PART TWO

WANDERINGS THROUGH THE WORLD OF THOUGHT
I do not know who put me into the world, or what the world is, or what I am. I am in a terrible ignorance of everything. I do not know what my body is, or my senses, or my soul, or even that part of me which thinks what I am saying, which reflects on everything and on itself, and knows itself no better than anything else. [...] I see nothing but infinites on all sides which surround me as if I were an atom or a shadow that endures for an instant and returns no more.

Blaise Pascal Pensées

Modern man lives in a boundless world. I do not know who made the tools I use or where they were made; neither do I know from whence or from whom comes the knowledge and intelligence within which I am grounded. These are all nameless things; anonymous and amorphous. Thus the modern self, existing in the midst of such living conditions, has become an anonymous, amorphous, characterless thing.

Miki Kiyoshi Notes on life

From the perspective of 1941–2, it must have seemed to Miki that the years from 1920 until 1925 belonged to a golden age of reading and study. Wanderings through the World of Books suggests closure with the end of his physical tour of Europe. However, this sense of closure is illusory. His wanderings through the world of thought (shisō henreki) were only just beginning. This chapter examines Miki’s interpretation of the existential nature of man, based primarily on influences from Dilthey, Heidegger, Pascal and Marx, between autumn 1925 and the early part of 1932. During this period his thought is characterised by a gradual process in which French Enlightenment humanism is synthesised with (or indeed sublated by) German historical materialism. Historically and culturally this period marks a transition from the relative optimism and liberalism of the Taishō period to the beginnings of a sense of crisis and anxiety during the first years of the Shōwa period, leading to a questioning of Japan’s place in the world and what it meant to be Japanese.