderlin. Brigitte Schillbach (ed.): Heidegger, Martin (1996) Gesamtausgabe, I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976, Vol. 6.1, Nietzsche I. Vittorio Klostermann. Susanne Ziegler (ed.): Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1934/35, in: Martin Heidegger: Gesamtausgabe. II. Volume 39: Hölderlin's hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine", Frankfurt 1989.

¹³⁸ Sebastian Berger, *Dichtung und Wirtschaft*, pp. 70, 102.

¹³⁹ See Goethe, *Epimenides*, Act 2, Act 10: "THE UNITY. The Spirit who creates all worlds/Through me he teaches his dear ones:/From danger, the immense/Saves only total power./What I teach seems so easy,/And almost impossible to fulfill:/Letting be amidst great will./Now the word's goal is reached,/I see the highest wish fulfilled."