
NEGATIVE DIALECTICS

THEODOR W. ADORNO



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NEGATIVE DIALECTICS

‘To the isolated, isolation seems an indubitable certainty; they are bewitched on pain of losing their existence, not to perceive how mediated their isolation is’—Adorno—

Theodor Adorno was one of the great intellectual figures of the twentieth century. *Negative Dialectics* is his major and culminating work. In it he attempts to free critical thought from the blinding orthodoxies of late capitalism, and earlier ages too. The book is essential reading for students of Adorno. It is also a vital weapon for making sense of modern times.

**NEGATIVE
DIALECTICS**
Theodor W.Adorno
Translated by E.B.Ashton



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This book—to begin with an admission—made me violate what I consider the Number One rule for translators of philosophy: never to start translating until you think you know what the author means by every sentence, indeed by every word. It was done unwittingly. I had read the book in German, not too thoroughly but never unsure of its theses. I clearly recalled the thrust of what it conveys in a polished prose that had seemed eminently translatable. And so it turned out to be, not only because most of Theodor Adorno's philosophical vocabulary is of Latin or Greek stock and identical in English and German. His syntax rarely needs disentangling like that of most German philosophers since Kant; he is not as addicted to making up words as they are; and the few neologisms he does use are borrowed from English.

In the early stages of translation I wondered now and then what one sentence might have to do with the preceding one and that with the one before. But other readers told of the same experience, and Adorno's own Preface promised that what seemed baffling at first would be clarified later. Besides, I felt, there was no mistranslating his text. His sentences were clear. The words (his own, that is; his discussions of other men's words are a different matter) were unequivocal. Their English equivalents were beyond doubt. I plodded on, oblivious of my Number One rule.

But the enigmas piled up. I found myself translating entire pages without seeing how they led from the start of an argument to the conclusion. I was about to return the book as untranslatable—for me, at least—when my favorite translators' story crossed my mind. A colleague, commissioned to translate a certain book, was asked whether he had had a chance to read it yet. "I do not read; I translate," was his reply.

I put my nascent translation aside and did what I ought to

have done in the first place. I reread *Negative Dialectics*—not at a fast clip, not for an overall view of the intellectual edifice, but examining brick after brick to see whether they were really thrown together helter-skelter or there was some method in the madness. I found not one method but several.

Let me inject here that both ways of reading this book are legitimate, in my opinion. A writer as facile and literate as Adorno will make his points on two levels: line by line, and impression by impression. What he wants to say comes through even if you read as I first read it and as probably many of its German readers have—if you savor the nuggets of wit, the darts of sarcasm, and get the drift while floating over problems on the ripples of a style that may, at best, approximate the smoothness of the German.

If you do want to get to the bottom and dig, however, there are, I believe, three keys—not to Adorno's philosophy, but to his presentation. They will unlock, not the substance of his thinking, but the formidable formal gates along the way to it. Carried in mind, they will greatly ease one's path through *Negative Dialectics*.

The first key is the title. In his Preface, Adorno calls it paradoxical, explaining that one of his aims is to rid dialectics of such traditional affirmative traits as trying "to achieve something positive by way of negation." But this logical sense of negativity is not the only one in which it is here pursued. In this book the word "negative" has all the meanings found in an unabridged dictionary, and then some—logical, ethical, utilitarian, political, socio-economic. It may be used, or its use may be implied, in a purely vernacular sense at one moment, and the next moment in the esoteric sense of running counter to the philosophies of identity and noncontradictoriness. It is the implied use of "negative," the multitude of passages avidly hunting the thing without mentioning the word, that perplexes readers who do not keep reminding themselves of the title.

Its second word also has implications beyond philosophical usage. Much of this book is dialectical in the traditional sense of Platonic, Kantian, Hegelian dialectics; but all of it is dialectics in the popular, commonplace sense of skilled argumentation. It never addresses itself to philosophical problems, always to other philosophies. There is a chapter against Heidegger (with a few

swipes at Husserl and Jaspers), another against Hegel, a third against Kant. The targets cover an impressive range; Adorno spares neither idealists nor positivists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and he savages the neo-ontologists, intuitionists, and existentialists of the twentieth. Sub rosa, he polemicizes also against the twentieth-century Marxist establishment—which brings us to the second of the three keys.

“The author,” Adorno ends his Preface, “is prepared for the attacks to which *Negative Dialectics* will expose him. He feels no rancor and does not begrudge the joy of those in either camp who will proclaim that they knew it all the time and now he was confessing.” The two camps—“*hüben und drüben*”—are East and West, Marxists and anti-Marxists. To the latter, Adorno had nothing new to confess; he had never made a secret of his convictions. But he had striven long and hard against his doubts, and when he could not repress them any more he felt obliged to defend them. At bottom, this book is an apologia for deviationism, a Marxist thinker’s explication of his inability to toe the lines laid down today for proper Marxist thinking.

The deviations to which he pleads guilty are numerous. He accords primacy to facts over concepts, and to substance over form. He holds that dark realities can eclipse dazzling ideas, and that theory, however noncontradictory, cannot undo a contradictory practice. He contends that if nonidentical objects belie the identity of subjectivism—even of collective subjectivism—that identity is not truth but a lie. And his defense of all this, the reason why a believer feels compelled to disavow articles of his own creed, is that the negativity of the concrete particular, of things as we see and experience them in our time, makes his the true, the “negative” dialectics.

Concretely, all of these sins are epitomized in one: in the contention that history, all reinterpretations to the contrary notwithstanding, has failed to take the course predicted for it as a scientific necessity. Directly following the Preface, the book itself opens with a flat statement of this cardinal heresy: “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had

crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried”—two sentences one may be at a loss to understand unless he remembers Marx’s famous dictum about the philosophers who were content to interpret the world: “What matters is to change it.”

What matters here is the third key to reading this book. It overflows with such allusions, with paraphrases of renowned and not so renowned quotations from men presupposed as familiar. Adorno has several ways of handling these. The original may be quoted at length, in the text or in footnotes, leaving the parallel to be figured out by the reader. Or the authors—modern ones in particular—are named, assuming only that the reader will know them sufficiently to understand what specific line or aspect of their work is here referred to. But sometimes such aids are dispensed with altogether, on the assumption that whoever reads *Negative Dialectics* will instantly have the source in mind.

The last procedure, I believe, will be responsible for most of the problems one may have in reading; it certainly was responsible for most of mine. To follow the line of thought from detail to detail, you need to know Kant near-perfectly, Hegel perfectly, and Marx-Engels viscerally—not just “by heart.” If you twitch whenever a phrase in this book resembles one from the Marxist Founding Fathers, then and not until then can you think along with Adorno.

Besides, you should have a working knowledge of moderns from a variety of fields, of such philosophers as Bergson, Husserl, Scheler, Walter Benjamin (an anthology of whose work has lately appeared in English and who may be the one object of Adorno’s unqualified admiration), of prominent sociologists and psychiatrists, of seminal poets (Beckett) and composers (Schönberg—Adorno is not only a philosopher but one of the most knowledgeable musicologists of our time). And you should at least have heard of Karl Kraus of Vienna, the consummate intellectual and jack-of-all-literary-trades whose influence covered the German language area after the first World War and had a revival of sorts after the second.

You do not need to know Heidegger. The principal target of Adorno’s polemics is the only one where he presupposes nothing,

where every line he scorns is quoted in full, preliminary to dissection. The duels with Heidegger in the first half of this book will not stump the reader, as a rule, although some did stump the translator. For Martin Heidegger has always struck me as untranslatable, and despite the talent and effort invested in recent English versions of his works, he still does. He is a man who chose to put the gist of his philosophizing into the form of an argument with language. Being a German, he argues with the German language. To reproduce his plays on German words, his translators invented ingenious English words and word combinations, but the very point of the method is that in the source language the words are neither ingenious nor invented. Like the means used to vary them, they are all commonplace, almost all Germanic, and carefully selected for both traits. Heidegger's most abstruse texts can be skimmed with a sense of familiarity by German readers, and this plays a major role in the philosophy.

That a vocabulary of linguistic oddities will not produce the same illusion is clear. With Heidegger, time and again, there is simply no way to the equivalence that is the crux of translation. In two or three such cases, therefore, a few lines of the original have been omitted from this volume. They are not vital, merely reinforcing other exemplifications of the same points, and the alternative—to quote the German and to append footnotes with a translation bound to miss the point, an explanation of the inadequacy, and a further explanation of Adorno's comments on the mistranslated quotes—seemed to me too horrible to contemplate.

The passages Adorno quotes or paraphrases from Kant, Hegel, or Marx-Engels posed a different problem. There are many Kant translations and some excellent ones, but in the concrete case their wording would not often lend itself to the Adorno variations. There are not many good Hegel translations, though the Josiah Royce version of *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, a work analyzed extensively in this book, ranks with the best; looking forward to this chance to draw upon the late Professor Royce's English, I spent hours searching for his rendering of every quoted line. In vain; most of them were undiscoverable. To capture Hegel's spirit,

the translator had stripped away the weak Hegelian flesh. But it is the flesh, unfortunately, that Adorno picks on.

The official, canonical English version of the works of Marx and Engels is in the opposite category. The flesh is there, but the spirit is that of the Leninist revision. The greatest translations have not escaped from such ideological service; after all, in one of our English Bibles the Christmas message promises “good will toward men” while the other limits it to “men of good will.” In the standard English Marx-Engels, the original tenets are ever so slightly nudged in the direction of meanings given to them, as Adorno’s heretical opening puts it, “after the attempt to change the world miscarried.” (Three little words repeated over and over in this book—“*nach wie vor*,” now as before—keep us mindful of that miscarriage.)

Finally, it should be noted that each of these wellsprings of thought has its own variant of German philosophical usage, its own somewhat different understanding of the same terms, and that in English each new translation led inevitably to new differences within Hegel, for instance, besides adding to the original ones between Hegel and others. In *Negative Dialectics* the consistent use of existing translations would have produced an unintelligible hodgepodge. What I decided to do instead, after much soul-searching, was to orient my work to the man I was translating. Wherever someone else is quoted, paraphrased, discussed, or alluded to, I would take Adorno’s terminology, construction, and meaning as the base on which to synthesize my own renderings of the texts he refers to, regardless of how they may have been rendered elsewhere.

It was he, after all, who dealt with them, who reasoned and argued with them, and here, to my mind, these dealings rather than their objects are of the essence. My responsibility, as I saw it, was to put Adorno’s thought into English, not to keep his examples of other philosophers’ thought in line with the English forms lent to them by other translators. If a reader has studied the German thinkers in English and fails to find here the expressions he has come to be familiar with, I ask him to remember that this is Adorno’s book—and to take my word for it that a comparison

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

with the original text of the others will show that they were translated faithfully.

“I often wonder,” a noted translator and critic wrote to me years ago, “how far writers like Benjamin, Lukács, Adorno, say, are ever going to make much mark in the English-speaking world ...as long as translators do not risk their lives and *think* them into English. What does the reader with a quite different philosophical background, and often very little philosophical background of any sort, really make of them?”

For readers with no philosophical background of any sort, I am afraid, the answer has to be: Not much—in any language. And Lukács and Benjamin may indeed force a translator to take his life in his hands even for a well-trained audience. But I like to believe that Adorno, who often seems to do his own thinking in English, requires no such valor. If you are aware that he is defending himself against attacks from “either camp”; if you recall that his armor is a dialectics built on relentless pursuit of the negative in every possible sense; and if you know the philosophies he uses (negatively, as a rule) for his concretions and models, the encounter with his “anti-system,” as the German book jacket calls it, may prove a challenging and intriguing experience—even, I hope, in English.

E.B.A.

NEGATIVE DIALECTICS

PREFACE

Negative Dialectics is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of a “negation of negation” later became the succinct term. This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy. The unfoldment of the paradoxical title is one of its aims.

What would be the foundation, according to the dominant view of philosophy, will here be developed long after the author has discussed things of which that view assumes that they grow out of a foundation. This implies a critique of the foundation concept as well as the primacy of substantive thought—a thought of whose movement the thinker becomes aware only as he performs it. What it needs is secondary under the rules of the intellectual game, which always remain applicable.

A methodology of the author’s material works is not all there is to this book; no continuum exists between those works and it, according to the theory of negative dialectics. The discontinuity will be dealt with, however, and so will the directions for thought to be read in it. The procedure will be justified, not based on reasons. To the best of his ability the author means to put his cards on the table—which is by no means the same as playing the game.

In 1937, when the author had completed his *Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, the last chapter of that publication moved Walter Benjamin to remark that one had to “cross the frozen waste of abstraction to arrive at concise, concrete philosophizing.” *Negative Dialectics* now charts such a crossing in retrospect. In contemporary philosophy, concretion would mostly be obtained on the sly. By contrast, this largely abstract text seeks no less to serve authentic concretion than to explain the author’s concrete procedure. As the latest esthetic discussions

feature the “anti-drama” and the “anti-hero,” this *Negative Dialectics* in which all esthetic topics are shunned might be called an “anti-system.” It attempts by means of logical consistency to substitute for the unity principle, and for the paramountcy of the supraordinated concept, the idea of what would be outside the sway of such unity. To use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity—this is what the author felt to be his task ever since he came to trust his own mental impulses; now he did not wish to put it off any longer. Stringently to transcend the official separation of pure philosophy and the substantive or formally scientific realm was one of his determining motives.

The Introduction expounds the concept of philosophical experience. Part One starts out from the current state of the ontology reigning in Germany; rather than judged from above, this ontology is understood and immanently criticized out of the need for it, which is a problem of its own. From the results, Part Two proceeds to the idea of a negative dialectics and to its position on several categories which are retained as well as qualitatively altered. Part Three elaborates models of negative dialectics. They are not examples; they do not simply elucidate general reflections. Guiding into the substantive realm, they seek simultaneously to do justice to the topical intention of what has initially, of necessity, been generally treated—as opposed to the use of examples which Plato introduced and philosophy repeated ever since: as matters of indifference in themselves. The models are to make plain what negative dialectics is and to bring it into the realm of reality, in line with its own concept. At the same time—not unlike the so-called “exemplary method”—they serve the purpose of discussing key concepts of philosophical disciplines and centrally intervening in those disciplines. For philosophical ethics this will be done by a dialectics of freedom, and for the philosophy of history, by “World Spirit and Natural History.” The last chapter, groping its way around metaphysical questions, tries by critical self-reflection to give the Copernican revolution an axial turn.

The author is prepared for the attacks to which *Negative Dialectics* will expose him. He feels no rancor and does not begrudge

PREFACE

the joy of those in either camp who will proclaim that they knew
it all the time and now he was confessing.

Frankfurt am Main
Summer 1966

THEODOR W. ADORNO

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE POSSIBILITY OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried. Philosophy offers no place from which theory as such might be concretely convicted of the anachronisms it is suspected of, now as before. Perhaps it was an inadequate interpretation which promised that it would be put into practice. Theory cannot prolong the moment its critique depended on. A practice indefinitely delayed is no longer the forum for appeals against self-satisfied speculation; it is mostly the pretext used by executive authorities to choke, as vain, whatever critical thoughts the practical change would require.

Having broken its pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself. Once upon a time, compared with sense perception and every kind of external experience, it was felt to be the very opposite of naïveté; now it has objectively grown as naïve in its turn as the seedy scholars feasting on subjective speculation seemed to Goethe, one hundred and fifty years ago. The introverted thought architect dwells behind the moon that is taken over by extroverted technicians. The conceptual shells that were to house the whole, according to philosophical custom, have in view of the immense expansion of society and of the strides made by positive natural science come to seem like relics of a simple barter economy amidst the late stage of industrial capitalism. The discrepancy (since decayed into a commonplace) between power and any sort of spirit has grown so vast as to foil whatever attempts to understand the preponderance might be inspired by the spirit's own concept.

The will to this understanding bespeaks a power claim denied by that which is to be understood.

The most patent expression of philosophy's historical fate is the way the special sciences compelled it to turn back into a special science. If Kant had, as he put it, "freed himself from the school concept of philosophy for its world concept,"¹ it has now, perforce, regressed to its school concept. Whenever philosophers mistake that for the world concept, their pretensions grow ridiculous. Hegel, despite his doctrine of the absolute spirit in which he included philosophy, knew philosophy as a mere element of reality, an activity in the division of labor, and thus restricted it. This has since led to the narrowness of philosophy, to a disproportionateness to reality that became the more marked the more thoroughly philosophers forgot about the restriction—the more they disdained, as alien, any thought of their position in a whole which they monopolized as their object, instead of recognizing how much they depended on it all the way to the internal composition of their philosophy, to its immanent truth.

To be worth another thought, philosophy must rid itself of such naïveté. But its critical self-reflection must not halt before the highest peaks of its history. Its task would be to inquire whether and how there can still be a philosophy at all, now that Hegel's has fallen, just as Kant inquired into the possibility of metaphysics after the critique of rationalism. If Hegel's dialectics constituted the unsuccessful attempt to use philosophical concepts for coping with all that is heterogeneous to those concepts, the relationship to dialectics is due for an accounting insofar as his attempt failed.

DIALECTICS NOT A STANDPOINT

No theory today escapes the marketplace. Each one is offered as a possibility among competing opinions; all are put up for choice; all are swallowed. There are no blinders for thought to don against this, and the self-righteous conviction that my own theory is spared that fate will surely deteriorate into self-advertising. But neither need dialectics be muted by such rebuke, or by the concomitant charge of its superfluity, of being a method slapped on outwardly,

at random. The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. Contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism was bound to transfigure it into: it is not of the essence in a Heraclitean sense. It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.

Yet the appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify. Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend. The semblance and the truth of thought entwine. The semblance cannot be decreed away, as by avowal of a being-in-itself outside the totality of cogitative definitions. It is a thesis secretly implied by Kant—and mobilized against him by Hegel—that the transconceptual “in itself” is void, being wholly indefinite. Aware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance, I have no way but to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity. Since that totality is structured to accord with logic, however, whose core is the principle of the excluded middle, whatever will not fit this principle, whatever differs in quality, comes to be designated as a contradiction. Contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity; the dialectical primary of the principle of contradiction makes the thought of unity the measure of heterogeneity. As the heterogeneous collides with its limit it exceeds itself.

Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint. My thought is driven to it by its own inevitable insufficiency, by my guilt of what I am thinking. We are blaming the method for the fault of the matter when we object to dialectics on the ground (repeated from Hegel's Aristotelian critics on²) that whatever happens to come into the dialectical mill will be reduced to the merely logical form of contradiction, and that (an argument still advanced by Croce³) the full diversity of the noncontradictory, of that which is simply differentiated, will be ignored. What we differentiate will appear divergent, dissonant, negative for just as long as the structure of our consciousness obliges it to strive for unity: as long as its demand for totality will be its measure for whatever is not identical with it. This is what

dialectics holds up to our consciousness as a contradiction. Because of the immanent nature of consciousness, contradictoriness itself has an inescapably and fatefully legal character. Identity and contradiction of thought are welded together. Total contradiction is nothing but the manifested untruth of total identification. Contradiction is nonidentity under the rule of a law that affects the nonidentical as well.

REALITY AND DIALECTICS

This law is not a cogitative law, however. It is real. Unquestionably, one who submits to the dialectical discipline has to pay dearly in the qualitative variety of experience. Still, in the administered world the impoverishment of experience by dialectics, which outrages healthy opinion, proves appropriate to the abstract monotony of that world. Its agony is the world's agony raised to a concept. Cognition must bow to it, unless concretion is once more to be debased into the ideology it starts becoming in fact.

Another version of dialectics contented itself with a debilitated renaissance: with its intellectual-historical derivation from Kant's *aporias* and from that which the systems of his successors projected but failed to achieve. It can be achieved only negatively. Dialectics unfolds the difference between the particular and the universal, dictated by the universal. As the subject-object dichotomy is brought to mind it becomes inescapable for the subject, furrowing whatever the subject thinks, even objectively—but it would come to an end in reconciliation. Reconciliation would release the nonidentical, would rid it of coercion, including spiritualized coercion; it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them. Reconciliation would be the thought of the many as no longer inimical, a thought that is anathema to subjective reason.

Dialectics serves the end of reconciliation. It dismantles the coercive logical character of its own course; that is why it is denounced as "panlogism." As idealistic dialectics, it was bracketed with the absolute subject's predominance as the negative impulse of each single move of the concept and of its course as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, such primacy of the subject has been condemned even in the Hegelian conception that eclipsed the individual human consciousness as well as the transcendental one of Kant and Fichte. Subjective primacy was not only supplanted by the impotence of the weakening thought, which the world's overpowering course deters from construing it; but none of the reconcilements claimed by absolute idealism—and no other kind remained consistent—has stood up, whether in logic or in politics and history. The inability of consistent idealism to constitute itself as anything but the epitome of contradiction is as much the logical consequence of its truth as it is the punishment incurred by its logicity *qua* logicity; it is appearance as much as necessity.

Yet reopening the case of dialectics, whose non-idealistic form has since degenerated into a dogma as its idealistic one did into a cultural asset, will not decide solely about the actuality of a traditional mode of philosophizing, nor about the actuality of the philosophical structure of cognitive objects. Through Hegel, philosophy had regained the right and the capacity to think substantively instead of being put off with the analysis of cognitive forms that were empty and, in an emphatic sense, null and void. Where present philosophy deals with anything substantive at all, it lapses either into the randomness of a *weltanschauung* or into that formalism, that “matter of indifference,” against which Hegel had risen. There is historical evidence of this in the evolution of phenomenology, which once was animated by the need for contents and became an invocation of being, a repudiation of any content as unclean.

The fundament and result of Hegel's substantive philosophizing was the primacy of the subject, or—in the famous phrase from the Introduction to his *Logic*—the “identity of identity and nonidentity.”⁴ He held the definite particular to be definable by the mind because its immanent definition was to be nothing but the mind. Without this supposition, according to Hegel, philosophy would be incapable of knowing anything substantive or essential. Unless the idealistically acquired concept of dialectics harbors experiences contrary to the Hegelian emphasis, experiences independent of the idealistic machinery, philosophy must inevitably

do without substantive insight, confine itself to the methodology of science, call that philosophy, and virtually cross itself out.

THE CONCERN OF PHILOSOPHY

The matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest. They are nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity—things which ever since Plato used to be dismissed as transitory and insignificant, and which Hegel labeled “lazy Existenz.” Philosophy’s theme would consist of the qualities it downgrades as contingent, as a *quantité négligeable*. A matter of urgency to the concept would be what it fails to cover, what its abstractionist mechanism eliminates, what is not already a case of the concept.

Bergson and Husserl, carriers of philosophical modernism, both have innervated this idea but withdrawn from it to traditional metaphysics. Bergson, in a tour de force, created another type of cognition for nonconceptuality’s sake. The dialectical salt was washed away in an undifferentiated tide of life; solidified reality was disposed of as subaltern, not comprehended along with its subalternity. The hater of the rigid general concept established a cult of irrational immediacy, of sovereign freedom in the midst of unfreedom. He drafted his two cognitive modes in as dualistic an opposition as that of the Cartesian and Kantian doctrines he fought had ever been; the causal-mechanical mode, as pragmatistic knowledge, was no more affected by the intuitive one than the bourgeois establishment was by the relaxed unself-consciousness of those who owe their privileges to that establishment.

The celebrated intuitions themselves seem rather abstract in Bergson’s philosophy; they scarcely go beyond the phenomenal time consciousness which even Kant had underlying chronological-physical time—spatial time, according to Bergson’s insight. Although it takes an effort to develop, the intuitive mode of mental conduct does continue to exist in fact as an archaic rudiment of mimetic reactions. What preceded its past holds a promise beyond the ossified present. Intuitions succeed only desultorily, however.

Every cognition including Bergson's own needs the rationality he scorns, and needs it precisely at the moment of concretion. Absolutized duration, pure becoming, the pure act—these would recoil into the same timelessness which Bergson chides in metaphysics since Plato and Aristotle. He did not mind that the thing he groped for, if it is not to remain a mirage, is visible solely with the equipment of cognition, by reflection upon its own means, and that it grows arbitrary in a procedure unrelated, from the start, to that of cognition.

Husserl the logician, on the other hand, would indeed sharply distinguish the mode of apprehending the essence from generalizing abstraction—what he had in mind was a specific mental experience capable of perceiving the essence in the particular—but the essence to which this experience referred did not differ in any respect from the familiar general concepts. There is a glaring discrepancy between the arrangements of essence perception and its *terminus ad quem*. Neither attempt to break out of idealism was successful: Bergson's bearings, like those of his positivistic arch-enemies, came from the *données immédiates de la conscience*; Husserl's came in similar fashion from phenomena of the stream of consciousness. Both men stay within range of immanent subjectivity.⁵ To be insisted upon, against both, would be the goal they pursue in vain: to counter Wittgenstein by uttering the unutterable.

The plain contradictoriness of this challenge is that of philosophy itself, which is thereby qualified as dialectics before getting entangled in its individual contradictions. The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unraveling that paradox. Everything else is signification, secondhand construction, pre-philosophical activity, today as in Hegel's time. Though doubtful as ever, a confidence that philosophy can make it after all—that the concept can transcend the concept, the preparatory and concluding element, and can thus reach the nonconceptual—is one of philosophy's inalienable features and part of the naïveté that ails it. Otherwise it must capitulate, and the human mind with it. We could not conceive the simplest operation; there would be no truth; emphatically, everything would be just nothing. But whatever truth the concepts cover beyond their abstract range can have no other stage than what the concepts suppress,

disparage, and discard. The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the nonconceptual with concepts, without making it their equal.

THE ANTAGONISTIC ENTIRETY

Such a concept of dialectics makes us doubt its possibility. However varied, the anticipation of moving in contradictions throughout seems to teach a mental totality—the very identity thesis we have just rendered inoperative. The mind which ceaselessly reflects on contradiction in the thing itself, we hear, must be the thing itself if it is to be organized in the form of contradiction; the truth which in idealistic dialectics drives beyond every particular, as one-sided and wrong, is the truth of the whole, and if that were not preconceived, the dialectical steps would lack motivation and direction. We have to answer that the object of a mental experience is an antagonistic system in itself—antagonistic in reality, not just in its conveyance to the knowing subject that rediscovers itself therein. The coercive state of reality, which idealism had projected into the region of the subject and the mind, must be retranslated from that region. What remains of idealism is that society, the objective determinant of the mind, is as much an epitome of subjects as it is their negation. In society the subjects are unknowable and incapacitated; hence its desperate objectivity and conceptuality, which idealism mistakes for something positive.

The system is not one of the absolute spirit; it is one of the most conditioned spirit of those who have it and cannot even know how much it is their own. The subjective preconception of the material production process in society—basically different from its theoretical constitution—is the unresolved part, the part unreconciled with the subjects. Their own reason, unconscious like the transcendental subject and establishing identity by barter, remains incommensurable with the subjects it reduces to the same denominator: the subject as the subject's foe. The preceding generality is both true and untrue: true, because it forms that "ether" which Hegel calls spirit; untrue, because its reason is no reason yet, because its universality is the product of particular

interests. This is why a philosophical critique of identity transcends philosophy. But the ineffable part of the utopia is that what defies subsumption under identity—the “use value,” in Marxist terminology—is necessary anyway if life is to go on at all, even under the prevailing circumstances of production. The utopia extends to the sworn enemies of its realization. Regarding the concrete utopian possibility, dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction.

DISENCHANTMENT OF THE CONCEPT

Philosophy, Hegel’s included, invites the general objection that by inevitably having concepts for its material it anticipates an idealistic decision. In fact no philosophy, not even extreme empiricism, can drag in the *facta bruta* and present them like cases in anatomy or experiments in physics; no philosophy can paste the particulars into the text, as seductive paintings would hoodwink it into believing. But the argument in its formality and generality takes as fetishistic a view of the concept as the concept does in interpreting itself naïvely in its own domain: in either case it is regarded as a self-sufficient totality over which philosophical thought has no power. In truth, all concepts, even the philosophical ones, refer to nonconceptualities, because concepts on their part are moments of the reality that requires their formation, primarily for the control of nature. What conceptualization appears to be from within, to one engaged in it—the predominance of its sphere, without which nothing is known—must not be mistaken for what it is in itself. Such a semblance of being-in-itself is conferred upon it by the motion that exempts it from reality, to which it is harnessed in turn.

Necessity compels philosophy to operate with concepts, but this necessity must not be turned into the virtue of their priority—no more than, conversely, criticism of that virtue can be turned into a summary verdict against philosophy. On the other hand, the insight that philosophy’s conceptual knowledge is not the absolute of philosophy—this insight, for all its inescapability, is

again due to the nature of the concept. It is not a dogmatic thesis, much less a naïvely realistic one. Initially, such concepts as that of “being” at the start of Hegel’s *Logic* emphatically mean nonconceptualities; as Lask put it, they “mean beyond themselves.” Dissatisfaction with their own conceptuality is part of their meaning, although the inclusion of nonconceptuality in their meaning makes it tendentially their equal and thus keeps them trapped within themselves. The substance of concepts is to them both immanent, as far as the mind is concerned, and transcendent as far as being is concerned. To be aware of this is to be able to get rid of concept fetishism. Philosophical reflection makes sure of the nonconceptual in the concept. It would be empty otherwise, according to Kant’s dictum; in the end, having ceased to be a concept of anything at all, it would be nothing.

A philosophy that lets us know this, that extinguishes the autarky of the concept, strips the blindfold from our eyes. That the concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being does not change the fact that on its part it is entwined with a nonconceptual whole. Its only insulation from that whole is its reification—that which establishes it as a concept. The concept is an element in dialectical logic, like any other. What survives in it is the fact that nonconceptuality has conveyed it by way of its meaning, which in turn establishes its conceptuality. To refer to nonconceptualities—as ultimately, according to traditional epistemology, every definition of concepts requires nonconceptual, deictic elements—is characteristic of the concept, and so is the contrary: that as the abstract unit of the noumena subsumed thereunder it will depart from the noumenal. To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics. Insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept would end the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection. Reflection upon its own meaning is the way out of the concept’s seeming being-in-itself as a unit of meaning.

“INFINITY”

Disenchantment of the concept is the antidote of philosophy. It keeps it from growing rampant and becoming an absolute to itself. An idea bequeathed to us by idealism—and corrupted by it, more than any other—needs a change in its function: the idea of the infinite. It is not up to philosophy to exhaust things according to scientific usage, to reduce the phenomena to a minimum of propositions; there are hints of that in Hegel’s polemic against Fichte, whom he accused of starting out with a “dictum.” Instead, in philosophy we literally seek to immerse ourselves in things that are heterogeneous to it, without placing those things in prefabricated categories. We want to adhere as closely to the heterogeneous as the programs of phenomenology and of Simmel tried in vain to do; our aim is total self-relinquishment. Philosophical contents can only be grasped where philosophy does not impose them. The illusion that it might confine the essence in its finite definitions will have to be given up.

The fatal ease with which the word “infinite” rolled off the idealistic philosophers’ tongues may have been due only to a wish to allay gnawing doubts about the meager finiteness of their conceptual machinery—including Hegel’s, his intentions notwithstanding. Traditional philosophy thinks of itself as possessing an infinite object, and in that belief it becomes a finite, conclusive philosophy. A changed philosophy would have to cancel that claim, to cease persuading others and itself that it has the infinite at its disposal. Instead, if it were delicately understood, the changed philosophy itself would be infinite in the sense of scorning solidification in a body of enumerable theorems. Its substance would lie in the diversity of objects that impinge upon it and of the objects it seeks, a diversity not wrought by any schema; to those objects, philosophy would truly give itself rather than use them as a mirror in which to reread itself, mistaking its own image for concretion. It would be nothing but full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection, whereas even the “science of empirical consciousness” reduced the contents of such experience to cases of categories. What makes philosophy

risk the strain of its own infinity is the unwarranted expectation that each individual and particular puzzle it solves will be like Leibniz's monad, the ever-elusive entirety in itself—although, of course, in line with a pre-established disharmony rather than a pre-established harmony. The metacritical turn against the *prima philosophia* is at the same time a turn against the finiteness of a philosophy that prates about infinity without respecting it.

No object is wholly known; knowledge is not supposed to prepare the phantasm of a whole. Thus the goal of a philosophical interpretation of works of art cannot be their identification with the concept, their absorption in the concept; yet it is through such interpretation that the truth of the work unfolds. What can be envisioned, however—whether as the regularly continued abstraction or as an application of the concepts to whatever comes under their definition—may be useful as technology in the broadest sense of the word; but to philosophy, which refuses to fit in, it is irrelevant. In principle, philosophy can always go astray, which is the sole reason why it can go forward. This has been recognized in skepticism and in pragmatism, most recently in Dewey's wholly humane version of the latter; but we ought to add it as a ferment to an emphatic philosophy instead of renouncing philosophy, from the outset, in favor of the test it has to stand.

As a corrective to the total rule of method, philosophy contains a playful element which the traditional view of it as a science would like to exorcise. For Hegel, too, this was a sensitive point; he rejects “types and distinctions determined by external chance and by play, not by reason.”⁶ The un-naïve thinker knows how far he remains from the object of his thinking, and yet he must always talk as if he had it entirely. This brings him to the point of clowning. He must not deny his clownish traits, least of all since they alone can give him hope for what is denied him. Philosophy is the most serious of things, but then again it is not all that serious. A thing that aims at what it is not a priori and is not authorized to control—such a thing, according to its own concept, is simultaneously part of a sphere beyond control, a sphere tabooed by conceptuality. To represent the mimesis it supplanted, the concept has no other way than to adopt something mimetic in its own conduct, without abandoning itself.

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The esthetic moment is thus not accidental to philosophy, though on grounds quite different from Schelling's; but it is no less incumbent upon philosophy to void its estheticism, to sublimate the esthetic into the real, by cogent insights. Cogency and play are the two poles of philosophy. Its affinity to art does not entitle it to borrow from art, least of all by virtue of the intuitions which barbarians take for the prerogatives of art. Intuitions hardly ever strike in isolation, as lightning from above; they do not strike the artist's work like that either. They hang together with the formal law of the work; if one tried to extract and preserve them, they would dissolve. Finally, thought is no protector of springs whose freshness might deliver us from thinking. We have no type of cognition at our disposal that differs absolutely from the disposing type, the type which intuitionism flees in panic and in vain.

A philosophy that tried to imitate art, that would turn itself into a work of art, would be expunging itself. It would be postulating the demand for identity, claiming to exhaust its object by endowing its procedure with a supremacy to which the heterogeneous bows a priori, as material—whereas to genuine philosophy its relation to the heterogeneous is virtually thematic. Common to art and philosophy is not the form, not the forming process, but a mode of conduct that forbids pseudomorphosis. Both keep faith with their own substance through their opposites: art by making itself resistant to its meanings; philosophy, by refusing to clutch at any immediate thing. What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the yearning that animates the nonconceptual side of art, and whose fulfillment shuns the immediate side of art as mere appearance. The concept—the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought—negates that yearning. Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it. It must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept.

THE SPECULATIVE MOMENT

Even after breaking with idealism, philosophy cannot do without speculation, which was exalted by idealism and tabooed with it—meaning speculation, of course, in a sense broader than the overly

positive Hegelian one.* For positivists it is not difficult to attribute speculation to Marxian materialism, which starts out from laws of objective being, by no means from immediate data or protocol statements. To cleanse himself of the suspicion of ideology, it is now safer for a man to call Marx a metaphysician than to call him a class enemy.

But the safe ground is a phantasm where the claims of truth demand that one rise above it. Philosophy is not to be put off with theorems that would talk it out of its essential concern instead of satisfying that concern, albeit with a No. In the counter-movements to Kant, from the nineteenth century on, this was sensed but always compromised again by obscurantism. The resistance of philosophy needs to unfold, however. Even in music—as in all art, presumably—the impulse animating the first bar will not be fulfilled at once, but only in further articulation. To this extent, however much it may be phenomenal as a totality, music is a critique of phenomenality, of the appearance that the substance is present here and now. Such a mediate role befits philosophy no less. When it presumes to say things forthwith it invites Hegel's verdict on empty profundity. Mouthing profundities will no more make a man profound than narrating the metaphysical views of its characters will make a novel metaphysical.

To ask philosophy to deal with the question of being, or with other cardinal themes of Western metaphysics, shows a primitive

* “Moreover, if skepticism even nowadays is frequently considered an irresistible enemy of all positive knowledge, and thus of philosophy insofar as it is a matter of positive cognition, we have to counter by saying that it is indeed only finite, abstractly intellectual thought that need fear skepticism and cannot withstand it, while philosophy contains the skeptical as one of its own elements, namely, as dialectics. But then philosophy will not halt at the merely negative result of dialectics, as is the case in skepticism. Skepticism misconceives its result, holding on to pure (i.e., abstract) negation. As dialectics has the negative for its result, this negative, being a result, is simultaneously positive, since it contains sublimated within itself that from which it results and without which it is not. This is the basic definition of the third form of logic, namely, of speculation or positive reason.” (Hegel, Works 8, p. 194ff.)

topical faith. The objective worth of those themes is indeed inescapable in philosophy, but neither can we rely on our ability to cope with the great topics. We must be so wary of the beaten tracks of philosophical reflection that our emphatic interest will seek refuge in ephemeral objects not yet overdetermined by intentions. Though chained to the questions of traditional philosophical problematics, we certainly must negate that problematics. A world that is objectively set for totality will not release the human consciousness, will ceaselessly fasten it to points it wants to get away from; but a thinking that blithely begins afresh, heedless of the historic form of its problems, will so much more be their prey.

That philosophy shares in the idea of depth is due to its cogitative breath alone. A prime example from the modern age is the Kantian deduction of pure intellectual concepts, which the author, with abysmally apologetic irony, called “somewhat profoundly arranged.”⁷⁷ Profundity, as Hegel did not fail to note, is another element of dialectics, not an isolated trait. A dreadful German tradition equates profound thoughts with thoughts ready to swear by the theodicy of death and evil. A theological *terminus ad quem* is tacitly passed over and passed under, as if the worth of a thought were decided by its result, the confirmation of transcendence, or by its immersion in inwardness, its sheer being-for-itself; as if withdrawal from the world were flatly tantamount to consciousness of the world ground. As for the phantasms of profundity—which in the history of the human spirit have always been well-disposed toward an existing state of affairs they find insipid—resistance would be their true measure.

The power of the status quo puts up the façades into which our consciousness crashes. It must seek to crash through them. This alone would free the postulate of depth from ideology. Surviving in such resistance is the speculative moment: what will not have its law prescribed for it by given facts transcends them even in the closest contact with the objects, and in repudiating a sacrosanct transcendence. Where the thought transcends the bonds it tied in resistance—there is its freedom. Freedom follows the subject’s urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs

upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.

PRESENTATION

This may help to explain why the presentation of philosophy is not an external matter of indifference to it but immanent to its idea. Its integral, nonconceptually mimetic moment of expression is objectified only by presentation in language. The freedom of philosophy is nothing but the capacity to lend a voice to its unfreedom. If more is claimed for the expressive moment, it will degenerate into a *weltanschauung*; where the expressive moment and the duty of presentation are given up, philosophy comes to resemble science.

To philosophy, expression and stringency are not two dichotomous possibilities. They need each other; neither one can be without the other. Expression is relieved of its accidental character by thought, on which it toils as thought toils on expression. Only an expressed thought is succinct, rendered succinct by its presentation in language; what is vaguely put is poorly thought. Expression compels stringency in what it expresses. It is not an end in itself at the latter's expense; rather, expression removes the expressed from the materialized mischief which in its turn is an object of philosophical criticism. Speculative philosophy without an idealistic substructure requires observance of stringency to break the authoritarian power claim of stringency. Benjamin, whose original draft of his passage theory combined incomparable speculative skill with micrological proximity to factual contents, later remarked in a correspondence about the first properly metaphysical stratum of this work that it could be accomplished only as an "impermissible 'poetic' one,"⁸ This admission of surrender denotes as much the difficulty of a philosophy loath to decline as the point at which its concept can be carried further. It was probably due to Benjamin's acceptance of dialectical materialism as a *weltanschauung*, so to speak, with closed eyes. But the fact that he could not bring himself to put the definitive version of the passage theory in writing reminds us that philosophy

is more than bustle only where it runs the risk of total failure—this in reply to the absolute certainty that has traditionally been obtained by stealth. Benjamin's defeatism about his own thought was conditioned by the undialectical positivity of which he carried a formally unchanged remnant from his theological phase into his materialistic phase. By comparison, Hegel's equating negativity with the thought that keeps philosophy from both the positivity of science and the contingency of dilettantism has empirical substance.

Thought as such, before all particular contents, is an act of negation, of resistance to that which is forced upon it; this is what thought has inherited from its archetype, the relation between labor and material. Today, when ideologues tend more than ever to encourage thought to be positive, they cleverly note that positivity runs precisely counter to thought and that it takes friendly persuasion by social authority to accustom thought to positivity. The effort implied in the concept of thought itself, as the counterpart of passive contemplation, is negative already—a revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing. Critical germs are contained in judgment and inference, the thought forms without which not even the critique of thought can do: they are never definite without simultaneously excluding what they have failed to achieve, and whatever does not bear their stamp will be denied—although with questionable authority—by the truth they seek to organize. The judgment that a thing is such and such is a potential rebuttal to claims of any relation of its subject and predicate other than the one expressed in the judgment. Thought forms tend beyond that which merely exists, is merely “given.” The point which thinking aims at its material is not solely a spiritualized control of nature. While doing violence to the object of its syntheses, our thinking heeds a potential that waits in the object, and it unconsciously obeys the idea of making amends to the pieces for what it has done. In philosophy, this unconscious tendency becomes conscious. Accompanying irreconcilable thoughts is the hope for reconciliation, because the resistance of thought to mere things in being, the commanding freedom of the subject, intends in the object even that of which the object was deprived by objectification.

ATTITUDE TOWARD SYSTEMS

Traditional speculation has developed the synthesis of diversity—which it conceived as chaotic, on Kantian grounds—and its ultimate aim was to divest itself of any kind of content. By contrast, the *telos* of philosophy, its open and unshielded part, is as anti-systematic as its freedom to interpret the phenomena with which it joins unarmed issue. Philosophy retains respect for systems to the extent to which things heterogeneous to it face it in the form of a system. The administered world moves in this direction. It is the negative objectivity that is a system, not the positive subject. In a historical phase in which systems—insofar as they deal seriously with contents—have been relegated to the ominous realm of conceptual poetry and nothing but the pale outline of their schematic order has been retained, it is difficult to imagine vividly what used to attract a philosophical spirit to the system.

When we contemplate philosophical history, the virtue of partisanship must not keep us from perceiving how superior the system, whether rationalistic or idealistic, has been to its opponents for more than two centuries. Compared with the systems, the opposition seems trivial. Systems elaborate things; they interpret the world while the others really keep protesting only that it can't be done. The others display resignation, denial, failure—if they had more truth in the end, it would indicate the transience of philosophy. In any case, it would be up to philosophy to elevate such truth from its subaltern state and to champion it against the philosophies which not only boast of their “higher” rank: materialism in particular shows to this day that it was spawned in Abdera. According to Nietzsche's critique, systems no longer documented anything but the finickiness of scholars compensating themselves for political impotence by conceptually construing their, so to speak, administrative authority over things in being. But the systematic need, the need not to put up with the *membra disiecta* of knowledge but to achieve the absolute knowledge that is already, involuntarily, claimed in each succinct individual judgment—this need was more, at times, than a pseudomorphosis of the spirit

into the irresistibly successful method of mathematical and natural science.

In the philosophy of history, the systems of the seventeenth century especially served a compensatory purpose. The *ratio* which in accordance with bourgeois class interests had smashed the feudal order and scholastic ontology, the form of the intellectual reflection of that order—this same *ratio* no sooner faced the ruins, its own handiwork, than it would be struck by fear of chaos. It trembled before the menace that continued underneath its own domain, waxing stronger in proportion to its own power. This fear shaped the beginnings of a mode of conduct constitutive for bourgeois existence as a whole: of the neutralization, by confirming the existent order, of every emancipatory step. In the shadow of its own incomplete emancipation the bourgeois consciousness must fear to be annulled by a more advanced consciousness; not being the whole freedom, it senses that it can produce only a caricature of freedom—hence its theoretical expansion of its autonomy into a system similar to its own coercive mechanisms.

Out of itself, the bourgeois *ratio* undertook to produce the order it had negated outside itself. Once produced, however, that order ceased to be an order and was therefore insatiable. Every system was such an order, such an absurdly rational product: a posited thing posing as being-in-itself. Its origin had to be placed into formal thought divorced from content; nothing else would let it control the material. The philosophical systems were antinomical from the outset. Their rudiments entwined with their own impossibility; it was precisely in the early history of the modern systems that each was condemned to annihilation at the hands of the next. To prevail as a system, the *ratio* eliminated virtually all qualitative definitions it referred to, thus coming into an irreconcilable conflict with the objectivity it violated by pretending to grasp it. The *ratio* came to be removed from objectivity—the farther removed, the more completely objectivity was subjected to its axioms, and finally to the one axiom of identity. The pedantries of all systems, down to the architectonic complexities of Kant—and even of Hegel, despite the latter's program—are the marks of an a priori inescapable failure, noted with

incomparable honesty in the fractures of the Kantian system; Molière was the first to show pedantry as a main feature of the ontology of the bourgeois spirit.

Whenever something that is to be conceived flees from identity with the concept, the concept will be forced to take exaggerated steps to prevent any doubts of the unassailable validity, solidity, and acrimony of the thought product from stirring. Great philosophy was accompanied by a paranoid zeal to tolerate nothing else, and to pursue everything else with all the cunning of reason, while the other kept retreating farther and farther from the pursuit. The slightest remnant of nonidentity sufficed to deny an identity conceived as total. The excrescences of the systems, ever since the Cartesian pineal gland and the axioms and definitions of Spinoza, already crammed with the entire rationalism he would then deductively extract—by their untruth, these excrescences show the untruth, the mania, of the systems themselves.

IDEALISM AS RAGE

The system in which the sovereign mind imagined itself transfigured, has its primal history in the pre-mental, the animal life of the species. Predators get hungry, but pouncing on their prey is difficult and often dangerous; additional impulses may be needed for the beast to dare it. These impulses and the unpleasantness of hunger fuse into rage at the victim, a rage whose expression in turn serves the end of frightening and paralyzing the victim. In the advance to humanity this is rationalized by projection. The “rational animal” with an appetite for his opponent is already fortunate enough to have a superego and must find a reason. The more completely his actions follow the law of self-preservation, the less can he admit the primacy of that law to himself and to others; if he did, his laboriously attained status of a *zoon politikon* would lose all credibility.

The animal to be devoured must be evil. The sublimation of this anthropological schema extends all the way to epistemology. Idealism—most explicitly Fichte—gives unconscious sway to the ideology that the not-I, *l'autrui*, and finally all that reminds us of

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nature is inferior, so the unity of the self-preserving thought may devour it without misgivings. This justifies the principle of the thought as much as it increases the appetite. The system is the belly turned mind, and rage is the mark of each and every idealism. It disfigures even Kant's humanism and refutes the aura of higher and nobler things in which he knew how to garb it. The view of man in the middle is akin to misanthropy: leave nothing unchallenged. The august inexorability of the moral law was this kind of rationalized rage at nonidentity; nor did the liberalistic Hegel do better with the superiority of his bad conscience, dressing down those who refused homage to the speculative concept, the hypostasis of the mind.* Nietzsche's liberating act, a true turning point of Western thought and merely usurped by others later, was to put such mysteries into words. A mind that discards rationalization—its own spell—ceases by its self-reflection to be the radical evil that irks it in another.

Yet the process in which the systems decomposed, due to their own insufficiency, stands in counterpoint to a social process. In the form of the barter principle, the bourgeois *ratio* really approximated to the systems whatever it would make commensurable with itself, would identify with itself—and it did so with increasing, if potentially homicidal, success. Less and less was left outside. What proved idle in theory was ironically borne out in practice. Hence the ideological popularity of talk about a “crisis of the system” among all the types who earlier could not spout enough stentorian rancor at the “*aperçu*,” according to the system's own, already obsolete ideal. Reality is no longer to be construed, because it would be all too thoroughly construable. Pretexts are furnished by its irrationality, intensifying under the

* “The thought or conception which has before it only a definite being, existence, is to be relegated to the aforementioned beginning of science that was made by Parmenides, who purified and exalted his conceiving—and thus the conceiving of subsequent times as well—into the pure thought of being as such, and thus created the element of science.” (Hegel, Works 4, p. 96.)

pressure of particular rationality: there is disintegration by way of integration. If society could be seen through as a closed system, a system accordingly unreconciled to the subjects, it would become too embarrassing for the subjects as long as they remain subjects in any sense.

Angst, that supposed “existential,” is the claustrophobia of a systematized society. Its system character, yesterday still a shibboleth of academic philosophy, is strenuously denied by initiates of that philosophy; they may, with impunity, pose as spokesmen for free, for original, indeed, for unacademic thinking. Criticism of the systems is not vitiated by such abuse. A proposition common to all emphatic philosophy—as opposed to the skeptical one, which refrained from emphasis—was that only as a system could philosophy be pursued; this proposition has done hardly less to cripple philosophy than have the empiricisms. The things philosophy has yet to judge are postulated before it begins. The system, the form of presenting a totality to which nothing remains extraneous, absolutizes the thought against each of its contents and evaporates the content in thoughts. It proceeds idealistically before advancing any arguments for idealism.

THE TWOFOLD CHARACTER OF THE SYSTEM

In criticism we do not simply liquidate systems, however. At the peak of the Enlightenment, d’Alembert rightly distinguished between *l’esprit de système* and *l’esprit systématique*, and the method of the *Encyclopédie* took account of the distinction. Speaking for the *esprit systématique* is not only the trivial motive of a cohesion that will tend to crystallize in the incoherent anyway; it does not only satisfy the bureaucrats’ desire to stuff all things into their categories. The form of the system is adequate to the world, whose substance eludes the hegemony of the human thought; but unity and unanimity are at the same time an oblique projection of pacified, no longer antagonistic conditions upon the coordinates of supremacist, oppressive thinking. The double meaning of philosophical systematics leaves no choice but to

transpose the power of thought, once delivered from the systems, into the open realm of definition by individual moments.

To Hegelian logic this procedure was not altogether alien. The microanalysis of individual categories, which simultaneously appears as their objective self-reflection, was to let each concept pass into its otherness without regard to an overlay from above; to Hegel, the totality of this movement meant the system. There is contradiction as well as kinship between this concept of the system—a concept that concludes, and thus brings to a standstill—and the concept of dynamism, of pure, autarkic, subjective generation, which constitutes all philosophical systematics. Hegel could adjust the tension between statics and dynamics only by construing his unitarian principle, the spirit, as a simultaneous being-in-itself and pure becoming, a resumption of the Aristotelian-scholastic *actus purus*; and that the implausibility of this construction—in which subjective generation and ontology, nominalism and realism, are syncopated at the Archimedean point—will prevent the resolution of that tension is also immanent in the system.

And yet, such a concept of the philosophical system towers above a merely scientific systematics that call for orderly organization and presentation of thoughts, for a consistent structure of topical disciplines, without insisting strictly, from the object's point of view, upon the inner unity of its aspects. The postulate of this unity is bound up with the presupposition that all things in being are identical with the cognitive principle; but on the other hand, once burdened as it is in idealistic speculation, that postulate legitimately recalls the affinity which objects have for each other, and which is tabooed by the scientific need for order and obliged to yield to the surrogate of its schemata. What the objects communicate in—instead of each being the atom it becomes in the logic of classification—is the trace of the objects' definition in themselves, which Kant denied and Hegel, against Kant, sought to restore through the subject.

To comprehend a thing itself, not just to fit and register it in its system of reference, is nothing but to perceive the individual moment in its immanent connection with others. Such anti-subjectivism lies under the crackling shell of absolute idealism; it

stirs in the tendency to unseal current issues by resorting to the way they came to be. What the conception of the system recalls, in reverse, is the coherence of the nonidentical, the very thing infringed by deductive systematics. Criticism of systems and asystematic thought are superficial as long as they cannot release the cohesive force which the idealistic systems had signed over to the transcendental subject.

THE ANTINOMICAL CHARACTER OF SYSTEMS

The ego principle that founds the system, the pure method before any content, has always been the *ratio*. It is not confined by anything outside it, not even by a so-called mental order. Idealism, attesting the positive infinity of its principle at every one of its stages, turns the character of thought, the historic evolution of its independence, into metaphysics. It eliminates all heterogeneous being. This defines the system as pure becoming, a pure process, and eventually as that absolute engendering which Fichte—in this respect the authentic systematizer of philosophy—declared thinking to be. Kant had already held that the emancipated *ratio*, the *progressus ad infinitum*, is halted solely by recognizing nonidentities in form, at least. The antinomy of totality and infinity—for the restless *ad infinitum* explodes the self-contained system, for all its being owed to infinity alone—is of the essence of idealism.

It imitates a central antinomy of bourgeois society. To preserve itself, to remain the same, to “be,” that society too must constantly expand, progress, advance its frontiers, not respect any limit, not remain the same.⁹ It has been demonstrated to bourgeois society that it would no sooner reach a ceiling, would no sooner cease to have noncapitalist areas available outside itself, than its own concept would force its self-liquidation. This makes clear why, Aristotle notwithstanding, the modern concept of dynamics was inappropriate to Antiquity, as was the concept of the system. To Plato, who chose the aporetic form for so many of his dialogues, both concepts could be imputed only in retrospect. The reprimand which Kant gave the old man for that reason is not, as he put it, a

matter of plain logic; it is historical, modern through and through. On the other hand, systematics is so deeply ingrained in the modern consciousness that even Husserl's anti-systematic efforts—which began under the name of ontology, and from which “fundamental ontology” branched off later—reverted irresistibly to a system, at the price of formalization.

Thus intertwined, the system's static and dynamic characters keep clashing. No matter how dynamically a system may be conceived, if it is in fact to be a closed system, to tolerate nothing outside its domain, it will become a positive infinity—in other words, finite and static. The fact that it sustains itself in this manner, for which Hegel praised his own system, brings it to a standstill. Bluntly put, closed systems are bound to be finished. Eccentricities like the one constantly held up to Hegel—of world history being perfected in the Prussian state—are not mere aberrations for ideological purposes, nor are they irrelevant vis-à-vis the whole. Their necessary absurdity shatters the asserted unity of system and dynamics. By negating the concept of the limit and theoretically assuring itself that there always remains something outside, dynamics also tends to disavow its own product, the system.

An aspect under which it might well be fruitful to treat the history of modern philosophy is how it managed to cope with the antagonism of statics and dynamics in its systems. The Hegelian system in itself was not a true becoming; implicitly, each single definition in it was already preconceived. Such safeguards condemn it to untruth. Unconsciously, so to speak, consciousness would have to immerse itself in the phenomena on which it takes a stand. This would, of course, effect a qualitative change in dialectics. Systematic unanimity would crumble. The phenomenon would not remain a case of its concept, as it does to Hegel, despite all pronouncements to the contrary. The thought would be burdened with more toil and trouble than Hegel defines as such, because the thought he discusses always extracts from its objects only that which is a thought already. Despite the program of self-yielding, the Hegelian thought finds satisfaction in itself; it goes rolling along, however often it may urge the contrary. If the thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the

object, not on its category, the very objects would start talking under the lingering eye.

Hegel had argued against epistemology that one becomes a smith only by smithing, by the actual cognition of things that resist cognition—of things which are, so to speak, atheoretical. There we have to take him at his word; nothing else would return to philosophy what Hegel calls the “freedom to the object”—what philosophy had lost under the spell of the concept “freedom,” of the subject’s sense-determining autonomy. But the speculative power to break down the gates of the insoluble is the power of negation. The systematic trend lives on in negation alone. The categories of a critique of systems are at the same time the categories in which the particular is understood. What has once legitimately transcended particularity in the system has its place outside the system. The interpretive eye which sees more in a phenomenon than it is—and solely because of what it is—secularizes metaphysics. Only a philosophy in fragment form would give their proper place to the monads, those illusory idealistic drafts. They would be conceptions, in the particular, of the totality that is inconceivable as such.

ARGUMENT AND EXPERIENCE

The thought, to which a positive hypostasis of anything outside actual dialectics is forbidden, overshoots the object with which it no longer simulates being as one. It grows more independent than in the conception of its absoluteness, in which sovereignty and complaisance mingle, each inwardly depending on the other. This may have been the end to which Kant exempted the intelligible sphere from all immanence. An aspect of immersion in particularity, that extreme enhancement of dialectical immanence, must also be the freedom to step out of the object, a freedom which the identity claim cuts short. Hegel would have censured that freedom; he relied upon complete mediation by the objects. In cognitive practice, when we resolve the insoluble, a moment of such cogitative transcendence comes to light in the fact that for our micrological activity we have exclusively macrological means.

The call for binding statements without a system is a call for thought models, and these are not merely monadological in kind. A model covers the specific, and more than the specific, without letting it evaporate in its more general super-concept. Philosophical thinking is the same as thinking in models; negative dialectics is an ensemble of analyses of models. Philosophy would be debasing itself all over again, into a kind of affirmative solace, if it were to fool itself and others about the fact that it must, from without, imbue its objects with whatever moves them within it. What is waiting in the objects themselves needs such intervention to come to speak, with the perspective that the forces mobilized outside, and ultimately every theory that is brought to bear on the phenomena, should come to rest in the phenomena. In that sense, too, philosophical theory means that its own end lies in its realization.

There is no lack of related intentions in history. The French Enlightenment got a formally systematic touch from its supreme concept, that of reason; yet the constitutive entanglement of its idea of reason with that of an objectively rational arrangement of society deprived the idea of a pathos which it was not to recover until the realization of reason as an idea was renounced, until it was absolutized into the spirit. Encyclopedic thinking—rationally organized and yet discontinuous, unsystematic, loose—expressed the self-critical spirit of reason. That spirit represented something which later departed from philosophy, due as much to its increasing distance from practical life as to its absorption in the academic bustle: it represented mundane experience, that eye for reality of which thought, too, is a part.

The free spirit is nothing else. The element of the *homme de lettres*, disparaged by a petty bourgeois scientific ethos, is indispensable to thought; and no less indispensable, of course, is the element abused by a philosophy garbed as science: the meditative contraction—the argument, which came to merit so much skepticism. Whenever philosophy was substantial, both elements would coincide. At a distance, dialectics might be characterized as the elevation to self-consciousness of the effort to be saturated with dialectics. Otherwise the argument deteriorates into the technique of conceptless specialists amid the

concept, as it is now spreading academically in the so-called “analytical philosophy,” which robots can learn and copy.

The immanently argumentative element is legitimate where the reality that has been integrated in a system is received in order to oppose it with its own strength. The free part of thought, on the other hand, represents the authority which already knows about the emphatic untruth of that real-systematic context. Without this knowledge there would be no eruption; without adopting the power of the system, the outbreak would fail. That the two elements will not merge without a rift is due to the real power of the system, which includes even what potentially excels it. The untruth of the immanent context itself, however, shows in the overwhelming experience that the world—though organized as systematically as if it were Hegel’s glorified realization of reason—will at the same time, in its old unreason, perpetuate the impotence of the seemingly almighty spirit. The immanent critic of idealism defends idealism by showing how much it is defrauded of its own self—how much the first cause, which according to idealism is always the spirit, is in league with the blind predominance of merely existing things. The doctrine of the absolute spirit immediately aids that predominance.

A scientific consensus tends to admit that experience also implies theory. It holds, however, that experience is a “standpoint,” hypothetically at best. Conciliatory representatives of scientivism demand that what they call “decent” or “clean” science should account for premises of the sort. Precisely this demand is incompatible with the mind’s experience. Any standpoint it were asked to have would be that of the diner regarding the roast. Experience lives by consuming the standpoint; not until the standpoint is submerged in it would there be philosophy. Until then, theory in mental experience embodies that discipline which already pained Goethe in relation to Kant. If experience were to trust solely to its dynamics and good fortune, there would be no stopping.

Ideology lies in wait for the mind which delights in itself like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, for the mind which all but irresistibly becomes an absolute to itself. Theory prevents this. It corrects the

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naïve self-confidence of the mind without obliging it to sacrifice its spontaneity, at which theory aims in its turn. For the difference between the so-called subjective part of mental experience and its object will not vanish by any means, as witness the necessary and painful exertions of the knowing subject. In the unreconciled condition, nonidentity is experienced as negativity. From the negative, the subject withdraws to itself, and to the abundance of its ways to react. Critical self-reflection alone will keep it from a constriction of this abundance, from building walls between itself and the object, from the supposition that its being-for-itself is an in-and-for-itself. The less identity can be assumed between subject and object, the more contradictory are the demands made upon the cognitive subject, upon its unfettered strength and candid self-reflection.

Theory and mental experience need to interact. Theory does not contain answers to everything; it reacts to the world, which is faulty to the core. What would be free from the spell of the world is not under theory's jurisdiction. Mobility is of the essence of consciousness; it is no accidental feature. It means a doubled mode of conduct: an inner one, the immanent process which is the properly dialectical one, and a free, unbound one like a stepping out of dialectics. Yet the two are not merely disparate. The unregimented thought has an elective affinity to dialectics, which as criticism of the system recalls what would be outside the system; and the force that liberates the dialectical movement in cognition is the very same that rebels against the system. Both attitudes of consciousness are linked by criticizing one another, not by compromising.

VERTIGINOUSNESS

A dialectics no longer “glued”¹⁰ to identity will provoke either the charge that it is bottomless—one that ye shall know by its fascist fruits—or the objection that it is dizzying. In great modern poetry, vertigo has been a central feeling since Baudelaire; the anachronistic suggestion often made to philosophy is that it must

have no part in any such thing. Philosophy is cautioned to speak to the point; Karl Kraus had to learn that no matter how precisely each line of his expressed his meaning, a materialized consciousness would lament that this very precision was making its head swim. A usage of current opinion makes such complaints comprehensible. We like to present alternatives to choose from, to be marked True or False. The decisions of a bureaucracy are frequently reduced to Yes or No answers to drafts submitted to it; the bureaucratic way of thinking has become the secret model for a thought allegedly still free.

But the responsibility of philosophical thought in its essential situations is not to play this game. A given alternative is already a piece of heteronomy. The legitimacy of alternative demands has yet to be judged by the very consciousness that is moralistically asked to make its decision beforehand. To insist on the profession of a standpoint is to extend the coercion of conscience to the realm of theory. With this coercion goes a coarsening process in which not even the great theorems retain their truth content after the adjuncts have been eliminated. Marx and Engels, for instance, objected to having their dynamic class theory and its knife-edged economic expression diluted by substituting the simpler antithesis of rich and poor. The essence is falsified by a résumé of essentials. If philosophy were to stoop to a practice which Hegel already mocked, if it were to accommodate its kind reader by explaining what the thought should make him think, it would be joining the march of regression without being able to keep up the pace.

Behind the worry where to take hold of philosophy lies mostly pure aggression, a desire to take hold of it the way the historical schools used to devour each other. The equivalence of guilt and penance has been transposed to the sequence of thoughts. It is this very assimilation of the spirit to the reigning principle through which we see in philosophical reflection. Traditional thinking, and the common-sense habits it left behind after fading out philosophically, demand a frame of reference in which all things have their place. Not too much importance is attached to the intelligibility of the frame—it may even be laid down in dogmatic axioms—if only each reflection can be localized, and if unframed

thoughts are kept out. But a cognition that is to bear fruit will throw itself to the objects *à fond perdu*. The vertigo which this causes is an *index veri*; the shock of inconclusiveness, the negative as which it cannot help appearing in the frame-covered, never-changing realm, is true for untruth only.

FRAGILITY OF TRUTH

The dismantling of systems, and of the system at large, is not an act of formal epistemology. What the system used to procure for the details can be sought in the details only, without advance assurance to the thought: whether it is there, or what it is. Not until then would the steadily misused word of “truth as concreteness” come into its own. It compels our thinking to abide with minutiae. We are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of these things. But if we surrender to the specific object we are suspected of lacking an unequivocal position. What differs from the existent will strike the existent as witchcraft, while thought figures such as proximity, home, security hold the faulty world under their spell. Men are afraid that in losing this magic they would lose everything, because the only happiness they know, even in thought, is to be able to hold on to something—the perpetuation of unfreedom. They want a bit of ontology, at least, amidst their criticism of ontology—as if the smallest free insight did not express the goal better than a declaration of intention that is not followed up.

Philosophy serves to bear out an experience which Schoenberg noted in traditional musicology: one really learns from it only how a movement begins and ends, nothing about the movement itself and its course. Analogously, instead of reducing philosophy to categories, one would in a sense have to compose it first. Its course must be a ceaseless self-renewal, by its own strength as well as in friction with whatever standard it may have. The crux is what happens in it, not a thesis or a position—the texture, not the deductive or inductive course of one-track minds. Essentially, therefore, philosophy is not expoundable. If it were, it would be superfluous; the fact that most of it can be expounded speaks

against it. But if a mode of conduct shields no primacy, harbors no certainly, and yet—because of its definite presentation, if on no other grounds—concedes so little to relativism, the twin of absolutism, that it approaches a doctrine, such a mode will give offense. It goes beyond, and to the point of breaking with, the dialectics of Hegel, who wanted his dialectics to be all things, including *prima philosophia*, and in fact made it that in his principle of identity, his absolute subject.

By dissociating thought from primacy and solidity, however, we do not absolutize it as in free suspense. The very dissociation fastens it to that which it is not. It removes the illusion of the autarky of thought. The falsehood of an unleashed rationality running away from itself, the recoil of enlightenment into mythology, is rationally definable. To think means to think something. By itself, the logically abstract form of “something,” something that is meant or judged, does not claim to posit a being; and yet, surviving in it—indelible for a thinking that would delete it—is that which is not identical with thinking, which is not thinking at all. The *ratio* becomes irrational where it forgets this, where it runs counter to the meaning of thought by hypostasizing its products, the abstractions. The commandment of its autarky condemns thinking to emptiness, and finally to stupidity and primitivity. The charge of bottomlessness should be lodged against the self-preserving mental principle as the sphere of absolute origins; but where ontology, Heidegger in the lead, hits upon bottomlessness—there is the place of truth.

Truth is suspended and frail, due to its temporal substance; Benjamin sharply criticized Gottfried Keller’s arch-bourgeois dictum that the truth can’t run away from us. Philosophy must do without the consolation that truth cannot be lost. A truth that cannot plunge into the abyss which the metaphysical fundamentalists prate about—it is not the abyss of agile sophistry, but that of madness—will at the bidding of its certainty principle turn analytical, a potential tautology. Only thoughts that go the limit are facing up to the omnipotent impotence of certain accord; only a cerebral acrobatics keeps relating to the matter, for which, according to the *fable convenu*, it has nothing but disdain for the

sake of its self-satisfaction. No unreflected banality can remain true as an imprint of the wrong life.

Any attempt to bring thought—particularly for its utility’s sake—to a halt with the hackneyed description of it as smugly exaggerated and noncommittal is reactionary nowadays. The argument might be reduced to a vulgar form: “If you want me to, I’ll make innumerable analyses like that, rendering each one worthless.” Peter Altenberg gave the appropriate reply to a man who cast the same sort of aspersion on his abbreviated literary forms: “But I don’t want you to.” The open thought has no protection against the risk of decline into randomness; nothing assures it of a saturation with the matter that will suffice to surmount that risk. But the consistency of its performance, the density of its texture, helps the thought to hit the mark. There has been an about-face in the function of the concept of certainty in philosophy. What was once to surpass dogmas and the tutelage of self-certainty has become the social insurance of a cognition that is to be proof against any untoward happening. And indeed, to the unobjectionable nothing happens.

AGAINST RELATIVISM

In the history of philosophy we repeatedly find epistemological categories turned into moral ones; the most striking instance, although by no means the only one, is Fichte’s interpretation of Kant. Something similar happened with logical-phenomenological absolutism. To fundamental ontologists, relativism is the offense of bottomless thinking. Dialectics is as strictly opposed to that as to absolutism, but it does not seek a middle ground between the two; it opposes them through the extremes themselves, convicts them of untruth by their own ideas. Against relativism this procedure is overdue because most of its criticism has been so formal in nature as to leave the fiber of relativistic thinking more or less untouched. The popular argument against Spengler, for example—that relativism presupposes at least one absolute, its own validity, and thus contradicts itself—is shabby; it confuses

the general denial of a principle with the denial's own elevation to affirmative rank, regardless of the specific difference in the positional value of both.

More fruitful might be the recognition of relativism as a limited form of consciousness. It began as that of bourgeois individualism, in which the individual consciousness is taken for the ultimate and all individual opinions are accorded equal rights, as if there were no criterion of their truth. Proponents of the abstract thesis that every man's thought is conditioned should be most concretely reminded that so is their own, that it is blind to the supra-individual element which alone turns individual consciousness into thought. The attitude behind that thesis is one of disdain for the mind and respecting the predominance of material conditions, considered the only thing that counts. A father's retort to his son's decidedly uncomfortable views is that all things are relative, that money makes the man, as in the Greek proverb. Relativism is a popularized materialism; thought gets in the way of money-making.

Such a flatly anti-intellectual posture must necessarily remain abstract. The relativity of all cognition can always be asserted only from without, for as long as there is no act of concrete cognition. Consciousness no sooner enters into some definite thing, no sooner faces its immanent claim to be true or false, than the thought's allegedly subjective accidentality will dissolve. Relativism is nugatory for another reason: the things it considers random and accidental, on the one hand, and irreducible on the other—those things themselves are brought forth by an objectivity, by an objective individualist society, and can be deduced from it as socially necessary phenomena. The reactive modes which relativistic doctrine holds to be peculiar to each individual are pre-established; they are never far from the bleating of sheep, the stereotype of relativity in particular. And indeed, canny relativists such as Pareto have extended the individualistic phenomenality to group interests. But the bounds of objectivity which sociology has drawn, the bounds which are specific to its strata, are on their part only so much more deducible from the whole of society, from the objective realm. In Mannheim's late version of sociological relativism, which fancies that scientific objectivity might be distilled

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from the different perspectives of the strata of a “freely suspended” intelligence, the factors are reversed: the conditioning becomes the conditioned.

In fact, the law that governs the divergent perspectives is the structure of the social process as a preordained whole. Knowledge of the whole makes the perspectives binding. An entrepreneur who wants to stay competitive must calculate so that the uncompensated portion of the yield of other people’s labor will go to him as profit, and he must believe that what he is doing is a fair exchange of labor against the cost of its reproduction. It can be just as stringently shown, however, why this objectively necessary belief is an objective falsehood. The dialectical relation voids its particular elements in itself. The alleged social relativity of views obeys the objective law of social production under private ownership of the means of production. Bourgeois skepticism, of which relativism is the doctrinal embodiment, is obtuse.

But the perennial anti-intellectualism is more than an anthropological trait of bourgeois subjectivity. It is due to the fact that under the existing conditions of production the concept of reason, once emancipated, must fear that its consistent pursuit will explode those conditions. This is why reason limits itself; throughout the bourgeois era, the spirit’s accompanying reaction to the idea of its autonomy has been to despise itself. The spirit cannot forgive itself for being barred, by the constitution of the existence it guides, from unfolding the freedom inherent in its concept. The philosophical term for this prohibition is relativism. No dogmatic absolutism need be summoned against it; it is crushed by being proved narrow. Relativism, no matter how progressive its bearing, has at all times been linked with moments of reaction, beginning with the sophists’ availability to the more powerful interests. To intervene by criticizing relativism is the paradigm of definite negation.

DIALECTICS AND SOLIDITY

Unleashed dialectics is not without anything solid, no more than is Hegel. But it no longer confers primacy on it. Hegel did not

overstress the solid features in the origin of his metaphysics: they were to emerge from it at the end, as a translucent entirety. This lends a peculiar duplicity to his logical categories. They are structures that have originated, structures that void themselves, and at the same time they are a priori, invariant structures. With dynamism they are made to accord by the doctrine of an immediacy newly restored in each dialectical stage. The theory of second nature, to which Hegel already gave a critical tinge, is not lost to a negative dialectics. It assumes, *tel quel*, the abrupt immediacy, the formations which society and its evolution present to our thought; and it does this so that analysis may bare its mediations to the extent of the immanent difference between phenomena and that which they claim to be in themselves.

The self-preserving solidity, the young Hegel's "positive," is to such analysis, as it was to him. the negative. In the Preface to *Phenomenology* he still characterized thought, the arch-enemy of that positivity, as the negative principle.* The road to this is the simplest of reflections: what does not think, what surrenders to visibility, is inclined toward the badly positive by that passive nature which in the critique of reason marks the sensory source of the rights of knowledge. To receive something as it is offered at a time, dispensing with reflection, is potentially always tantamount to recognizing it the way it is; virtually all thoughts, on the other hand, cause a negative motion.

Of course, all his statements to the contrary notwithstanding, Hegel left the subject's primacy over the object unchallenged. It is disguised merely by the semi-theological word "spirit" with its indelible memories of individual subjectivity. The bill for this is presented in the excessive formality of Hegel's logic. According

* "The activity of distinguishing is the force and the work of the intellect, the most marvelous and greatest or, rather, the absolute power. The closed circle, which rests in itself and substantially contains its elements, is the immediate and therefore not marvelous relation. But that accidental things as such, apart from their extent, dependent things which are real only in connection with others—that these obtain an existence of their own and a separate freedom is the enormous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure I." (Hegel, Works 2, p. 33f.)

to its own concept it would have to be substantial, but the endeavor to make it all things at once, metaphysics as well as a doctrine of categories, resulted in the elimination of the definite being that might have legitimized its rudiment. In this respect Hegel is not so far removed from Kant and Fichte, whom he never tires of denouncing as spokesmen for abstract subjectivity. For its part, the science of logic is abstract in the simplest sense of the word: the reduction to general concepts is an advance elimination of the counter-agent to those concepts, of that concrete element which idealistic dialectics boasts of harboring and unfolding.

The spirit wins its fight against a nonexistent foe. Hegel's derogatory remark about contingent existence—the Krugianism which philosophy may, and must, scorn to deduce from itself—is a cry of “Stop thief!” Having always dealt with the medium of the concept, and reflecting only generally on the relation between the concept and its conceptual content, Hegelian logic has advance assurance of what it offers to prove: that the concept is absolute. The more critically we see through the autonomy of subjectivity, however, and the clearer our awareness of its own mediated nature, the more incumbent is it upon our thinking to take on what lends it the solidity it does not have in itself. Otherwise we would not even have the dynamics with which dialectics moves its solid burden.

Not every experience that appears as primary can be denied point-blank. If conscious experience were utterly lacking in what Kierkegaard defended as naïveté, thought would be unsure of itself, would do what the establishment expects of it, and would become still more naïve. Even terms such as “original experience,” terms compromised by phenomenology and neo-ontology, denote a truth while pompously doing it harm. Unless resistance to the façade stirs spontaneously, heedless of its own dependencies, thought and activity are dull copies. Whichever part of the object exceeds the definitions imposed on it by thinking will face the subject, first of all, as immediacy; and again, where the subject feels altogether sure of itself—in primary experience—it will be least subjective. The most subjective, the immediate datum, eludes the subject's intervention. Yet such immediate consciousness is neither continuously maintainable nor downright positive; for

consciousness is at the same time the universal medium and cannot jump across its shadow even in its own *données immédiates*. They are not the truth.

The confidence that from immediacy, from the solid and down-right primary, an unbroken entirety will spring—this confidence is an idealistic chimera. To dialectics, immediacy does not maintain its immediate pose. Instead of becoming the ground, it becomes a moment. At the opposite pole, the same thing happens to the invariants of pure thought. Nothing but a childish relativism would deny the validity of formal logic and mathematics and treat them as ephemeral because they have come to be. Yet the invariants, whose own invariance has been produced, cannot be peeled out of the variables as if all truth were at hand, then. Truth has coalesced with substance, which will change; immutability of truth is the delusion of *prima philosophia*. The invariants are not identically resolved in the dynamics of history and of consciousness, but they are moments in that dynamics; stabilized as transcendence, they become ideology. By no means will ideology always resemble the explicit idealistic philosophy. Ideology lies in the substruction of something primary, the content of which hardly matters; it lies in the implicit identity of concept and thing, an identity justified by the world even when a doctrine summarily teaches that consciousness depends on being.

THE PRIVILEGE OF EXPERIENCE

In sharp contrast to the usual ideal of science, the objectivity of dialectical cognition needs not less subjectivity, but more. Philosophical experience withers otherwise. But our positivistic *zeitgeist* is allergic to this need. It holds that not all men are capable of such experience; that it is the prerogative of individuals destined for it by their disposition and life story; that calling for it as a premise of cognition is elitist and undemocratic.

Granted, philosophical experiences are indeed not equally accessible to everyone, not the way all men of comparable I.Q.

should be able to repeat experiments in the natural sciences, for instance, or to grasp the cogency of mathematical deductions, although current opinion regards these faculties as requiring even more of a specific talent. In any case, compared with the virtually subjectless rationality of a scientific ideal that regards all men as interchangeable, the subjective share in philosophy retains an irrational adjunct. It is not a quality of nature. While the argument pretends to be democratic, it ignores what the administered world makes of its compulsory members. Only a mind which it has not entirely molded can withstand it. Criticizing privilege becomes a privilege—the world's course is as dialectical as that. Under social conditions—educational ones, in particular—which prune and often cripple the forces of mental productivity, and considering the prevailing dearth of images and the pathogenic processes in early childhood which psychoanalysis diagnoses but cannot really change, it would be fictitious to assume that all men might understand, or even perceive, all things. To expect this would be to make cognition accord with the pathic features of a mankind stripped of its capacity for experience—if it ever had this capacity—and by a law of perpetual sameness. The construction of truth in analogy to a *volonté de tous*, which is the final consequence of the concept of subjective reason, would in all men's name defraud all men of what they need.

If a stroke of undeserved luck has kept the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms—a stroke of luck they have often enough to pay for in their relations with their environment—it is up to these individuals to make the moral and, as it were, representative effort to say what most of those for whom they say it cannot see or, to do justice to reality, will not allow themselves to see. Direct communicability to everyone is not a criterion of truth. We must resist the all but universal compulsion to confuse the communication of knowledge with knowledge itself, and to rate it higher, if possible—whereas at present each communicative step is falsifying truth and selling it out. Meanwhile, whatever has to do with language suffers of this paradoxicality.

Truth is objective, not plausible. It falls into no man's lap; it does take objective conveyance; but just as applicable to its web

is what Spinoza over-enthusiastically claimed for each single truth: that it is its own index. As for the privileged character which rancor holds against it, truth will lose that character when men stop pleading the experiences they owe it to—when they let it enter instead into configurations and causal contexts that help to make it evident or to convict it of its failings. Elitist pride would be the last thing to befit the philosophical experience. He who has it must admit to himself how much, according to his possibilities in existence, his experience has been contaminated by existence, and ultimately by the class relationship. In philosophical experience, chances which the universal desultorily affords to individuals turn against the universal that sabotages the universality of such experience. If this universality were established, the experience of all individuals would change accordingly, losing much of the accidental character which until then incurably disfigures it even where it keeps stirring. Hegel's doctrine of the self-reflecting object survives its idealistic version because in a changed dialectics the subject's divestment of sovereignty turns it even more into a reflexive form of its object.

The less definitive and all-encompassing a theory is claimed to be, the less of an object will it become to the thinker. As the compulsion of the system evaporates, he will be free to rely more frankly on his own consciousness and experience than was permitted by the pathos-filled conception of a subjectivity whose abstract triumph would exact the price of renouncing its specific substance. This price was in line with the emancipation of individuality that occurred between the great age of idealism and the present, and whose achievements—despite, and because of, the present pressure of collective regression—are theoretically as irrevocable as the impulses of the dialectics of 1800. Nineteenth century individualism has indeed weakened the objectifying power of the mind, its capacity for insight into objectivity and for its construction; but it has also equipped the mind with a discriminating sense that strengthened its experience of the object.

THE QUALITATIVE MOMENT OF RATIONALITY

To yield to the object means to do justice to the object's qualitative moments. Scientific objectification, in line with the quantifying tendency of all science since Descartes, tends to eliminate qualities and to transform them into measurable definitions. Increasingly, rationality itself is equated *more mathematico* with the faculty of quantification. While perfectly corresponding to the primacy of a triumphant natural science, this faculty is by no means inherent in the concept of the *ratio* itself, which is blinded mainly when it balks at the idea that qualitative moments on their part are susceptible of rational conception. *Ratio* is not merely *συναγωγή*, an ascent from the scattered phenomena to the concept of their species,¹¹ it calls just as much for an ability to discriminate. Without this, the synthetic function of thought—abstract unification—would not be possible: to aggregate what is alike means necessarily to segregate it from what is different. But what is different is the qualitative; a thinking in which we do not think qualitatively is already emasculated and at odds with itself.

At the very dawn of the European philosophy of reason, the qualitative moment of the *ratio* was still vigorously expressed by Plato, the first to install mathematics as a model of method. Next to *συναγωγή*, with equal rights, he put *διαίρεσις*—which amounts to the commandment that consciousness, mindful of the Socratic and sophistic separation of *φύσει* and *θέσει*, should adhere to the nature of things and not deal with them arbitrarily. And qualitative distinction is not only incorporated in Plato's dialectics, in his doctrine of thought, but interpreted as a corrective for the violence of unleashed quantification. A parable from *Phaedrus* leaves no doubt of it; there, organizing thought and nonviolence strike a balance. The principle, reversing the conceptual motion of synthesis, is that of "division into species according to the natural formation, where the joints are, not breaking any part as a bad carver might."¹²

The qualitative moment is preserved in all quantification, as the substrate of that which is to be quantified. This is what Plato

cautions us not to destroy, lest the *ratio*, impairing the object it should attain, recoil into unreason. In a second reflection—an antidote, as it were—rational operations are accompanied by the same quality that was dismissed in the first, narrowly scientific reflection of a philosophy as alien to science as it is beholden to it. There is no quantified insight whose point, whose *terminus ad quem*, can be reached without qualitative retranslation. Even in statistics the cognitive goal is qualitative; quantification is nothing but the means. Absolutizing the *ratio*'s tendency to quantify agrees with its lack of self-reflection, which serves an insistence on the qualitative; it does not raise the specter of irrationality. Later, Hegel alone seemed aware of this without any romantic-retrospective leanings—at a time, of course, when quantification did not yet enjoy its present undisputed supremacy. He did agree with the scientific tradition that “the truth of quality itself is quantity,”¹³ but in *System of Philosophy* he recognizes quantity as a “definition indifferent to Being and extraneous to it,”¹⁴ and according to *Logic*, quantity is “itself a quality.” It retains its relevance in quantitative form; and the quantum returns to quality.¹⁵

QUALITY AND INDIVIDUAL

Corresponding to the quantifying tendency on the subjective side was the reduction of the knower to a purely logical universal without qualities. True, the qualities would be free only at an objective stage no longer limited to quantification, no longer having quantification drilled into the man who must make a mental adjustment. But quantification is not the timeless being it is made to seem by mathematics, its instrument. When it claimed exclusiveness it became transient. What awaits the qualitative subject in the matter is the potential of its qualities, not the transcendental residue of this potential—although the subject's restriction by the division of labor strengthens it for that residue alone. Yet as more of the subject's reactions are tabooed as allegedly merely subjective, more qualitative definitions of the object will escape cognition.

The ideal of discrimination, of the nuance—an ideal which in

cognition, including the latest developments, has never been quite forgotten, despite all “Science is measurement”—refers not only to an individual faculty which objectivity can do without. A discriminating man is one who in the matter and its concept can distinguish even the infinitesimal, that which escapes the concept; discrimination alone gets down to the infinitesimal. Its postulate of a capacity to experience the object—and discrimination is the experience of the object turned into a form of subjective reaction—provides a haven for the mimetic element of knowledge, for the element of elective affinity between the knower and the known.

In the total process of enlightenment this element gradually crumbles. But it cannot vanish completely if the process is not to annul itself. Even in the conception of rational knowledge, devoid of all affinity, there survives a groping for that concordance which the magical delusion used to place beyond doubt. If this moment were extinguished altogether, it would be flatly incomprehensible that a subject can know an object; the unleashed rationality would be irrational. In being secularized, however, the mimetic element in turn blends with the rational one. The word for this process is discrimination. It contains the faculty of mimetic reaction as well as the logical organ for the relation of genus, species, and *differentia specifica*. In the process, the differentiating faculty keeps as accidental a character as does any undiminished individuality compared with the universal of its reason.

Yet this element of chance is not radical enough for the criteria of scientivism. Hegel was oddly inconsistent when he arraigned the individual consciousness, the stage of the mental experience that animates his work, as accidental and narrow. The only explanation is an urge to incapacitate the critical element that entwines with the individual mind. Particularizing this, he came to feel the contradictions between the concept and the particular. The individual consciousness is almost always the unhappy one, and with good reason. In his aversion to it, Hegel refuses to face the very fact he underscores where it suits him: how much universality is inherent in that individuality. According to his strategic requirements he treats the individual as if it were the immediacy whose semblance he is destroying; with that, however,

the semblance of an absolute contingency of individual experience will disappear as well.

Without concepts, that experience would lack continuity. By definition, the part it takes in the discursive medium makes it always more than purely individual. The individual becomes a subject insofar as its individual consciousness objectifies it, in the unity of the self as well as in the unity of its experiences; to animals, presumably, both unities are denied. Because it is general in itself, and to the extent to which it is general, individual experience goes as far as the universal. Even in epistemological reflection, logical universality and the unity of the individual consciousness are mutually interdependent. Yet this does not only refer to the subjective-formal side of individuality: every content of individual consciousness is brought to it by its carrier for the sake of his self-preservation, and is reproduced along with that self-preservation.

Self-reflection may free the individual consciousness from that dependence and expand it. Spurring that expansion is the agonizing fact that logical universality tends to predominate in individual experience. As the “test of reality,” experience does not simply double the individual’s wishes and whims; it also denies them for the sake of his survival. The subject has no way at all to grasp universals other than in the motion of individual human consciousness. The result of cropping the individual would not be a higher subject cleansed of the dross of accidentality; the only subject to emerge from such an operation would be an unconsciously imitative one. In the East, the theoretical short circuit in the views of individuality has served as a pretext for collective oppression. The party, even if deluded or terrorized, is deemed a priori superior in judgment to each individual because of the number of its members. Yet the isolated individual unhampered by any ukase may at times perceive objectivities more clearly than the collective, which is no more than the ideology of its functionaries, anyway.

Brecht’s line—that the party has a thousand eyes while the individual has but two—is as false as any bromide ever. A dissenter’s exact imagination can see more than a thousand eyes peering through the same pink spectacles, confusing what they

see with universal truth, and regressing. Against this stands the individuation of knowledge. Not only the way the object is perceived depends upon that individuation and differentiation; the differentiation itself is determined by the object, which demands therein its *restitutio in integrum*, so to speak. Just the same, the modes of subjective reaction which the object needs require ceaseless objective correction in their turn. This occurs in self-reflection, in the ferment of mental experience. Metaphorically speaking, the process of philosophical objectivation would be vertical and intratemporal as opposed to the horizontal, abstractly quantifying one of science. This much of Bergson's metaphysics of time is true.

SUBSTANTIALITY AND METHOD

Bergson's generation—also Simmel, Husserl, and Scheler—yearned in vain for a philosophy receptive to the objects, a philosophy that would substantialize itself. What tradition tells, tradition wanted. Yet this does not relieve us of methodical reflection on the relative positions of substantial individual analysis and dialectical theory. The idealistic-identitarian avowals that the first absorbs the second are unconvincing; but objectively—not just through the knowing subject—the whole which theory expresses is contained in the individual object to be analyzed. What links the two is a matter of substance: the social totality.

But the link is also a matter of form, of the abstract legality of the totality itself: the legality of barter. It was from this that idealism distilled its absolute spirit, simultaneously encoding the truth that the linkage happens to phenomena as a coercive mechanism; this lies behind the so-called "constitutive problem." In a philosophical experience we do not have this universal immediately, as a phenomenon; we have it as abstractly as it is objective. We are constrained to take our departure from the particular, without forgetting what we know but do not have. The path of philosophical experience is twofold, like that of Heraclitus, one leading upward, one downward. Assured of the real determination of phenomena by their concept, our experience cannot propound

this concept ontologically, as truth-in-itself. The concept is fused with untruth, with the oppressive principle, thus lessening even the dignity of its epistemological criticism. It does not constitute a positive *telos* that would quench cognition. The negativity of the universal in turn welds cognition to the particular as that which is to be saved. "Only thoughts which cannot understand themselves are true."

All philosophy, even that which intends freedom, carries in its inalienably general elements the unfreedom in which society prolongs its existence. Coercion is inherent in philosophy, yet coercion alone protects it from regressing into license. The coercive character that is immanent in our thinking can be critically known; the coercion of thought is the medium of its deliverance. Hegel's "freedom to the object," the net result of which was the subject's incapacitation, has yet to be achieved. Until then, the divergence between dialectics as a method and substantial dialectics will go on. The principle of dominion, which antagonistically rends human society, is the same principle which, spiritualized, causes the difference between the concept and its subject matter; and that difference assumes the logical form of contradiction because, measured by the principle of dominion, whatever does not bow to its unity will not appear as something different from and indifferent to the principle, but as a violation of logic.

The remnant of divergence between philosophical conception and execution, on the other hand, also denotes some of the non-identity that allows the method neither quite to absorb the contents—though it is supposed to be in the contents alone—nor to immaterialize them. The precedence of the matter shows as a necessary insufficiency of the method. What must be said methodically, in the form of general reflection, in order not to be defenseless against the philosophers' philosophy, can be legitimized solely in execution, thus denying the method in turn. A surplus of method, compared with the substance, is abstract and false; even Hegel had to put up with the discrepancy between his Preface to *Phenomenology* and phenomenology itself. The philosophical ideal would be to obviate accounting for the deed by doing it.

EXISTENTIALISM

The most recent attempt to break out of conceptual fetishism—out of academic philosophy, without relinquishing the demand for commitment—went by the name of Existentialism. Like fundamental ontology, from which it split off by entering into political commitments, Existentialism remained in idealistic bonds; besides, compared with the philosophical structure, it retained an accidental touch replaceable by politics to the contrary, provided only the politics satisfied the Existentialist *characteristica formalis*. Each bloc has its partisans. There is no theoretical dividing line from decisionism. And yet the idealistic component of Existentialism is a political function. As social critics, Sartre and his friends were unwilling to limit themselves to theoretical criticisms, and it did not escape them that wherever communism had seized power it was digging in as a bureaucracy. The institution of a centralized state party makes a mockery of all past thinking about men's relation to the state. Hence Sartre's total stress upon the moment which the reigning practice will no longer tolerate—on spontaneity, philosophically speaking. He would urge Kierkegaard's category of decision the more exclusively, the smaller the objective chances left to it by the distribution of social power. Kierkegaard drew the meaning of the category from Christology, its *terminus ad quem*; Sartre made it the absolute it was to serve.

Despite his extreme nominalism,* Sartre's philosophy in its most

* By the rules of the game as played under an unreflected Enlightenment, Hegel's restitution of conceptual realism, down to his provocative defense of the ontological argument for the existence of God, was reactionary. Meanwhile, the course of history has justified his anti-nominalist intention. In contrast to the crude schema of Scheler's sociology of knowledge, nominalism on its part has turned into ideology—into the ideology of an eye-blinking “There isn't any such thing,” which official science likes to use as soon as mention is made of such embarrassing entities as class or ideology or, nowadays, society at large. A genuinely critical philosophy's relation to nominalism is not invariant; it changes historically with the function of skepticism. To ascribe any *fundamentum in re* of concepts to the subject is idealism.

effective phase was organized according to the old idealistic category of the free act of the subject. To Existentialism as to Fichte, any objectivity is a matter of indifference. Consequently, social conditions came in Sartre's plays to be topical adjuncts, at best; structurally, they do hardly more than provide an occasion for the action. The irrationality to which Sartre's philosophical nonobjectiveness condemned his plots was surely the last thing in the obdurate Enlightenment apostle's mind. The notion of absolute freedom of choice is as illusionary as that of the absolute I as the world's source has ever been. As for the situations that were built up as foils for heroic decisions, a modicum of political experience would make them wobble like stageprops. Not even dramaturgically could such a sovereign choice be postulated at a concrete historic juncture. A general who resolved, as irrationally as he used to revel in atrocities, to allow no more of them to be committed; a general who raised the siege of a city already given into his hands by traitors and set up a utopian community instead—such a general would have been promptly killed by mutinous soldiers or else recalled by his superiors even in the furious, farcically romanticized times of the German Renaissance.

Fitting in only too well with this is the fact that Götz, bragging like Nestroy's Holofernes who had at least been enlightened about his free act by the massacre of the City of Light, puts himself at the disposal of an organized people's movement, a transparent likeness of the ones against which Sartre plays off his absolute spontaneity. And indeed—although now clearly with philosophy's blessing—the Renaissance man promptly recommits the atrocities he had so freely forsworn. The absolute subject cannot get out of its entanglements: the bonds it would have to tear, the bonds of dominion, are as one with the principle of absolute subjectivity. It honors Sartre that this shows up in his plays, against his philosophical chef d'oeuvre. The plays disavow the philosophy with whose theses they deal. There is, however, a philosophical reason for the follies of political Existentialism, as there is for the phraseology of the nonpolitical German one. Existentialism raises

Nominalism parted company with it only where idealism made objective claims. The concept of a capitalist society is not a *flatus vocis*.

the inevitable, the sheer existence of men, to the status of a mentality which the individual is to choose, without his choice being determined by any reason, and without there really being another choice. Whenever they go beyond such a tautology, Existentialist teachings join hands with subjectivity as a being-for-itself, and as the sole substantial being.

The schools that take derivatives of the Latin *existere* for their device would cite the realities of tangible experience against the alienated special sciences. For fear of materialization they withdraw from substance. Unwittingly they turn it into an example. What they subsume under *ἐπιτοχή* will avenge itself by enforcing its power behind the back of philosophy, in decisions which philosophy deems irrational. A thinking purged of substantialities is not superior to a special science stripped of concepts; all versions of such thinking will relapse into the very formalism they combat for the sake of philosophy's vital concern. Afterwards it will be replenished with accidental loans, from psychology in particular. The intent of Existentialism, at least in its radical French form, would not be realizable at a distance from the substantial contents, but in menacing proximity to those contents. The dichotomy of subject and object is not to be voided by a reduction to the human person, not even to the absolutely isolated person. The question of man, a question whose present popularity extends all the way to Marxism of the Lukács persuasion, is ideological because its pure form dictates the invariant of the possible answer, even if that invariant is historicity itself.

What man ought to be as such is never more than what he has been: he is chained to the rock of his past. He is not only what he was and is, however, but equally what he can come to be, and to anticipate that, no definition suffices. The schools grouped around *Existenz*, even the utterly nominalistic ones, are incapable of the self-relinquishment they long for in their recourse to the individual human *Existenz*; and they confess that incapacity by philosophizing in general concepts about things not absorbed in their concepts, things running counter to their concepts—instead of thinking them through. They illustrate *Existenz*, the concept, by *Existenz*, the condition.

THING, LANGUAGE, HISTORY

How one should think instead has its distant and vague archetype in the various languages, in the names which do not categorically cover the thing, albeit at the cost of their cognitive function. In undiminished cognition we want what we have been drilled to resign ourselves to, what the names that come too close will blind us to—resignation and delusion are ideological complements. An idiosyncratic precision in the choice of words, as if they were to designate the things, is one of the major reasons why presentation is essential to philosophy. The cognitive reason for much expressive insistence on τὸδε τι is its own dialectics, its conceptual mediation within itself; this is the point of attack for conceiving its non-conceptual side.

For mediation in the midst of nonconceptuality is not a remainder after accomplished subtraction, nor something pointing to a bad infinity of such procedures. Rather, the mediation of the ὄλη is its implicit history. It is from a negative that philosophy draws whatever legitimacy it still retains: from the fact that, in being so and not otherwise, those insolubles which forced philosophy to capitulate and from which idealism declines are another fetish—the fetish of the irrevocability of things in being. What dissolves the fetish is the insight that things are not simply so and not otherwise, that they have come to be under certain conditions. Their becoming fades and dwells within the things; it can no more be stabilized in their concepts than it can be split off from its own results and forgotten. Similar to this becoming is temporal experience. It is when things in being are read as a text of their becoming that idealistic and materialistic dialects touch. But while idealism sees in the inner history of immediacy its vindication as a stage of the concept, materialism makes that inner history the measure, not just of the untruth of concepts, but even more of the immediacy in being.

The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility—the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one. But no matter how hard we try for linguistic expression

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of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing itself, without quite bringing its selfhood to mind; there is a gap between words and the thing they conjure. Hence, the residue of arbitrariness and relativity in the choice of words as well as in the presentation as a whole. Benjamin's concepts still tend to an authoritarian concealment of their conceptuality. Concepts alone can achieve what the concept prevents. Cognition is a *πρώσας ἴασεται*. The determinable flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others; this is the font of the only constellations which inherited some of the hope of the name. The language of philosophy approaches that name by denying it. The claim of immediate truth for which it chides the words is almost always the ideology of a positive, existent identity of word and thing. Insistence upon a single word and concept as the iron gate to be unlocked is also a mere moment, though an inalienable one. To be known, the inwardness to which cognition clings in expression always needs its own outwardness as well.

TRADITION AND KNOWLEDGE

In the mainstream of modern philosophy we can no longer—pardon the odious word—be in the swim. The hitherto dominant philosophy of the modern age wants to eliminate the traditional moments of thinking. It would dehistoricize the contents of thought and assign history to a special, fact-gathering branch of science. Ever since the fundament of knowledge came to be sought in supposedly immediate subjective data, men have been enthralled by the idol of a pure present. They would endeavor to strip thought of its historic dimension. The fictitious, one-dimensional Now became the cognitive ground of all inner meaning. On this point there is agreement between patriarchs of modernity who are officially considered antipodes: between Descartes' autobiographical statements on the origin of his method and Bacon's idol theory. What is historic in thought, instead of heeding the timelessness of an objectified logic, was equated with

superstition—and to cite ecclesiastically institutional traditions against inquiring thought was indeed superstition. Men had every reason to criticize authority. But their critique misconceived that tradition is immanent in knowledge itself, that it serves to mediate between known objects. Knowledge no sooner starts from scratch, by way of a stabilizing objectification, than it will distort the objects. Knowledge as such, even in a form detached from substance, takes part in tradition as unconscious remembrance; there is no question which we might simply ask, without knowing of past things that are preserved in the question and spur it.

From the outset, thinking as an intratemporal, motivated, progressive motion is the microcosmic equivalent of the macrocosmic motion of history that was internalized in the structure of thinking. Among the achievements of Kantian deduction, one ranging foremost is that even in the pure cognitive form, in the unity of the “I think” at the stage of imaginative reproduction, Kant perceived remembrance, the trace of historicity. Because there is no time without its content, however, that which Husserl in his late phase called “inner historicity” cannot remain internal, a pure form. The inner historicity of thought is inseparable from its content, and thus inseparable from tradition; the pure, perfectly sublimated subject, on the other hand, would be absolutely devoid of tradition. A knowledge wholly conforming to the idol of that purity, of total timelessness—a knowledge coincident with formal logic—would become a tautology; there would be no more room in it even for transcendental logic. Timelessness, the goal which the bourgeois mind may be pursuing in order to compensate for its own mortality, is the acme of its delusion. Benjamin innervated this when he strictly foreswore the ideal of autonomy and submitted his thought to tradition—although to a voluntarily installed, subjectively chosen tradition that is as unauthoritative as it accuses the autarkic thought of being. Although reflecting the transcendental moment, the traditional moment is quasi-transcendental: it is not a point-like subjectivity but the properly constitutive factor, what Kant called “the mechanism hidden in the depths of the soul.” There is one variant that should not be missing from the excessively narrow initial questions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and that is the

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question how a thinking obliged to relinquish tradition might preserve and transform tradition.¹⁶ For this and nothing else is the mental experience. It was plumbed by Bergson in philosophy, and even more by Proust in the novel, though both men were kept under the spell of immediacy by their disgust with the bourgeois timelessness that will use conceptual mechanics to anticipate the end of life. Yet philosophy's methexis in tradition would only be a definite denial of tradition. Philosophy rests on the texts it criticizes. They are brought to it by the tradition they embody, and it is in dealing with them that the conduct of philosophy becomes commensurable with tradition. This justifies the move from philosophy to exegesis, which exalts neither the interpretation nor the symbol into an absolute but seeks the truth where thinking secularizes the irretrievable archetype of sacred texts.

RHETORIC

In its dependence—patent or latent—on texts, philosophy admits its linguistic nature which the ideal of the method leads it to deny in vain. Like tradition, this nature has been tabooed in recent philosophical history, as rhetoric. Severed and degraded into a means to achieve effects, it became the carrier of the lie in philosophy. In despising rhetoric, philosophy atoned for a guilt incurred ever since Antiquity by its detachment from things, a guilt already pointed out by Plato. But the persecutors of the rhetorical element that saved expression for thought did just as much for the technification of thought, for its potential abolition, as did those who cultivated rhetoric and ignored the object.

In philosophy, rhetoric represents that which cannot be thought except in language. It holds a place among the postulates of contents already known and fixed. Rhetoric is in jeopardy, like any substitute, because it may easily come to usurp what the thought cannot obtain directly from the presentation. It is incessantly corrupted by persuasive purposes—without which, on the other hand, the thought act would no longer have a practical relation. The fact that all approved traditional philosophy from Plato down to the semanticists has been allergic to expression,

this fact accords with a propensity of all Enlightenment: to punish undisciplined gestures. It is a trait extending all the way to logic, a defense mechanism of the materialized consciousness.

The alliance of philosophy and science aims at the virtual abolition of language and thus of philosophy, and yet philosophy cannot survive without the linguistic effort. Instead of splashing around in the linguistic cascade, a philosopher reflects upon it. There is a reason why sloppy language—inexactness, scientifically speaking—tends to be leagued with the scientific mien of incorruptibility by language. For to abolish language in thought is not to demythologize thought. Along with language, philosophy would blindly sacrifice whatever is not merely significative in dealing with its object; it is in language alone that like knows like. Yet we cannot ignore the perpetual denunciation of rhetoric by nominalists to whom a name bears no resemblance to what it says, nor can an unbroken rhetoric be summoned against them.

Dialectics—literally: language as the organon of thought—would mean to attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element, a mutual approximation of thing and expression, to the point where the difference fades. Dialectics appropriates for the power of thought what historically seemed to be a flaw in thinking: its link with language, which nothing can wholly break. It was this link that inspired phenomenology to try—naïvely, as always—to make sure of truth by analyzing words. It is in the rhetorical quality that culture, society, and tradition animate the thought; a stern hostility to it is leagued with barbarism, in which bourgeois thinking ends. The vilification of Cicero and even Hegel's aversion to Diderot bear witness to the resentment of those whom the trials of life have robbed of the freedom to stand tall, and who regard the body of language as sinful.

In dialectics, contrary to popular opinion, the rhetorical element is on the side of content. Dialectics seeks to mediate between random views and unessential accuracy, to master this dilemma by way of the formal, logical dilemma. But dialectics inclines to content because the content is not closed, not predetermined by a skeleton; it is a protest against mythology. Mythical is that which never changes, ultimately diluted to a formal legality of thought. To want substance in cognition is to want a utopia. It is this consciousness of possibility

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that sticks to the concrete, the undisfigured. Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why it seems abstract in the midst of extant things. The inextinguishable color comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending—however negatively—to that which is not. The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism in which its color is caught.

PART ONE

RELATION TO ONTOLOGY

ONE

THE ONTOLOGICAL NEED

QUESTION AND ANSWER

The ontologies in Germany, Heidegger's in particular, remain effective to this day. Traces of the political past are no deterrent. Tacitly, ontology is understood as readiness to sanction a heteronomous order that need not be consciously justified, and that such interpretations are denied in higher places—as misconceptions, declines to the ontical sphere, deficient radicalism in formulating the question—serves but to enhance the dignity of their appeal. Ontology seems the more numinous the less it can be laid down in definite contents that would give the meddlesome intellect something to latch on to. Intangibility comes to be unassailability. He who refuses to follow suit is suspect, a fellow without a spiritual fatherland, without a home in Being—not so much different from the “baseness” for which the idealists Fichte and Schelling used to excoriate resisters to their metaphysics. In all its embattled trends, which mutually exclude each other as false versions, ontology is apologetical. Yet its effect would be unintelligible if it did not meet an emphatic need, a sign of something missed, a longing that Kant's verdict on a knowledge of the Absolute should not be the end of the matter.

The need was crudely but openly manifest in the early days of the neo-ontological movements, when theological sympathizers would talk of the resurrection of metaphysics. There was a touch of it in Husserl's will to replace the *intentio obliqua* with the *intentio recta*; what had delimited the cognitive possibilities in the critique of reason was nothing but the recollection of the cognitive powers themselves, a recollection which the phenomenological platform initially meant to dispense with. Plainly stirring in the “draft” of the ontological constitution of

topical fields and regions, and finally of the “world as the entirety of all there is,” was the will to grasp the whole without any limits being placed on its cognition. Husserl’s *εἶδη*—later turned into “*existentialia*” by the Heidegger of *Being and Time*—were to anticipate encompassingly what those regions were, up to the highest. The implication behind them was that rational drafts might pre-design the structure of all the abundance of Being. It was a second reprise of the old philosophies of the Absolute, their first reprise having been post-Kantian idealism.

Yet the critical trend remained at work at the same time, though not so much as counter to dogmatic concepts. It continued as an effort in which the absolutes, now deprived of their systematic unity and delimited from each other, would no longer be posited or construed but received, accepted, and described in a posture following the lines of the positivistic scientific ideal. Once again, as for Schelling, absolute knowledge became intellectual visuality. One hoped to delete the transmissions instead of reflecting them. The nonconformist motive that philosophy need not resign itself within the bounds of an organized, usable science recoiled into conformism. The categorial structure that had been uncritically accepted as such, as the skeleton of extant conditions, was confirmed as absolute, and the unreflective immediacy of the method lent itself to any kind of license. The critique of criticism became pre-critical. Hence the mental posture of a permanent “back to.” The Absolute became what it would least like to be, and what critical truth does call it: a matter of natural history that would quickly and crudely provide the norm of adjustment.

In comparison, the idealistic academic philosophy denied what will be expected of philosophy by anyone who goes in for it unprepared. That was the reverse of its Kant-enforced scientific self-responsibility. The awareness that a philosophy carried on as a specialty no longer has anything to do with people—with the people it trains to stop asking, as futile, the only questions for whose sake they turn to it—this awareness was already stirring in German idealism; it was voiced without professional discretion by Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche challenged any kind of accord with academicism. But what the present ontologies have done under this aspect is not simply to adopt the antiacademic

philosophical tradition by asking, as Paul Tillich phrased it once, about that which concerns one absolutely. They have taken the nonacademic pathos and established it academically. They combined a pleasant shudder at the world's imminent end with a soothing sense of operating on solid ground, perhaps even on philologically fortified ground. Audacity, ever the prerogative of youth, knew itself covered by general agreement and by the most powerful educational institution. The movement as a whole became the opposite of what its germs seemed to promise: the treatment of relevant things relapsed into an abstractness unsurpassed by any neo-Kantian methodology.

This development is inseparable from the problematics of the ontological need itself. It can no more be quenched by that sort of philosophy than it could once be quenched by the transcendental system. This is why ontology has become shrouded in vapors. In line with an older German tradition, it puts the question above the answer; where it keeps owing what it promised, it has consolingly raised failure as such to existential rank. The weight of questions in philosophy differs indeed from the weight they have in special sciences, where the solution of questions removes them, while in philosophical history their rhythm would be more that of duration and oblivion. But this does not mean that—as some keep parroting Kierkegaard—the truth lies in the questioner's existence, in his mere futile search for an answer. Rather, in philosophy the authentic question will somehow almost always include its answer. Unlike science, philosophy knows no fixed sequence of question and answer. Its question must be shaped by its experience, so as to catch up with the experience. Its answers are not given, not made, not generated: they are the recoil of the unfolded, transparent question.

This is precisely what idealism would drown out in its constant endeavor to produce, to “deduce,” its own form and, if possible, its every content. But thought does not preserve itself as an origin, and it ought not to hide the fact that it does not generate—that it merely returns what it already has as experience. The expressive moment in thought keeps it from proceeding *more mathematico* and serving up problems followed by pseudo-solutions. In philosophy, words like “problem” and “solution” have a mendacious

ring because they postulate the thought's independence from thinking precisely where thinking and the thought transmit each other. Only the truth can really be philosophically understood. Our fulfilling concurrence in the judgment in which we understand something is the same as a decision about True or False. If we do not personally judge the stringency or nonstringency of a theorem, we do not understand it. The theorem's claim of such stringency is its own content of meaning, the very thing that is to be understood.

This distinguishes the relation of understanding and judgment from the usual order of time. The fact that we can no more understand without judging than we can judge without understanding invalidates the schema that the solution is the judgment and the problem is only the question, based on understanding. What is transmitted here is the fiber of the so-called philosophical demonstration, a mode of proof that contrasts with the mathematical model. And yet that model does not simply disappear, for the stringency of a philosophical thought requires its mode of proceeding to be measured by the forms of inference. Philosophical proof is the effort to give statements a binding quality by making them commensurable with the means of discursive thinking. But it does not purely follow from that thinking: the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity is itself a philosophical content.

In Hegel's case, despite the extreme enhancement of his claim to derive the nonidentical from identity, the thought structure of the great Logic implies the solutions in the way the problems are put, instead of presenting results after striking a balance. While Hegel's critique of analytical judgments is exacerbated to the thesis of their "falseness," everything is to him an analytical judgment, a turning to and fro of the thought without citation of anything extraneous to it. It is a moment of dialectics that the new is the old, and otherness is familiarity. The connection of that moment with the identity thesis is evident, but it is not circumscribed by the thesis. Paradoxically, the more a philosophical thought yields to its experience, the closer its approach to an analytical judgment. To grow fully aware of a desideratum of cognition is mostly to achieve the cognition itself; this is the counterpart of the idealistic principle of perpetual production. That it is by no means the Absolute

is asserted in philosophy by doing without the traditional machinery of proof, by accentuating a knowledge that is known already.

AFFIRMATIVE CHARACTER

The ontological need can no more guarantee its object than the agony of the starving assures them of food. But no doubts of such guarantees plague a philosophical movement once destined for better things; it was for this reason as much as for any other that it became untruthfully affirmative. “Dimming the world never takes us to the light of Being.”¹ In the categories to which fundamental ontology owes its echo—and which it therefore either denies or sublimates until they will no longer serve for any unwelcome confrontation—we can read how much they are the imprints of something missing that is not to be produced, how much they are its complementary ideology. Yet the cult of Being, or at least the attraction of the word as of something superior, lives by the fact that in reality, as once upon a time in epistemology, concepts denoting function have more and more replaced the concepts denoting substance. Society has become the total functional context which liberalism used to think it was: to be is to be relative to other persons and things, and to be irrelevant in oneself. This frightening fact, this dawning awareness that it may be losing its substantiality, prepares the subject to listen to avowals that its unarticulated being—equated with that substantiality—cannot be lost, that it will survive the functional context.

What the conjurers of ontological philosophizing strive, as it were, to awaken is undermined by real processes, however: by the production and reproduction of social life. The effort to justify “man” and “being” and “time” theoretically, as primal phenomena, cannot stay the fate of the resurrected ideas. Concepts whose substrate is historically at an end have always been duly criticized as dogmatic hypostases, even in the specifically philosophical realm—as Kant, for example, criticized the transcendence of the empirical soul, the aura of the word *Dasein*, in his chapter on paralogisms, and the immediate recourse to Being in his chapter on the amphiboly of reflexive concepts. But the exponents of the

new ontology do not make that Kantian critique their own. They do not carry it forward by reflection. Instead, they act as if that critique belonged to a rationalistic consciousness of whose flaws genuine thought had to be cleansed as in a ritual bath.

Despite this, trying to hitch their wagon to critical philosophy as well, they directly impute to this philosophy an ontological content. Heidegger's reading of the anti-subjectivist and "transcending" element in Kant was not quite unwarranted: in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant does programmatically stress his objective way to pose questions, and leaves no doubt of it as he performs the deduction of pure intellectual concepts. The Copernican turn registered in conventional philosophical history does not exhaust him; the objective interest retains primacy over the subjective interest in the mere occurrence of cognition, in a dismembering of consciousness in empiricist style. By no means, however, can we equate this objective interest with a hidden ontology. Arguing against such an equation is not only Kant's critique of rationalist ontology—which might allow for the conception of another, if need be—but the train of thought of the critique of reason itself. Following this train of thought, we find that objectivity, the objectivity of knowledge as well as that of the totality of all things known, is subjectively transmitted. It allows us to assume an "in itself" beyond the subject-object polarity, but it intentionally leaves this assumption so indefinite that no sort of interpretation whatsoever would be able to extract an ontology from it. If Kant meant to rescue that *kosmos noetikos* which the turn to the subject was attacking, and if, therefore, there is an ontological element in his work, it is still an element, and not the central one. His philosophy is an attempt to accomplish the rescue by means of that which menaces what he would save.

INCAPACITATION OF THE SUBJECT

A fact supporting the objectivistic resuscitation of ontology would indeed be the least compatible with its idea: the fact that to a great extent the subject came to be an ideology, a screen for society's

objective functional context and a palliative for the subjects' suffering under society. In this sense—and not just today—the not-I has moved drastically ahead of the I. In Heidegger's philosophy the fact is detoured but registered; in his hands that historical primacy becomes an ontological precedence of "Being" pure and simple over all ontical and real things. He prudently refrained from reversing the Copernican turn, the turn to the idea, in plain view of all. He zealously set off his version of ontology from objectivism, and his anti-idealistic stand from realism, whether critical or naïve.² Unquestionably, the ontological need could not be planed down to an anti-idealism along the battle lines of academic debate. And yet, of all the impulses given by that need the most enduring may have been the disavowal of idealism.

The anthropocentric sense of life has been shaken. The subject in its philosophical self-reflection has, so to speak, made the centuries-old critique of geocentrism its own. This motive is more than a matter of *weltanschauung*, however easy it was to exploit as a *weltanschauung*. Extravagant syntheses between developments in philosophy and in the natural science are odious, of course; they ignore the increasingly independent language of physical-mathematical formulas, a language that has long ceased to be retrievable into visuality or any other categories directly commensurable to the consciousness of man. And yet, the results of recent cosmology have radiated far and wide. All notions to make the universe resemble the subject, if not indeed to derive it as positing the subject, have been relegated to a naïveté comparable to that of Boeotians or paranoiacs who regard their hamlet as the center of the world. The ground of philosophical idealism, the control of nature, has lost the certainty of its omnipotence precisely because of its immense expansion during the first half of the twentieth century; also because human consciousness has limped behind, leaving the order of human affairs irrational, and finally because it took the magnitude of the attainments to let us measure their infinitesimality in comparison with the unattainable. There is a universal feeling, a universal fear, that our progress in controlling nature may increasingly help to weave the very calamity it is supposed to protect us from, that it may be weaving that second nature into which society has rankly grown.

Ontology and the philosophy of Being are modes of reaction in which—along with other and cruder modes—consciousness hopes to escape from that entanglement. But they contain a fatal dialectics. The truth that expels man from the center of creation and reminds him of his impotence—this same truth will, as a subjective mode of conduct, confirm the sense of impotence, cause men to identify with it, and thus reinforce the spell of the second nature. Faith in Being, a dim *weltanschauung* derived from critical premonitions, really degenerates into a bondage to Being, as Heidegger incautiously defined it once. Feeling face to face with the cosmos, the believer clings without much ado to any kind of particular, if only it is forceful enough in convicting the subject of its weakness. The subjects' readiness to cringe before the calamity that springs from the subjective context itself is the punishment for their futile wish to fly the prison of their subjectivity. The philosophical leap, the primal gesture of Kierkegaard, is the very license from which the subject dreams it may escape by its submission to Being.

The spell is diminished only where the subject, in Hegel's language, is "involved"; it is perpetuated in whatever would be the subject's downright otherness, just as the *deus absconditus* always carried some of the irrational features of mythical deities. The corny exoticism of such decorative world views as the astonishingly consumable Zen Buddhist one casts light upon today's restorative philosophies. Like Zen, they simulate a thinking posture which the history stored in the subjects makes impossible to assume. Restricting the mind to thoughts open and attainable at the historical stage of its experience is an element of freedom; non-conceptual vagary represents the opposite of freedom. Doctrines which heedlessly run off from the subject to the universe, along with the philosophy of Being, are more easily brought into accord with the world's hardened condition and with the chances of success in it than is the tiniest bit of self-reflection by a subject pondering upon itself and its real captivity.

BEING, SUBJECT, OBJECT

The popular success of ontology feeds on an illusion: that the state of the *intentio recta* might simply be chosen by a consciousness full of nominalist and subjectivist sediments, a consciousness which self-reflection alone has made what it is. Heidegger, of course, saw through this illusion. He circumvents the alternative by way of the doctrine of Being that prevails beyond *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*, beyond subject and object, beyond concept and entity. Being is the supreme concept—for on the lips of him who says “Being” is the word, not Being itself—and yet it is said to be privileged above all conceptuality, by virtue of moments which the thinker thinks along with the word “Being” and which the abstractly obtained significative unity of the concept does not exhaust.

Presupposed by the talk of Being—though no longer referred to by the mature Heidegger, at least—is Husserl’s doctrine of categorial visuality or essence perception. It is solely by such perception that the structure which Heidegger’s philosophy ascribes to Being could, in the terminology of the school, be “unsealed” or “unveiled”; Heidegger’s emphatic Being would be the ideal of what yields to ideation. The critique that lies in Husserl’s doctrine—of a classifying logic as the significative unity of whatever the concept covers—remains in force. But Husserl wished to have his cake and eat it too: he kept his philosophy within the bounds of the division of labor and left the concept of strict science alone until his late phase, despite all of the so-called “foundation questions,” and yet he sought to apply the strict rules of the scientific game to whatever critique of these rules has its own meaning. What his explicitly propounded method sought to do to classifying concepts, by the mode of their cognitive ascertainment, was to imbue them with that which as classification, as the mere arrangement of given things, they cannot have—to imbue them with what they would have only by grasping the thing itself, which in Husserl’s case oscillates between an intramental thing and one contrary to the immanence of consciousness. Husserl

cannot, as was customary in his lifetime, be accused of irrationalism on the ground that his categorial vision is unscientific; his work as a whole is a stand against irrationalism. But what can be held against his work is its contamination with science.

Heidegger noticed this and took the step Husserl shrank from. However, in doing so he discarded the rational moment which Husserl preserved, and—more like Bergson in this respect—he tacitly followed a procedure in which the relation to the discursive concept, an inalienable element of thought, was sacrificed. At the same time he covered Bergson's weakness, his juxtaposition of two disconnected, disparate modes of cognition: Heidegger, mobilizing the alleged higher dignity of the part of categorial vision, removes the epistemological-critical question as pre-ontological, along with the question whether that part is legitimate. Discontent with the preliminary epistemological question comes to justify its outright elimination; dogmatics simply turns into a higher truth, as against the traditional critique of dogmatics. This is the root of Heidegger's archaicism. The ambiguity of the Greek words for "being"—an ambiguity that dates back to the Ionians' failure to distinguish between materials, principles, and the pure essence—is not listed as a defect but as original superiority. Its mission is to heal the concept "Being" of the wound of its conceptuality, of the split between thoughts and their content.

ONTOLOGICAL OBJECTIVISM

What appears as if it were located in the eon before the Fall, however—the Fall of both subjectifying and objectifying metaphysics—will turn, *contre coeur*, into a stark "in itself." A self-denying subjectivity recoils into objectivism. No matter how painstakingly such thinking shuns the criticist controversy by adding the two antithetical positions alike to the loss of Being, the sublimation of its concepts will be a ceaseless continuance of Husserl's reductions. What is meant by Being is stripped as much of all individuated existence as of all traces of rational abstraction. This Being ends up in a tautology from which the subject has been evicted: "But Being—what is Being? It is Itself."³ There is no

way for Being to avoid the tautology, and we do not improve it if with prudent candor we opt for it and pronounce it a pledge of profundity.

Intentionally or not, every judgment—even an analytical one, as shown by Hegel—carries with it the claim to predicate something that is not simply identical with the mere concept of the subject. If it ignores this requirement, the judgment breaks the contract it has previously signed by its form. But the concept of Being as handled by the new ontology cannot help breaking that contract. In this ontology, Being must be defined by itself alone because it is held to be neither comprehensible in concepts—in other words, neither “transmitted”—nor immediately demonstrable after the model of sensory ascertainment. In lieu of any critical authority for Being we get a reiteration of the mere name. The residue, the supposedly undisfigured essence,⁴ is like an ἀρχή of the type which the motivated thought movement had to reject.

As Heidegger once pointed out against Sartre,⁵ a philosophy’s denial that it is metaphysics does not settle the question whether or not it is, but it does justify the suspicion that untruth may hide in the refusal to admit its metaphysical content. A new beginning at an alleged zero point is the mask of strenuous forgetfulness—an effort to which sympathy with barbarism is not extraneous. The decay of the older ontologies, of the scholastic ones as well as of their rationalistic successors, was not a contingent change in weltanschauung or thinking style; to believe in that change is the same historical relativism to which the ontological need used to take exception. No sympathy with Plato’s enthusiasm as against Aristotle’s touch of resignation to the special sciences can refute the objection that the doctrine of ideas duplicates the world of things; no plea for the blessings of order will remove the difficulties caused in Aristotelian metaphysics by the relation of τὸδε τι and πρώτη οὐσία. These difficulties spring from the disjoint definitions of Being and entity, which the new ontology resolutely and naively restores. Nor would the demand, however legitimate, for objective reason alone enable us to think Kant’s critique of the ontological argument for God out of existence. Compared with hylozoism, the Eleatic turn to the presently glorified concept of Being was already a sort of Enlightenment, something less appreciated by Heidegger. But to

wipe this all out by regressing to sacred primordially, behind the reflection of critical thought—this intention would solely circumvent philosophical compulsions which, once understood, barred the quenching of the ontological need. The will not to accept evasions, the will to learn essential things from philosophy, is deformed by answers tailored to the need, by answers that lie in twilight between the legitimate duty to provide bread, not stones, and the illegitimate conviction that there must be bread because it must be.

THE DISAPPOINTED NEED

That a philosophy based on the primacy of method will acquiesce in so-called preliminary questions—and that, therefore, it may possibly even feel secure as a basic science—serves only to deceive us about the fact that the preliminary questions and philosophy itself have virtually no cognitive consequences any more. Reflections on the instrument of scientific knowledge have long ceased to touch its substance; they only touch upon what may be cognoscible at all, on the validity of scientific judgments. To such reflection, any definite knowledge is subaltern, a mere *constitutum*. While resting its claims on its immersion in the general constitution of knowledge, the reflection leaves knowledge indifferent.

The first formula to express this was Kant's famous line that the "transcendental idealist" is an "empirical realist."⁶ Admirers of the critic of pure reason, and of his attempt to find reasons for experience, were deaf to this admission of bankruptcy: that the immeasurable strain of that critique was *ἀδιάφορον* with respect to the content of experience. Encouraged are only the normally functioning intellect and the corresponding view of reality—Heidegger, by the way, still opts for the "normally thinking human being."⁷ Few of the intramundane views and judgments of common sense are withdrawn from circulation. "What Kant wished to prove, in a way that would offend 'all the world,' was that 'all the world' was right—this was that soul's secret joke. He wrote against the scholars and in favor of the prejudices of the people, but he wrote for scholars, and not for the people."⁸ Defeatism paralyzes the

specifically philosophical impulse to blast a hidden truth out from behind the idols of conventional consciousness. The chapter on amphibolies mocks the brazen desire to know the inside of things, and this self-satisfied, manly resignation of a philosophy settling down in the external *mundus sensibilis* is not just the Enlightenment's No to a metaphysics that confuses the concept with its own reality; it is also the obscurantist No to every refusal to capitulate to the façade.

Surviving in the ontological need is some remembrance of this greatest virtue, which critical philosophy did not so much forget as zealously eliminate in honor of the science it sought to establish—a remembrance of the will not to let thoughts be robbed of that for the sake of which men think them. Since the sciences' irrevocable farewell to idealistic philosophy, the successful sciences are no longer seeking to legitimize themselves otherwise than by a statement of their method. Their self-exegesis makes a *causa sui* of science. It accepts itself as given and thereby sanctions also its currently existing form, its division of labor, although in the long run the insufficiency of that form cannot be concealed. The intellectual sciences in particular, due to their borrowed ideal of positivity, lapse into the irrelevance and nonconceptuality of countless special investigations. The cuts between special disciplines such as sociology, economics, and history make the cognitive interest vanish in pedantically drawn, inflatedly defended trenches.

Ontology recalls this, but it has become cautious enough not to try to breathe the essence into the thing by speculative thinking. The essence is to spring forth like something given, rather, in tribute to the rules of positivity, which the need would transcend. Some initiates of science expect it to be decisively supplemented by ontology without their having to touch the scientific procedures. If Heidegger, in the later phase of his philosophy, claims to rise above the traditional distinction of essence and fact, he is reflecting a justified irritation at the divergence of essential and factual sciences, of mathematical-logical and substantive disciplines, which in scientific activity thrive side by side, disconnected, although the cognitive ideal of one group would be irreconcilable with that of the other.

But the antagonism between exclusive scientific criteria and

the absolute claim of a doctrine of essence—or, later, of Being—will not vanish at the doctrine’s bidding. The doctrine opposes its counterpart abstractly, displaying the same flaws of a labor-dividing consciousness which it pretends to cure. What it enlists against science is not scientific self-reflection, nor, as some seem to think, is it something qualitatively different whose necessary motion would superimpose it on science. According to the old parable Hegel used against Schelling, the doctrine comes out of a gun: it is an addition to science, a summary disposal that effects no valid change in science itself.

The doctrine’s noble turn away from science finally serves only to confirm the universal rule of science, not unlike the way irrationalist slogans under fascism served as a counterpoint to scientific-technological activities. To pass from a critique of the sciences to their essential concerns—as to Being—is to disregard in turn whatever might be of the essence in the sciences; it is a move that robs those in need of ontology of what ontology appears to give them. With a detachment from all things substantive that is more anxious than Kant’s ever was, ontological philosophizing permits less unregimented insight than Schelling’s idealism, or even Hegel’s. Especially tabooed as heterodoxy, as dealing with mere entity and *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*, is social consciousness, which precisely in the ontologies of Antiquity was inseparable from the philosophical one. In his hermeneutics, Heidegger adopts the turn against epistemology which Hegel inaugurated in the Preface to *Phenomenology of the Mind*⁹ But the reservations of transcendental philosophy against a substantive philosophy that forbids substance to cross its threshold as merely empirical—these reservations survive, for all protestations to the contrary, in Heidegger’s program to distinguish Being from entity and to explicate Being itself.¹⁰

Not the last reason for the aloofness of fundamental ontology is that an ideal of the “purity” of Being in contrast to entity—an ideal derived from the methodologization of philosophy, with Husserl as the last connecting link—will be maintained, and yet philosophizing will go on as though about matters of substance. This habitude and that purity could be reconciled only in a realm that blurs all definite distinctions, indeed every content. Scared

by Scheler's weaknesses, Heidegger refuses to have the *prima philosophia* crassly compromised by the contingency of material things, by the transiency of the eternities of the moment. But neither will he do without the concretion originally promised by the word existence.* The distinction of concept and matter is called the original sin while it perpetuates itself in the pathos of Being.

Not to be underestimated among the many functions of Being is that, while flaunting its higher worth against entity, it simultaneously carries with it the memory of the entity from which

* Years ago, Günther Anders already pilloried the pseudo-concreteness of fundamental ontology ("On the Pseudo-Concreteness of Heidegger's Philosophy," *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*, vol. VIII, Nr. 3, pp. 337ff.). The word "concretion," most affectively occupied in German philosophy between the two World Wars, was drenched with the spirit of the times. Its magic used the feature of Homer's *nekyia*, when Ulysses feeds blood to the shadows to make them speak. Presumably it was not at all as an appeal to roots that "Blood and Soil" was so effective. The ironic undertone that accompanied the formula from the beginning shows a sense of the threadbareness of such archaicism at the finance-capitalistic stage of industrial production. Even *Das Schwarze Korps* snickered at the old Teutonic beards. Instead, the lure was the semblance of concreteness as non-interchangeability, as nonfungibility. This was the phantasm that rose amidst a world bound for monotony. It was a phantasm because it left the basis of the barter relationship untouched—else the longing ones would have felt even more menaced by what they called equalitarianism, by the capitalist principle of which they were unaware while taxing its opponents with it. Obsession with the concept of concreteness joined with inability to reach it in thought. The conjuring word replaced the thing. Heidegger's philosophy, of course, exploits even the *pseudos* of that sort of concretion: because τὸδε τι and οὐσία are undistinguishable, he proceeds—as Aristotle projected already—to substitute one for the other, according to requirement and *thema probandum*. Mere entity becomes nonentity; rid of the stain of being an entity, it is raised up to Being, to its own pure concept. Being, on the other hand, devoid of any content that would restrict it, no longer needs to appear as a concept. It is held to be immediate like οὐσία, in other words, to be concrete. Once isolated absolutely, the two moments have no *differentia specifica* from each other and become interchangeable. This *quid pro quo* is a main feature of Heidegger's philosophy.

it wants to be set off, as a memory of something precedent to differentiation and antagonism. The lure of Being is as eloquent as the rustle of leaves in the wind of bad poems. But what that rustle praises will slide out of reach rather harmlessly, while in philosophy it is insisted on like a possession over which the thought that thinks it has no power. Dialectics—in which pure particularization and pure generality pass into each other, both equally indistinct—is shrouded in silence and exploited in the doctrine of Being. Indistinctness makes a mythical cuirass.

“DEFICIENCY=PROFIT”

Heidegger’s philosophy is like a highly developed credit system: one concept borrows from the other. The state of suspense thus created gives an ironic touch to the bearing of a philosophy that feels close enough to the soil to prefer the Germanic “thinking” to the foreign word “philosophy.” The debtor, says a faded joke, has it all over the creditor, who must depend upon the debtor’s will to pay—and so, for Heidegger, blessings flow from everything he owes. That Being is neither a fact nor a concept exempts it from criticism. Whatever a critic would pick on can be dismissed as a misconception. The concept borrows from the factual realm an air of solid abundance, of something not just cogitatively and unsolidly made—an air of being “in itself.” From the mind which synthesizes it, entity borrows the aura of being more than factual: the sanctity of transcendence. And this very structure hypostatizes itself as superior to the reflective intellect, which is accused of dissecting entity and concept with a scalpel.

The very meagerness of what all this leaves in Heidegger’s hands is recoined into an advantage. One of the invariants that pervade his philosophy (though never called invariants, of course) is that each substantive deficiency, each absence of a cognition, will be revalued into a sign of profundity. Involuntary abstractness is presented as a voluntary vow. “Thinking,” it says in the tract on Plato’s doctrine of truth, “is on its descent to the poverty of its provisional essence”¹¹—as if the emptiness of the concept of Being were the fruit of original monastic chastity, not of conditioning

by cogitative aporias. And yet, this Being which is supposed to be no concept at all, or at least a very special concept, is the aporetical concept pure and simple.¹² It transforms that which is more abstract into that which is more concrete and thus more true. Heidegger's own language confesses, in phrasings that are more critical of him than the most malevolent critic, what his asceticism is about: "Thinking, by its saying, lays unobtrusive furrows into the language. They are even less obtrusive than the furrows drawn through the field by the slow-gaited yeoman."¹³

Despite such affectations of humility, not even theological risks will be taken. The attributes of Being do indeed, like those of the absolute idea of old, resemble the traditional attributes of the deity; but the philosophy of Being beware of divine existence. The whole, however archaic, is not to be an admission of being unmodern. Instead, it participates in modernity as an alibi of entity—of that to which Being transcended, but which is to be sheltered in Being just the same.

NO MAN'S LAND

Since Schelling, substantive philosophizing has been based on the thesis of identity. Unless the essence of entity, and ultimately entity itself, was a mental element reducible to subjectivity—unless concept and thing were identical on the superior level of the mind—there was no chance to proceed according to Fichte's maxim that the a priori is at the same time the a posteriori. Yet the judgment which history passed on the identity thesis upsets Heidegger's conception also. To his phenomenological maxim that the thought must bow to what is given or, finally, "sent" to it (as if the thought could not penetrate the conditions of such sending) the possibility of construction, of the speculative concept that was ingrained in the identity thesis, is taboo. Husserl's phenomenology already suffered from a desire to transcend epistemology under the slogan

* In the phenomenological "fundamental consideration" of *Ideas* [*Ideas—General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W.R. Boyce Gibson, London, 1931] Husserl expounds his method as a structure

“Back to things.” Husserl expressly described his doctrine as nonepistemological,* as Heidegger later called his own doctrine nonmetaphysical; but the thought of passing into subject-matter was more chilling to Husserl than to any neo-Kantian of the University of Marburg who might find the infinitesimal method helpful in such a passage.

Heidegger, like Husserl, sacrifices empiricism and ascribes to the unphilosophical factual sciences whatever would not be eidetic phenomenology, in Husserl’s language. But Heidegger extends the proscription even to Husserl’s *εἰδη*, those supreme, fact-free, conceptual units of a factuality with which traces of subject-matter are commingled. Being is the contraction of essences. Ontology’s own consistency takes it to a no man’s land. It must eliminate each a posteriori; it is not supposed to be logic either, in the sense of a doctrine of thought and a particular discipline; each thinking step would necessarily take ontology beyond the only point where it may hope to be sufficient unto itself. In the end, there is hardly anything it would dare aver any longer, not even about Being. What shows in this ontology is not so much mystical meditation as the distress of a thinking that seeks its otherness and cannot make a move without fearing to lose what it claims. Tendentally, philosophy becomes a ritualistic posture. Yet there is a truth stirring in that posture as well: the truth of philosophy falling silent.

UNSUCCESSFUL REALISM

The historic innervation of realism as a mode of mental conduct is not foreign to the philosophy of Being. Realism seeks to breach

of operations, without deducing it. The arbitrariness he thus concedes—and sought to remove only in his late phase—is inevitable. If it were deduced, the procedure would reveal itself precisely as that “from above” which Husserl did not want, which at all costs he wished to prevent it from being. It would violate his quasi-positivistic “Back to things.” Yet things do by no means compel the phenomenological reductions, which therefore get a touch of being posited at random. In spite of all the preserved “jurisdiction of reason” they lead to irrationalism.

the walls which thought has built around itself, to pierce the interjected layer of subjective positions that have become a second nature. There are vibrations of this in Husserl's program, and Heidegger agreed with it.¹⁴ The performance of the subject, which establishes idealistic cognition, has the irritating quality of a dispensable ornament after idealism has declined. In this respect fundamental ontology remains, like phenomenology, an involuntary heir to positivism.¹⁵ Heidegger's realism turns a somersault: his aim is to philosophize formlessly, so to speak, purely on the ground of things, with the result that things evaporate for him. Weary of the subjective jail of cognition, he becomes convinced that what is transcendent to subjectivity is immediate for subjectivity, without being conceptually stained by subjectivity. In analogy to such romantic currents as the later "*Jugendbewegung*," fundamental ontology mistakes its protest against the confining and dimming subjective element for anti-romanticism; it wants to conquer subjectivity by belligerent speech, from which Heidegger does not shrink either.¹⁶

Since the transmissions of our subjectivity cannot be thought out of the world, we want to return to stages of consciousness that lie before the reflection upon subjectivity and transmission. This effort fails. When we believe we are, so to speak, subjectlessly clinging to the phenomenality of things, are original and neo-realistic and at the same time doing justice to the material, we are in fact eliminating all definitions from OUT thought, as Kant once eliminated them from the transcendent thing-in-itself. Definitions would be equally offensive to us as works of mere subjective reason and as descendants of a particular entity. Contradictory desiderata collide and destroy one another. Because we are neither to think speculatively, to have any thoughts that posit anything whatever, nor the other way round to admit an entity—a bit of the world, which would compromise the precedence of Being—we really dare not think anything but a complete vacuum, a capital X far emptier than the ancient transcendental subject which always carried "egoity," the memory of a consciousness in being, as its unit of consciousness.

This new X, absolutely ineffable and removed from all predicates, becomes the *ens realissimum* under the name of Being.

In the inevitability of aporetic concept formation the philosophy of Being becomes the unwilling victim of Hegel's judgment about Being: it is indistinguishably one with nothingness. Heidegger did not deceive himself about this. But what should be held against existential ontology¹⁷ is not the nihilism which the left-wing Existentialists later interpreted into it, to its own horror; to be held against that ontology is its positive presentation of the downright nihility of its supreme word.

ON CATEGORIAL VISION

No matter how nondimensional we may make Being, how we may compress it into a point by the permanent exercise of caution in both directions, the procedure does have its *fundamentum in re*. Categorical vision, the growing awareness of a concept, reminds us that categorially constituted facts, which traditional epistemology knew as syntheses only, must always have a corresponding moment beyond the sensory $\nu\lambda\eta$. They always have something immediate about them, something resembling visuality. A simple mathematical theorem would not apply without the synthesis of the figures between which the equation is set up, and neither—this is what Kant neglects—would a synthesis be possible if the relation of elements were not in line with this synthesis, regardless of the trouble in which such a manner of speaking entangles us, according to current logic.

To put it drastically, in a way that invites misunderstanding: there could be no synthesis if the two sides of the equation were not actually alike. To talk sensibly about this link apart from the cogitative synthesis is no more possible than a rational synthesis could be without that correspondence. It is a classic case of "transmission," as suggested by the fact that in reflection we waver whether thought is an activity or whether the very strain of it does not make it a self-adjustment, rather.

Inseparably therefrom, spontaneous thoughts are phenomena. Heidegger's stress on their phenomenal aspect against its total reduction to thought would be a salutary corrective of idealism. But his procedure is to isolate the factual moment, to conceive it,

in Hegel's terminology, as abstractly as idealism conceives the synthetic moment. Hypostatized, it ceases to be a moment and comes to be what ontology in its protest against the split between concept and entity would least like it to be: it becomes a thing. And yet, its own character is genetical. The mental objectivity which Hegel taught, that product of the historic process, allows something like a visual relation to things of the mind, as some idealists (the late Rickert, for instance) were to rediscover. The more intensely our consciousness feels assured of such an evolved objectivity of the mental sphere—instead of attributing it as a “projection” to the contemplating subject—the closer its approach to a binding physiognomy of the mind. To a thinking which does not draw all definitions to its side, which does not disqualify its vis-à-vis, structures of the mind turn into a second immediacy.

This is what the doctrine of categorial vision too naïvely relies upon: it confuses that second immediacy with a first immediacy. Hegel's logic of essences went much farther; it treated the essence equally as grown out of Being and as independent of Being, as a kind of Dasein. By the demand which Husserl set forth and Heidegger tacitly adopted, on the other hand, that mental facts be purely described—that they be accepted as what they claim to be, and as nothing else—by this demand such facts are so dogmatized as if reflecting on things of the mind, re-thinking them, did not turn them into something else. The unhesitant supposition is that thinking, an inalienable activity, can really have an object that will not be made a product by the mere thought. Idealism, already conserved in the concept of the purely mental fact, is thus potentially reshaped into ontology. With the substruction of purely acceptant thought, however, the phenomenological thesis to which the entire school owed its effect broke down: that phenomenology is exploring and describing things rather than thinking them up; that it is not epistemology; in short, that it does not bear the stigma of a reflecting intelligence. Yet Being, the arcanum of fundamental ontology, is nothing but the categorial fact, offered in alleged purity and raised to the supreme formula.

To phenomenological analysis it was long known that there is something receptive about a synthesizing consciousness. What belongs

together in a judgment is recognized in examples, not merely in comparisons. The immediacy of insight as such is not deniable, only its hypostasis. Primary clarity about some side of a specific object throws the clearest light upon the species, a light that dissolves the tautology of knowing nothing of the species save its definition. Without the moment of immediate insight, Hegel's line that the particular is the universal would remain pure avowal. Phenomenology, from Husserl on, has saved that line, albeit at the cost of the reflecting element that complements the line.

Its essence perception, however—the late Heidegger carefully shuns the slogan of the school that made him—involves contradictions that cannot be settled for the sake of peace and quiet, neither in the nominalistic direction nor in the realistic one. On the one hand, ideation has an elective affinity for ideology, for the surreptitious acquisition by indirect things of a directness vested with the authority of absolute, unimpeachable, subjectively evident being-in-itself. On the other hand, essence perception is our word for the physiognomic view of mental facts—a legitimate view because things of the mind are not constituted by the cognitive intentionality of consciousness but are based objectively, far beyond the individual author, on the collective life of the mind, in accordance with its imminent laws.

That mental objectivity corresponds to the moment of direct vision. Pre-shaped in itself, it can be viewed like things of the senses. Only, this view is no more absolute and irrefutable than our view of sensory things. Husserl, without much ado, credits both the physiognomic flash and Kant's synthetic a priori judgments with scientific necessity and generality; but what categorial vision contributes to—fallibly enough—would be the understanding of the thing itself, not its classification. The *ψευδος* of categorial vision is its dogmatic scientification, not its unscientific nature. Astir beneath the ideating view is the transmission that had congealed in the seeming directness of mentally given things; in this respect, essence perception is close to allegorical consciousness. As the experience of what has come into being in things which supposedly merely are, essence perception would be the almost diametrical opposite of the end it is used for. Rather than a faithful acceptance of Being, it would be

its critique; rather than a sense of the thing's identity with its concept, it would be an awareness of the break between them. What the philosophy of Being boasts about, as if it were the organ of positivity pure and simple, has its truth in negativity.

Heidegger's stress on Being, which is not to be a mere concept, can be based upon the indissoluble content in judgments, as Husserl previously based himself on the ideal unity of the species. The positional value of such an exemplary consciousness is apt to rise historically. Günther Anders remarked that the more socialized the world, and the more tightly the network of general definitions covers its objects, the greater will be the tendency of individual facts to be direct transparencies of their universals, and the greater the yield a viewer obtains precisely by micrological immersion. This, of course, is a nominalistic kind of fact directly contrary to the ontological intention, although the essence perception may unwittingly have been occasioned by it. If the procedure nonetheless keeps exposing itself to the special-scientific objection, to the long since automatized charge of false or premature generalization, the fault lies not only with thought habits that have long caused men to misuse their scientific ethos, to use the principle of arranging facts modestly from outside as a rationalization of their failure to understand those facts from within. Insofar as the anticipations of the concept, the medium of exemplary thought, are confronted by empirical inquiry with concrete proof that the quasi-direct categorial view of a particular is not universal, the Husserl-Heidegger method—which avoids this test and yet flirts with a scientific language that sounds as if the test were submitted to—stands convicted of its failing.

BEING *θεσει*

It is asserted that Being, precedent to each abstraction, is no concept, or at most a qualitatively eminent concept. Ignored in this assertion is the fact that no immediacy—of which Hegel's *Phenomenology* already taught that in all its transmissions it keeps reproducing itself—is the whole of cognition. Each immediacy is a moment. No ontological draft can do without absolutizing single,

culled-out moments. If cognition is an interaction of the synthetic cogitative function and that which it is to synthesize, with neither independent of the other, the direct insight stipulated by Heidegger as the sole title to a philosophy worthy of Being will not succeed either, unless by the spontaneity of thought which Heidegger disdains. If there were no substantial reflection without immediacy, the immediacy would linger noncommittally and arbitrarily without reflection—without the thinking, distinguishing definition of what is meant by the Being that is alleged to show purely to a passive, nonthinking thought. The decorative sound of the pronouncements about things “unhiding” or “clearing” is due to the fictitious character of the claims. If the alleged primal word cannot be defined and fulfilled in thinking, if it cannot be critically confronted with its aims, the impossibility indicts all talk of Being. It has not been conceived because in the indistinctness it requires it cannot be conceived.

But that the philosophy of Being turns the unworkability into untouchability, that it turns the exemption from the rational process into a transcendence of the reflecting intellect—this is an act of violence as desperate as it is prudent. More resolute than phenomenology, which stops halfway, Heidegger wants to break out of the immanence of consciousness. But his outbreak is an outbreak into the mirror. Blinded to the moment of synthesis in the substrate, he ignores the fact that the mind—which in Heidegger’s adored Eleatic philosophy of Being confessed to identity with Being—is already implied in the meaning of what it presents as the pure selfhood it would be confronting. Objectively, Heidegger’s critique of philosophical tradition comes to run counter to its own promise. This critique tacitly ignores the subjective mind and thus necessarily the material, the factuality which any synthesis acts upon; it feigns a unity and absoluteness of what is articulated in it along these lines; and so it turns into the reverse of “destruction”—of the challenge to disenchant the manmade concepts.

Instead of recognizing human conditions in the concepts, Heidegger’s critique confuses the conditions with the *mundus sensibilis*. It conserves, by repetition, what it is rising against: the screening thought structures for whose removal its own program

calls. On the pretext of bringing to light what underlies them, those structures are once more, imperceptibly, turned into the “in itself” which a reified consciousness makes of them anyway. What pretends to crush fetishes is crushing nothing but the conditions of their recognition as fetishes. The seeming jailbreak terminates in what the flight is from; the Being it flows into is $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota$. As Being, which the mind transmits, is ceded to receptive vision, philosophy converges with a flatly irrationalist view of life.

A sign of irrationality would not by itself be the same as philosophical irrationalism. Irrationality is the scar which the irremovable nonidentity of subject and object leaves on cognition—whose mere form of predicative judgment postulates identity; it is also the hope of withstanding the omnipotence of the subjective concept. Like the concept, however, irrationality itself remains a function of the *ratio* and an object of its self-criticism: what slips through the net is filtered by the net. The philosophemes of irrationalism too depend on concepts, and thus on a rational element incompatible with them. One of the motives of dialectics is to cope with that which Heidegger evades by usurping a standpoint beyond the difference of subject and object—the difference that shows how inadequate the *ratio* is to thought. By means of reason, however, such a leap will fail. We cannot, by thinking, assume any position in which that separation of subject and object will directly vanish, for the separation is inherent in each thought; it is inherent in thinking itself. This is why Heidegger’s moment of truth levels off into an irrationalist *weltanschauung*. Today as in Kant’s time, philosophy demands a rational critique of reason, not its banishment or abolition.

“SENSE OF BEING”

When men are forbidden to think, their thinking sanctions what simply exists. The genuinely critical need of thought to awaken from the cultural phantasmagoria is trapped, channeled, steered into the wrong consciousness. The culture of its environment has broken thought of the habit to ask what all this may be, and to

what end; it has enfeebled the question what it all means—a question growing in urgency as fewer people find some such sense self-evident, as it yields more and more to cultural bustle. Enthroned instead is the being-thus-and-not-otherwise of whatever may, as culture, claim to make sense. The weight of existing culture ends all insistence on the reality of its asserted meaning, or on the legitimacy of that meaning. On the other hand, fundamental ontology makes its appearance as spokesman for the pilfered interest, for all that has been “forgotten.” This is not the least of its reasons for being averse to epistemology, which tends to list that interest among the prejudices.

Even so, fundamental ontology cannot annul epistemology at will. The doctrine of Dasein—of subjectivity—as the royal road to ontology resurrects the old subjective inquiry that had been humbled by ontological pathos. The phenomenological method claims to strip the tradition of Western philosophizing of its power, but it is at home in that tradition and well aware of the fact; for its main effect, its seeming originality, it has to thank the strides of obliviousness among the ones it appeals to. Phenomenology is the source of a turn in the question what Being means, or in its traditional variant: “Why is there anything at all? Why not nothing?” The question is now ceded to the analyzers of the meaning of a word: “Being.” What this word, or the word “Dasein,” might possibly mean is said to be one with the meaning of Being or Dasein: an immanent cultural component such as the meaning which semanticists decipher in the various languages is treated as if it had escaped from the relativity of products as well as from the senselessness of a mere entity. This is the function of Heidegger’s version of the doctrine of the primacy of language.

That the sense of the word “Being” should be the direct sense of Being is bad equivocation. True, equivoques are not merely imprecise expressions.¹⁸ The consonance of words always points to a sameness. The two meanings of “meaning” are entwined. Concepts, instruments of human thought, cannot make sense if sense itself is a negation, if every memory of an objective meaning beyond the mechanisms of concept formation has been expelled from the concepts. Positivism, to which concepts are nothing but accidental, interchangeable tokens, took the consequence and

honored truth by extirpating truth. Taking the contrary position, the philosophy of Being does indeed rebuke positivism for the folly of its reason, but the unity of equivoques can be seen only through the veil of their implicit differences. In Heidegger's talk of "sense" this is discarded. He follows his inclination to hypostasis: findings made in the conditioned sphere have a semblance of unconditionality conferred upon them by the mode of their expression.

What makes this possible is the oscillating character of the word "Being." If we conceive true Being radically *χωρίς* from entity, it is identical with its meaning: we need only state the sense of the essence, "Being," to have the sense of Being itself. We do not notice that in following this schema the attempt to break out of idealism is revoked and the doctrine of Being turned back into one of thought, a doctrine which strips Being of everything other than pure thought. In order to get it to make any sort of sense—now felt by its absence—a compensatory summons goes out to the field which in analytical judgment is set up from the outset as the realm of sense: to the theory of meanings. It is a fact that if concepts are to be concepts at all they must mean something, and this fact serves as a vehicle for the thesis that their *ὑποκείμενον*, Being itself, must be meaningful because it is not given otherwise than as a concept, a linguistic meaning. That this concept is not to be a concept, that it is supposed to be immediate, rather, shrouds the semantic sense in ontological dignity. "Our talk of 'Being' never understands this name in the sense of a species to whose empty generality the historically offered doctrines of entity belong as individual cases. 'Being' speaks ever and ever as sent and hence pervaded by tradition."¹⁹ This is the source from which such a philosophy draws its comfort. It is the magnet of fundamental ontology, far beyond its theoretical substance.

ONTOLOGY PRESCRIBED

Out of the human mind, ontology wants to restore the order shattered by the mind, along with the authority of that order. Its tendency freely to deny freedom shows when the expression