

*Lectures on*  

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**Negative Dialectics**

Theodor W.  
**Adorno**

# Lectures on Negative Dialectics



LECTURES ON  
NEGATIVE DIALECTICS  
Fragments of a lecture  
course 1965/1966

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Theodor W. Adorno

*Edited by Rolf Tiedemann*

*Translated by Rodney Livingstone*

polity

First published in German as *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann © Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main, 2003

This English edition © Polity Press, 2008

Polity Press  
65 Bridge Street  
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-3509-5

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-3510-1(pb)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5 on 12 pt Sabon  
by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong  
Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt Ltd, Kundli, India

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# Contents

Translator's Note	ix
Editor's Foreword	xi
Lecture 1: <i>The Concept of Contradiction</i>	1
After Paul Tillich's death ■ Plan and intention of the lecture course ■ Negative dialectics and the logic of disintegration ■ Contradiction in the concept ■ Logic as a coercive force to bring about identity ■ Contradiction in the object; antagonism in society; mastery over nature ■ Idealist, materialist and negative dialectics	
Lecture 2: <i>The Negation of Negation</i>	12
Abstract subjectivity and social objectivity ■ The negation of negation as a positive; Hegel's critique of positivity ■ Critique of Hegel's vindication of institutions ■ Against the fetishization of positivity as such ■ The actual is not rational ■ Critical theory and negative dialectics; philosophical criticism of the hypostasis of spirit	
Lecture 3: <i>Whether Negative Dialectics is Possible</i>	22
The ideology of the positive; reified thought ■ Resistance to reification, determinate negation, immanent critique ■ The positive as an aspect ■ Hegel's philosophy circular; <i>Falsum index sui et veri</i> ■ Critique of synthesis ■ The concept of system (I)	

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- Lecture 4: *Whether Philosophy is Possible without System* 33
- The concept of system (II) ■ System and systematization  
 Heidegger's latent system ■ Negative dialectics as secularized system ■ The unifying aspect and resistance of the positive; analysis of the singular and the power of system ■ Enforced provincialization ■ The eleventh Feuerbach thesis today
- Lecture 5: *Theory and Practice* 44
- The transition to practice a historical failure ■ Marx's concept of science; the definition of philosophy ■ The forces of production and the relations of production in conflict ■ Against the cult of practice ■ Interpretation as critique; philosophy and revolution; referring science back to philosophy ■ Left Hegelianism and thinking as a mode of behaviour
- Lecture 6: *Being. Nothing. Concept* 55
- Philosophy as self-criticism ■ The philosophy of the non-conceptual; 'a pause for breath' ■ The mastery of nature and social domination ■ No identity of thinking and being ■ Indeterminate and indeterminateness in Hegel ■ The self-reflection of the concept; the concept and the non-conceptual; formal or substantive philosophy
- Lecture 7: *'Attempted Breakouts'* 65
- Formalism and chance; Heidegger's archaic tendencies ■ Hegel's existent being [*Seiendes*] as a concept; Krug's 'quill' and Freud's 'dregs of the phenomenal world' ■ The non-conceptual as the neglected factor; the micrological method ■ Bergson and Husserl ■ Bergson's 'images'; Proust puts Bergson to the test; Husserl's conceptual realism ■ The failure of historical attempts to break out; the task of a breakout through self-reflection ■ The idea of infinity; against 'exhaustion'
- Lecture 8: *The Concept of Intellectual Experience* 76
- The concept of infinity in idealism ■ The finitude of categories; against the claim to infinity ■ On a philosophy of 'openness' ■ The concept of intellectual experience:

experience vs. deduction; the experience of the new; the meta-critical turn against first philosophy ■ The relation of works of art to the philosophy of art ■ Dialectic of enlightenment; philosophy's fallibility in principle

Lecture 9: *The Element of Speculation* 87

Relation to the empirical; intellectual experience and spiritualization ■ Earnestness and play ■ The uncontrolled, irrationality and the mimetic element; the affinity between philosophy and art ■ Intuition, inspiration, association ■ Concept and non-concept ■ The concept of speculation; the speculative element in Marx ■ 'The metaphysics of the forces of production'

Lecture 10: *Philosophy and 'Depth'* 98

Essence and appearance; speculation and ideology ■ Philosophy as 'resistance' ■ The theodicy of suffering; suffering and happiness ■ The invocation of depth or metaphysical meaning ■ Critique of the thesis of the meaningful; 'inwardness' ■ Resistance to bleating ■ Depth: the expression of suffering

Lectures 11 to 25: *Negative Dialectics* 111

Adorno's Notes: expression and presentation, thinking as negativity ■ Second reflection, making concrete ■ 'Strait-jacket', relation to system ■ Bourgeois ratio and system ■ Exchange principle and system, critique of system ■ Ambiguity of system ■ System and fragment, immanence and transcendence ■ The subject within objectivity, the concept of the qualitative ■ Truth as concrete ■ Relativism, the fragility of truth, truth unfathomable ■ Dialectics and firm ground; against synthesis ■ Unity and multiplicity ■ Negative ontology of perennial antagonism ■ Method and the creation of content ■ Principle of domination, Existentialism ■ Spontaneity in Sartre, Sartre's 'Götze', language and history

Additional Notes 178

Thing, concept, name ■ Against the current ■ Tradition ■ Rhetoric ■ Plato's *Cratylus* ■ Linguistic precision ■ Knowledge and utopia ■ Thought and non-being



Appendix: Towards a Theory of Intellectual Experience	183
Notes	211
Bibliographical Sources	260
Index	263

# Translator's Note

The German word *Geist* (spirit, mind, intellect) and its adjective *geistig* have presented particular difficulties in this translation. Normally, the translator tries to achieve consistency, but that has proved hard in this instance. *Geist* is commonly translated as 'spirit' (as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*), and this was an important component of Adorno's intellectual heritage. 'Spirit' has therefore been the translation of choice in some instances. But to translate the essay in the Appendix 'Zur Theorie der geistigen Erfahrung' as 'The Theory of Spiritual Experience' would convey entirely the wrong impression in English, because of the strong theological overtones that are quite absent from Adorno's text. In the published version of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno refers to *Geist* as 'a semi-theological word' (p. 38), but those overtones are too intrusive in English. Equally, mind in the sense of mind and matter is normally rendered in German by *Geist und Materie*. 'Mind' and 'mental' have proved to be possible renditions in a number of passages, but I have opted on the whole for 'intellect' and 'intellectual' in the example given above and elsewhere. However, no single term has proved viable in every case. The fact is that the term *Geist* falls somewhere between the available English words – spirit, mind, intellect – with all of which it also overlaps. Each of these terms seems to work in some instances, but not in all. For that reason I have felt constrained to sacrifice consistency to what seemed appropriate in the given context. Something of the word's flavour can perhaps be gleaned from this passage from Lecture 9: 'Admittedly, you must be very clear in your own minds

that this concept of intellectual [*geistig*] experience is infinitely far removed from the trivial concept of experience. This is because the concept of the fact, of data, that is canonical for empiricist philosophies and which is based on sense experience, that is, on *sense* data, has no validity for *intellectual* experience, which is the experience of something already intellectual and is an intellectually mediated experience' (p. 89).

# Editor's Foreword

Between 1960 and 1966 Adorno accompanied the writing of *Negative Dialectics* with four courses of lectures.<sup>1</sup> In the last of these he developed the themes that stand at the beginning of the book which finally appeared in 1966. They figure in what he called the Introduction, doubtless an echo of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's introduction, like his book as a whole, treats the 'experience of consciousness', or rather the 'science' of consciousness, and this appears to have been echoed in Adorno's own terminology when he considered giving his introductory text the title 'Theory of Intellectual [*geistig*] Experience', adding that he wished 'to expound the concept of philosophical experience' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. xx). Adorno did not hesitate to use 'intellectual experience' as a synonym for 'full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection' (*ibid.*, p. 13; see also p. 82 below). A 'theory of intellectual experience' such as the one he sketched in the introduction to *Negative Dialectics*, and parallel to that in the lectures on the same topic, would amount to something like a methodology of his philosophy, if we could speak of such a thing. Adorno himself referred to *Negative Dialectics* as a whole as 'a methodology of his material works' only to contradict this in the very next breath: '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 gleaned from it. The procedure will be justified, not rationally grounded. 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' (ibid., p. xix). These observations strikingly fail to do justice to the text of *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno repeatedly emphasized that his material works could not be subsumed under a fixed 'method', that they could not be separated from their objects, and that their contents could not simply be transferred to other topics. When we examine his texts, this becomes only too apparent. But what could *Negative Dialectics* be other than an ensemble of 'material works' – on ontology, on the philosophy of history and moral philosophy or on metaphysics; we might also say: on Heidegger, Hegel or Kant or the possibility of philosophy after Auschwitz? At best, the central section of the book, on the concept and categories of a negative dialectics, might be construed as belonging to what has traditionally been thought of as a doctrine of method. And as far as ineffectual 'Instructions for Thinking' are concerned – no opponent of Adorno's could do him a greater injustice than to attempt to reduce his *chef d'oeuvre* to vague instructions of whatever sort. After all, what could the 'game' be if not the treatment of the discontinuity between material and methodological philosophizing? Only if we stick to the literal meaning of methodology, to the λόγος immanent in every method; only if we expect no method in particular, but the justification of a plurality of methods and, tendentially, of the various distinct methods of all Adorno's writings, does the concept of method used in the 'Preface' of *Negative Dialectics*, and also in the present volume of lectures, make sense. It would be better, however, for us to follow Adorno's example in his essay on 'The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy' and speak of the 'models of intellectual experience' that 'motivate' Adorno's thinking and make up its 'truth content' (see *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 53). The verse of Kästner's cited in the present volume of lectures, 'Herr Kästner, where's the positive side?' (see pp. 12 and 17 below), could be matched – and can still be matched today – by the equally insipid question 'What method do you use, Herr Adorno?' It appears as if on one occasion he wished to make a few concessions in this direction and force his thinking into the requisite methodological corset, only to end up by going against his own intentions and immersing himself once more in material philosophizing, be it only philosophizing about the antinomy of method and intellectual experience.

Adorno frequently attempted to formulate the deeply unsatisfactory nature of all traditional philosophy, its inappropriateness to its subject, its repudiation by the worldly wise. He hoped to lead thought along the 'only critical path that remains open', by identifying such fallacies as 'thinking of a first philosophy', 'origin' thinking, the primacy of subjectivity, the universal rule of domination – and also

as the constitution of method. 'Method in the precise sense' was for him 'an intellectual approach which can be applied everywhere and at all times because it divests itself of any relation to things, i.e. to the object of knowledge' (*Against Epistemology*, p. 11, translation modified). The approach in question is that of ubiquitous mathematicization, just as the ideal of every express method has always been mathematics, which soared above the lowlands of empirical reality like a Platonic heaven. Adorno claimed to discern this 'triumph of mathematics and every such triumph' in the Socrates of Plato's *Meno*, who strove to 'reduce virtue to its immutable and hence abstract features' (ibid.). Abstraction is the procedure whose every method must start off by formulating concepts: it must ignore the particulars with which it is concerned at every turn; it must make its material manageable, that is to say, capable of being controlled. But the methodologists and logicians are mistaken in their belief that only by such means will they be able to gain a hold on the general as the other of the particular, the finite, the existent; just as mathematics is a gigantic tautology 'which exerts a total dominance over what it has itself prepared and formed' (ibid.; see also p. 27 below), so too methods are always concerned with themselves, with the flimsiest, most abstract vestige of what they have reduced the world to by treating anything and everything only in terms of general concepts, while declining to engage with the object itself. In this dire situation idealism has made a virtue of deducing every not-I from the I, of defining every object as a subject or, as they call it, of 'postulating' the former by means of the latter: each thing is like this and not otherwise and it is subject to the rule of subjectivity to which it has owed its very existence from the outset. Understood in this way, such methods come together in the societal model on which they are based: the principle of equivalence of the barter society in which use values appear only as quantities, as exchange values, as values comparable in money terms, not as distinct qualities. In the 'Introduction' to *Against Epistemology*, Adorno gave an account, one not yet adequately appreciated, of what, despite Kant and lasting well beyond his work, we must call the 'uncritical' path taken by both mind and reality. It is a truly philosophical account of the history of philosophy, and at the same time a literary feat in the linguistic desert that has prevailed in the world of German-language thought since Nietzsche's death. Adorno's 'second introduction', that to *Negative Dialectics*, is the continuation of that first one, since it progresses from a critical, negative methodology to a negative-dialectical one.

Adorno advanced the idea of philosophical or, more generally, intellectual experience as a weapon with which to oppose the

fetishism of method. By this he meant starting out from the concrete individual, the *individuum ineffabile*; he insisted that it was vital to dwell on the individual thing and entrust oneself to it, without confining oneself entirely to this trusting stance. In contrast to the abstracting method, intellectual experience is interested in differences, not in what makes things identical with other things; 'what is meant by negative dialectics – the dialectics not of identity but of non-identity' (p. 1 below). There can be no doubt that Adorno's emphatic use of the concept of experience stresses its closeness both to Aristotle's ἐμπειρία and to what English empiricism understands by 'experientia' and 'experience': namely the belief that the kind of thinking to which negative dialectics aspires is subject to the primacy of the individual; that it consists of the gaze of an individual fixed on individual beings or that it at least starts from there. It is in this sense that Adorno could maintain that the 'turn' he was striving for 'includes a salvaging of empiricism, albeit in a somewhat convoluted, dialectical fashion. That means that cognition always proceeds in principle from below to above, and not from the top down; it is concerned with leaving things to themselves and not with a process of deduction' (see p. 82 below). That 'includes' is crucial: Adorno's empiricist turn is *also* a salvaging of empiricism, but by no means the old or a new empiricism. According to Isaiah Berlin, 'an alliance of mysticism and empiricism against rationalism' was to be found in such figures as J. G. Hamann, a man with whom Adorno had a certain affinity despite his hostility to many of Hamann's ideas. (See Isaiah Berlin, *J. G. Hamann und der Ursprung des modernen Irrationalismus*, trans. Jens Hagerstadt, Berlin, 1995, p. 74; see also *History and Freedom*, p. 103 and note 10, p. 292ff.) In contrast to Hamann, we may characterize Adorno's thought as consisting of an alliance of rationalism and empiricism against mysticism. 'The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without unravelling it.' That is Adorno's view of the specific nature of 'The Essay as Form' (*Notes on Literature*, vol. 1, p. 13), of the 'essayistic thinker' who is no philosopher, however close he may become to being one. In contrast, the philosopher sees his task precisely in 'unravelling' the experience he is exploring; thinking actually coincides with 'unravelling' his experience of the *facta bruta*. Experience is one thing, the intellect another. While Locke maintained that all thought is based on experience, Leibniz's doctrine of ideas cannot be left out of account: nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu, *nisi intellectus ipse* [There is nothing in the mind that was not already present in the senses – *except the mind itself*]; for experience to become intellectual experience, experience must be

penetrated and transcended by intellect. However, that will not work, an insight Adorno shared with Hölderlin. 'Spirit is not what it enthrones itself as, the Other, the transcendent in its purity, but rather is also a piece of natural history. . . . Reality's spell over spirit prevents spirit from doing what its own concept wants to do when faced with the merely existent: to fly' ('Progress', *Critical Models*, p. 156f.). Experience alone, experience as such, does not suffice; only where experience acquires an intellectual dimension – the 'additional factor' without which a negative dialectics cannot thrive – can existing reality yield up those evanescent 'traces of otherness', fragile pointers to the fact that 'what exists, is not all that exists'. The irrational element that may be inherent in this is nevertheless far from implying an endorsement of irrationalism. On the contrary, 'Whoever thinks philosophically hardens intellectual experience by testing it against the same logical consistency at whose opposite pole he functions. In the absence of that, intellectual experience would remain rhapsodic. Only in this way can reflection become more than a repetitious presentation of what is experienced' ('Notes on Philosophical Thinking', *Critical Models*, p. 133, translation modified). But this merely provides confirmation that intellectual experience cannot subsist in a loose relation to conceptuality, but rather has to prove itself against strict yardsticks for discursiveness and rationality.

Adorno's negative dialectics cannot be thought of as a 'philosophy of difference' in Derrida's sense. Derrida distinguishes between *différence* and the non-word *différance* and hopes that this conjuring trick will enable him to evade the fate of imprisonment in conceptuality. But by the same token, now that idealism is dead, we can no longer speak of an identity of object and subject, whether given or to be established. Things and words no longer coincide in the sense that we might say that the latter contained the meaning of the former. For negative dialectics 'the thing itself is by no means a thought product. It is non-identity through identity' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 189). What is needed to achieve the objective specificity of a thing is a greater effort on the part of the subject, not a smaller one; what is needed is 'a more sustained subjective reflection than the identifications of which Kant taught that consciousness performs them, as it were, unconsciously and automatically. That the activity of the mind, and even more the activity which Kant ascribes to the problem of constitution, is something other than the automatism he equates it with – this, specifically, constitutes the mental experience which the idealists discovered, albeit only in order to castrate it on the spot' (*ibid.*, p. 188f.). Thus if the concern of philosophy is with the sphere of the non-conceptual that Hegel dismissed as 'worthless existence'



and ignored, then this sphere that is 'suppressed, disparaged and discarded by concepts' (ibid., p. 10) can receive fair treatment only in the language of concepts. Negative dialectics is unable to abolish conceptuality and abstraction or to replace it with knowledge of a different type, one that would necessarily come to grief on the rocks of reality. Nor does it involve an immediate reflection on reality, but reflection on what makes it impossible to achieve consciousness of things; on the social conditionality of a knowledge that is possible only through abstraction, by means of discursive language. Such reflection does not aim to step outside discourse, but would like 'to prise open the aspect of its objects that cannot be accommodated by concepts' ('The Essay as Form', *Notes on Literature*, vol. 1, p. 23). When for once Adorno did not shy away from speaking of the kind of knowledge to which he aspired in the form of a definition, he did not hesitate to frame it conceptually: 'The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual, without making it their equal' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 10). This non-conceptual realm, however, things themselves, the non-identical or the non-intentional – concepts with which Adorno sought to point to things that were not to be regarded as the exemplars of a species – is not something already given, already available, that existing knowledge somehow fails to reach; such knowledge would 'be fulfilled only by revealing their social, historical and human meaning' (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 20), but it is potentially implicit in the abstract concepts themselves that compel us to go beyond their rigid, would-be conclusive, fixed meanings. This compulsion is one that negative dialectics tries to satisfy, and, at the same time, the dialectic strives to prise open the categories that have classified and pacified the real once and for all, and to open them up once more to what is new.

The non-identical cannot be unlocked by a particular concept in isolation – that would have led readers to criticize Adorno's 'mere conceptualizing' – but at most by a plurality, a constellation of discrete individual concepts: 'True enough, the idea of classification which subsumes the particular as an example does not open it up; this can be done only by the constellation of concepts that the constructive mind brings to bear on it. – Comparison with the number combination of a safe' (p. 139). Thus far Adorno in the present course of lectures. The notion of mental constellations or configurations is one that Adorno pursued stubbornly over the longest possible period of time. As early as his lecture on 'The Idea of Natural History' of 1932, a kind of first stab at a programmatic statement of his philosophy, he draws attention to his profound dissatisfaction with thinking in universal concepts on the grounds that it seems to eliminate the

best part of the reality that the thinker is focusing on, the specific nature of every particular reality. So as to remain useful as instruments, the concept retains of things only the abstract qualities that they possess in common with many others. Adorno's ambition is to present a method 'with a different logical structure' from the usual philosophical thinking in universal concepts: 'It is the method of the constellation. Instead of explaining concepts from each other, the focus is on a constellation of ideas. . . . These are not treated as "constants"; the intention is not to refer back to them, but instead they congregate around the concrete historical factuality which opens up in all its uniqueness in the interplay with those moments' (GS, vol. 1, p. 359). The sole object of Adorno's philosophy was this 'uniqueness', this 'concrete historical factuality' – he held fast to this right up to his last writings, even though he never provided a fully elaborated, coherent theory of constellational knowledge. Not even the constitutive limbs from which the constellations and configurations were composed or from which they came together were always the same. Concepts, ideas, aspects, *τά όντα*, were all things against which constellational thinking had to be tested. 'The specificity of philosophy as a configuration of moments is qualitatively different from a lack of ambiguity in every particular moment, even within the configuration, because the configuration is more, and other, than the quintessence of its moments. Constellation is not system. Everything does not become resolved; everything does not come out even; rather, one moment sheds light on the other, and the figures that the individual moments form together are specific signs and a legible script' ('Skoteinos or How to Read Hegel', in *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 109). However unsatisfactory the numerous epistemological and methodological explanations of the concept of the constellation may be, the theory of the constellation was conceived as a counter to traditional theory of knowledge. Its fulfilment is enacted solely in Adorno's material writings, all of which represent the specification of the signs, the reading of the script, which constitutes the existing world as formed by the constellation. Negative dialectics is to be the dialectics of non-identity: that is to say, the truth content of the intellectual experience that that dialectics produces is a negative one. It registers not only the fact that the concept never does justice to the thing it refers to – does *not yet* do so. 'In the unreconciled condition, non-identity is experienced as negativity' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 31). This constitutes the philosophical signature of *Negative Dialectics* and the nature of its intellectual experience.

The 'introduction' to *Negative Dialectics*, like the present *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* that report on and provide variations on the

published book, are late works, not just literally in the sense that they were written and given when *Negative Dialectics* was already completed in manuscript form, but also in the further sense that Adorno's death turned them into late works biographically speaking. Above all, both form part of the 'last philosophy' that Adorno believed to be 'timely' once the collapse of civilization and culture in the first half of the twentieth century had inaugurated an age of barbarism that persists to this day.

This edition of Adorno's lectures is unfortunately fragmentary. The first ten lectures are based on transcripts from tape recordings that were made in the Institute for Social Research and are now lodged in the Theodor W. Adorno Archive with the classification numbers Vo 10809–10919. In preparing the text the editor has attempted to follow Adorno's own example in editing the texts of lectures that he had given extempore, once he had agreed to their publication. A particular effort has been made to preserve the informal character of the lecturing situation. The editor has tried to meddle with the text as little as possible and no more than was necessary. After his previous experience in editing Adorno's lectures, however, he felt able to act with somewhat greater freedom, both in the present instance and in his earlier edition of the lectures on *Ontologie und Dialektik*. In particular, he felt he could make more liberal use of drafts, some of which neither emanated from Adorno himself nor were authorized by him. Anacoluthons, ellipses and grammatical slips have been corrected. In addition to the cautious elimination of over-obtrusive repetitions, occasional attempts have been made to disentangle obscure syntactical constructions. Adorno tended to speak relatively quickly and individual words not infrequently became garbled in the process. Corrections have been inserted wherever it was possible to ascertain his meaning unambiguously. Fillers, especially 'nun', 'also' and 'ja', as well as a somewhat inflationary use of 'eigentlich' [actually], have all been cut out where it was evident that he was searching for the right word or thought. Since in the nature of the case punctuation had to be added by the editor, he felt most at liberty to impose his own practice there. He did so with the aim of achieving maximum clarity and unambiguity, without regard to the rules Adorno followed in preparing his own texts. At no point was any attempt made to 'improve' Adorno's writing; the aim was always to present *his* text to the best of the editor's abilities.

In the case of lectures 11 to 25, Adorno's notes have to stand in for his lectures. These notes are archived with the classification numbers Vo 11031–11061. While they allow us to reconstruct the

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course of the lectures with some precision, they do not reveal very much about the arguments Adorno used. To make good this gap, excerpts from the talk on which Adorno based the notes have been supplied parallel to them on the left-hand side of the page. The printed notes have been kept as closely as possible to what Adorno actually wrote. Where the reading was uncertain this is indicated by a question mark.

In the endnotes the quotations referred to by Adorno have been cited in full wherever possible, together with passages to which Adorno alludes or may have had in mind. In addition, parallel passages from his writings have been added or referred to wherever they can shed light on his remarks. They also help to make clear the manifold interconnections and overlaps in his writings and lectures. 'One needs to develop a faculty for discerning the emphases and accents peculiar to a particular philosophy in order to uncover their relationships within the philosophical context, and thus to understand the philosophy itself' (*Metaphysics*, p. 51). The endnotes aim likewise to facilitate a reading that takes Adorno's injunction seriously. They would like to help make visible the cultural sphere surrounding Adorno's activities as a lecturer, a world of the mind which can no longer be taken for granted. The endnotes to the four sets of lectures associated with *Negative Dialectics* amount to a catalogue raisonné of the important concepts of Adorno's philosophy.

\*

I would like once again to thank Michael Schwarz for his assistance. I owe a great debt of gratitude to my friend Hermann Schweppenhäuser, who as always has placed his vast experience and knowledge at my disposal. Since this is the final volume in the editions I have prepared for the Theodor W. Adorno Archive, I should like to record my thanks to the committee of the Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur and especially Jan Philipp Reemtsma, without whose support my work during the past seventeen years would not have been possible.

24 September 2002



# LECTURE 1

## 9 November 1965

### *The Concept of Contradiction*

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#### *Notes*

Begun on  
25 October 65<sup>1</sup>

The special relationship of research and teaching.  
The lecture course derived from work in progress.

Plan:

- (1) Introduction to the concept of a negative dialectics
- (2) Transition to neg[atative] dial[ectics] from a critique of present-day philosophy, especially the ontological approach
- (3) Some categories of a negative dialectics.

What is meant by neg[atative] dial[ectics] – the dialectics not of identity but of non-identity. Not the triadic form, too superficial. In particular, the emphasis on the so-called synthesis is absent. Dial[ectics] refers to the fibre of thought, the inner structure, not an architectonic pattern.

Basic conception: structure of contradiction, in a twofold sense:

- (1) the contradictory nature of the concept, i.e. the concept in contradiction to the thing to which it refers (explain: what is missing in the concept and in what respect it is something more. Contradiction = discrepancy. But with the emphatic

- sense of concept this becomes contradiction. Contradiction in the concept, not merely between concepts.[)]
- (2) the contradictory character of reality: model: antagonistic society. (Explain, life + catastrophe; today society survives by means of what tears it apart.)

This twofold character is no miracle. It shall have to be shown that the elements that shape reality in an antagonistic fashion are those that predispose the mind, the concept, to a state of antagonism. The principle of the mastery of nature intellectualized to the point of identity.

This implies that dialectics is no arbitrary invention, no world-view. My task will be to demonstrate the rigour of the dialectical method; that is what this is really all about.

Two versions of dial[ectics]: idealist and materialist.  
So why negative dialectics.

The expert objection. Negation the dialectical salt (cite the Preface to *Phen[omenology of Spirit]*, 13.<sup>2</sup> Subject: thought itself is initially the simple negation of the given.

All dialectics are negative: if so, why use the term? Tautology?

9 November 65

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Dear colleagues, a few weeks ago Paul Tillich<sup>3</sup> died. He had occupied the only chair in philosophy at this university from 1929 to 1933, in other words until we were all driven out by Hitler. (Horkheimer's chair was not established until 1932.) It is not my place, nor am I entitled, to speak about the subject that was crucial to both the life and the work of my late friend Paul Tillich, namely theology. Arrangements have been made for Professor Philipp to give a public lecture on his work.<sup>4</sup> I do not wish to make use of this hour, or a significant part of it, to speak about Tillich. I believe that I am relieved of that necessity by the fact that it is our intention to devote the first hour of the senior philosophy seminar, i.e. the first session next Thursday, to the relationship between philosophy and theology and, in particular, to focus on the problems that were of importance to Tillich.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, I think I owe it to you and also to myself to say that Paul Tillich, who I am sure is no more than a name to many of you, was one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met in my life

and I owe him the most profound debt of gratitude for having approved of my Habilitation thesis in 1931, in other words, at a time when fascism with all that this meant was on the rise. It is a debt such as I owe to few others. Had he not exerted himself on my behalf, something he did despite the differences in our respective theoretical points of view, differences that we frankly declared to one another from the very outset, it is very questionable whether I would be able to speak to you today; it is even questionable whether I would have survived. This is no mere private reminiscence but something integral to Tillich's unprecedented and truly unique qualities of character: an openness and open-mindedness such as I have never encountered in anyone else. I am fully aware that precisely these qualities in Tillich provoked criticism, and I myself was among those who made such criticisms early on. But I should like to take the opportunity to say here and now that Tillich's liberal-mindedness set an example of enduring worth. This is because his almost boundless willingness to entertain every intellectual experience – and I know of no one who could equal him in this respect – combined a genuinely irenic temperament with the greatest resoluteness in his personal conduct. His extraordinary charisma went hand in hand with what can only be called 'leadership' qualities. It goes without saying that the National Socialists made overtures to him – and I know as a fact that they did so. As late as the summer of 1933 when we spent time together in Rügen he told me a good deal about these matters. He unhesitatingly rejected all such temptations – although they must have appeared tempting even to him. His open-mindedness did not prevent him from drawing the necessary conclusions when what was at stake was the need to show whether or not he was a decent human being. And in that particular historical context, the plain statement that a person is a decent human being gains an emphasis that it perhaps does not otherwise possess. If I may say a few more things about Tillich, particularly at the beginning of these lectures which are attended by so many young people, I do so because I am mindful of his gifts as a teacher, gifts that are related to his open-mindedness. I do not exaggerate when I say that I have never seen a man with greater pedagogic gifts than his. In particular, thanks to the boundless humanity with which he treated students' reactions, he was able to draw the maximum out of very modest and even minimal abilities. If one had the opportunity to be present at Tillich's seminars – and I was unofficially his assistant for a number of years before I became a privatdozent – one had the feeling that the way he conducted himself with young people went some way towards anticipating a situation in which the usual distinctions of ability, intelligence and so on were of



no account. It was as if these distinctions were somehow negated by actual human contact, so that even a limited and repressed mind could blossom in a way that has been almost entirely ruled out everywhere nowadays. I should like to add that whatever I have myself acquired in the way of pedagogic expertise and whatever may have encouraged you to place some confidence in me, namely this ability to encourage the growth of objectivity in other people's minds, as far as that is possible, and to achieve a meeting of minds; that whatever of this I have learned – even though I am very aware how far I lag behind Paul Tillich in this respect – I owe to him and the years of our seminars and junior seminars together.<sup>6</sup> You may take my word for it that not only are there very few people who have meant so much to me but that I attribute an influence to them that far surpasses anything that is contained in their writings. Tillich belongs in the ranks of those thinkers who give far more through personal acquaintance and living initiative than is to be found in their writings. And you who have not known him or have perhaps only seen him once or twice in one of our joint discussions<sup>7</sup> will really struggle to form any conception of this. – I would be grateful if you would all stand out of respect for Paul Tillich.

Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are aware that the traditional definition of a university calls for the union of teaching and research. You know likewise just how problematic it can be to achieve the fulfilment of this idea despite the fact that it is still generally upheld. My own work has had to suffer a great deal from this situation: the quantity of teaching and administrative chores that I have gradually accumulated render it almost impossible to continue with my research during term time – if indeed we can speak of research in connection with philosophy – with the diligence that is not only objectively indicated but would above all reflect my own inclination and disposition. In such a situation, and given such compulsion and pressure, one tends to develop qualities that are best described by the words 'peasant cunning'. My solution to this problem, one that I have had recourse to during the last two semesters and shall do so again this semester, is to take the material for my lectures from a voluminous and somewhat burdensome book that I have been working on for six years now with the title 'Negative Dialectics', the same title I have given to this lecture course. I am very aware that objections may be raised to this procedure, in particular those of a positivist cast of mind will be quick to argue that as a university teacher my duty is to produce nothing but completed, cogent and watertight results. I shall not

pretend to make a virtue of necessity, but I do believe that this view does not properly fit our understanding of the nature of philosophy; that philosophy is thought in a perpetual state of motion; and that, as Hegel, the great founder of dialectics, has pointed out, in philosophy the process is as important as the result; that, as he asserts in the famous passage in the *Phenomenology*, process and result are actually one and the same thing.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, I believe that what characterizes philosophical thinking is an element of the tentative, experimental and inconclusive, and this is what distinguishes it from the positive sciences. Not the least of the tasks I propose in this course of lectures is to explore this question. In consequence, what I shall present to you here are reflections which will retain this experimental quality until, in so far as my own energies will allow it, they have acquired their appropriate linguistic form, their definitive shape. And I can only encourage you – I am reminded here once again of Paul Tillich – to think your own way through what I have to say to you and to assemble your own ideas on the subject rather than for me to transmit definite knowledge for you to take home with you. The plan that I have in mind is roughly as follows. I tell you this as a guide to finding your way around these perhaps rather convoluted lines of thought. I should like to introduce you to the concept of negative dialectics as such. I should like then to move on to negative dialectics in the light of certain critical considerations drawn from the present state of philosophy. I should like, in short, to unpack the idea of a negative dialectics and to present it in all its rigour, as far as I am able. I should then like to give you some of the categories of such a negative dialectics. Perhaps I should add that, in external, crudely architectonic terms, the plan I envisage corresponds roughly to a methodical account of what I do in general. In other words, what you will find here are some of the fundamental ideas that you will find repeated in very many other studies with different material, with different subject matter. I should like simply to try and answer the question that must have occurred to those who are familiar with my other writings: how does he actually arrive at this? What is at the bottom of all this? I want to try and put my cards on the table – in so far as I know what my own cards are, and in so far as any thinker knows what cards he holds. Such things are not as obvious as you might imagine. On the other hand – and this too is a matter I shall treat in the course of these lectures – what I have just outlined is made difficult and even problematic by the fact that I do not recognize the usual distinction between method and content. In particular, I maintain that so-called methodological questions are themselves dependent upon questions of content. A feature of the themes we

shall be discussing is that you may well become confused about the customary distinctions that you have learnt in your subject disciplines, which are in the habit of placing method on the one side and subject matter on the other.

Now I should probably start by anticipating my entire enterprise and telling you what I mean by the concept of negative dialectics, and I should do so in a manner that calls for a resolution of the issues it raises. A rather meagre, formal definition is that it sets out to be a dialectics not of identity but of *non-identity*. We are concerned here with a philosophical project that does not presuppose the identity of being and thought, nor does it culminate in that identity. Instead it will attempt to articulate the very opposite, namely the divergence of concept and thing, subject and object, and their unreconciled state. When I make use of the term ‘dialectics’ I would ask you not to think of the famous triadic scheme of θέσις [thesis], ἀντίθεσις [antithesis] and σύνθεσις [synthesis] in the usual sense, as you encounter it in the most superficial account of school dialectics. Hegel himself, who after all did possess something like a system that aspired as a system to be a σύνθεσις, did not adhere consistently to this scheme. In the preface to the *Phenomenology* which I have already referred to he has spoken of this creaking triadic scheme with utter contempt.<sup>9</sup> In particular, and to anticipate my discussion of what I believe to be a crucial issue, you will find that in negative dialectics the concept of ‘synthesis’ is very much reduced in importance. I can only explain this here in linguistic terms, namely with reference to my deeply rooted aversion to the term, an aversion I have felt ever since I started to do any thinking at all. And since philosophical thinking consists essentially in reflecting on one’s own intellectual experiences – you may perhaps have seen my ‘Notes on philosophical thinking’ in the *Neue Deutsche Hefte*<sup>10</sup> in which I discuss this – one motif of such a negative dialectics is to try to find out why I resist the concept of synthesis so strongly. A further motif is that my oldest independent (i.e. non-interpretative) piece of philosophical writing, one that has not survived, was concerned with a logic of disintegration.<sup>11</sup> This may be regarded as an alternative, albeit rather more pretentious title for such a negative dialectics. So when I speak here of negative dialectics, I would urge you to be clear in your minds that what I mean by it is not this superficial, skeletal format, but the very fibre of thought, its inner structure, the way in which, as Hegel used to express it, the concept moves towards its opposite, the non-conceptual. That is what you should be on the lookout for and not a kind of intellectual scaffolding that in fact you will seek in vain.

Nevertheless, what I intend to present to you as negative dialectics possesses something quite crucially related to the concept of dialectics

in general – and this is something I wish to clarify at the outset. It is that the concept of contradiction will play a central role here, more particularly, the contradiction in things themselves, contradiction *in* the concept, not contradiction *between* concepts. At the same time – and I am sure that you will not fail to see that this is in a certain sense the transposition or development of a Hegelian motif – the concept of contradiction has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, as I have already intimated, we shall be concerned with the contradictory nature of the concept. What this means is that the concept enters into contradiction with the thing to which it refers. I should like to demonstrate this to you quite simply, in a way that perhaps some of you will think almost childish. However, my intention is merely that our discussions should not cause you to lose touch with simple, straightforward realities. For even though I believe that thinking involves raising oneself above primitive things, an essential part of thought is that it should remain in touch with immediate experience. So what I mean here – and in the first instance I am speaking of the concept and of what is meant specifically by the concept in dialectics – that is something that we shall have to discuss. (The fact is that I am not talking about ‘concept’ in the ordinary sense, but about concept that is already theory.) But if you will allow me to illustrate this, I can put it all quite simply. If I subsume a series of characteristics, a series of elements, under a concept, what normally happens is that I abstract a particular characteristic from these elements, one that they have in common: and this characteristic will then be the concept, it will represent the unity of all the elements that possess this characteristic. Thus by subsuming them all under this concept, by saying that A is everything that is comprehended in this unity, I necessarily include countless characteristics that are *not* integrated into the individual elements contained in this concept. The concept is always less than what is subsumed under it. When a B is defined as an A, it is always also *different from* and *more than* the A, the concept under which it is subsumed by way of a predicative judgement. On the other hand, however, in a sense every concept is at the same time more than the characteristics that are subsumed under it. If, for example, I think and speak of ‘freedom’, this concept is not simply the unity of the characteristics of all the individuals who can be defined as free on the basis of a formal freedom within a given constitution. Rather, in a situation in which people are guaranteed the freedom to exercise a profession or to enjoy their basic rights or whatever, the concept of freedom contains a pointer to something that goes well beyond those specific freedoms, without our necessarily realizing what this additional element amounts to. This situation, that the concept is always both more and less than the elements included

in it, is not irrational or random; it is a situation that philosophical theory or philosophical critique can and must define in detail.

Now you may well say, this discrepancy is not necessarily a contradiction. But I believe that it offers us a first insight into the necessity of dialectical thinking. Any such predicative judgement that A is B, that  $A = B$ , contains a highly emphatic claim. It is implied, firstly, that A and B are truly identical. Their non-identity not only does not become manifest; if it does manifest itself, then according to the traditional rules of logic, predicative logic, that identity is disputed. Or else we say: the proposition  $A = B$  is self-contradictory because our experience and our perception tell us that B is not A. Thus because the forms of our logic practise this coercion on identity, whatever resists this coercion necessarily assumes the character of a contradiction. If, therefore, as I observed at the outset, the concept of contradiction plays such a central role in a negative dialectics, the explanation for it is to be found in the structure of logical thought itself, which is defined by many logicians (though not in the way it operates in the various current trends in mathematical logic) by the validity of the law of contradiction. And what this means then is that everything that contradicts itself is to be excluded from logic – and, in fact, everything that does not fit in with this positing of identity does contradict itself. Thus the fact that our entire logic and hence our entire thinking is built upon this concept of contradiction or its denial is what justifies us in treating the concept of contradiction as a central concept in a dialectics, and in subjecting it to further analysis.

However, that is only one side of the matter – and the fact that the question has two sides will enable the connoisseurs among you to identify without much difficulty a number of Hegelian motifs that have been extended and altered. And this side is the subjective aspect of dialectics, the aspect that is *not* the decisive one in the final analysis. Thus for dialectical thought in the sense in which the category of contradiction is central, what is needed is the structure of the concept and the relation of the concept to the thing it stands for. But to say this is also to imply the converse, namely objective reality, the sphere of the object – if, like the naïve realists, you can for a moment entertain the notion of a sphere of objectivity that is independent of thought. The model for this is the fact that we live in an antagonistic society. I shall explain this to you only briefly because I intend to begin my senior seminar in sociology today with a lecture based on a talk that elaborates precisely this idea. And I do not want to waste our time by saying the same thing here.<sup>12</sup> I shall say here only that the essence of this model of an antagonistic society is that it is not a society *with* contradictions or *despite* its contradictions, but *by virtue*

of its contradictions. In other words, a society based on profit necessarily contains this division in society because of the objective existence of the profit motive. This profit motive which divides society and potentially tears it apart is also the factor by means of which society reproduces its own existence. To remind you of an even crasser fact, likewise by way of illustration, it is probably true that today almost the entire economy can be sustained only because a very large part of the social product is devoted to the production of weapons of mass destruction, in particular, nuclear weapons and everything connected with them. This holds good in every country, in both the capitalist nations and the countries belonging to the Russian and Chinese power blocs. This means that the ability of our society to withstand crises, an ability that is generally held to be one of its finest achievements, is directly linked to the growth in its potential for technological self-destruction. I believe that these considerations will suffice for the moment to show you how we are compelled from the vantage point of objective reality to apply the concept of contradiction, not simply as the contradiction between two unrelated objects, but as an *immanent* contradiction, a contradiction in the object itself. Now, ladies and gentlemen, you may object – and I should like especially in these first lectures to anticipate as many of your objections as I reasonably can and to respond to them as best I may – you may object that this dual character of contradiction, the fact that on the one hand we have a contradiction in the realm of ideas and concepts, and on the other that the world itself is antagonistic in its objective form – that this dual character amounts to a kind of pre-established disharmony. Furthermore, this disharmony is a sort of wonder of the world, a negative *adaequatio rei atque cogitationes* [harmony of things and ideas] for which I owe you an explanation. I shall at least make the attempt to give you one, or at any rate, I intend to do so; I don't know whether I can keep all the promises I am making; one always turns out not to be able to say all the things in a lecture that one had intended to say. But I have the best of intentions about showing you that the factors that define reality as antagonistic are the same factors as those which constrain mind, i.e. the concept, and force it into its intrinsic contradictions. To put it in a nutshell, in both cases we are dealing with the principle of mastery, the mastery of nature,<sup>13</sup> which spreads its influence, which continues in the mastery of men by other men and which finds its mental reflex in the principle of identity, by which I mean the intrinsic aspiration of all mind to turn every alterity that is introduced to it or that it encounters into something like itself and in this way to draw it into its own sphere of influence. This is at the very least a formal

indication, a response in advance to the question that I expect and that I have accordingly posed for myself.

Now, if you can entertain the idea, if only for a single second, that there is some truth in these reflections, and that dialectics is a type of thought whose mode of being and whose substance is essentially contradiction, then it becomes clear that it is no arbitrary construct, nor is it a so-called world-view. For if in fact the necessity of contradiction really does emerge both in the object and in thought in the way I have outlined it to you, it follows that a mode of thought that incorporates it is really no more than an executor, a way of thinking that takes up what its materials make available to it – and that it is not a philosophical position artificially imposed from outside. If I may trail my coat for once, I may say that I think of myself as a Hegelian in that I regard dialectics as the opposite of mere standpoint philosophy.<sup>14</sup> But I am also well aware that simply to protest that something is no standpoint philosophy does not suffice to free it from the suspicion that it might be one after all. For what ideas have not advertised themselves as the very antithesis of standpoint philosophy? What ideas have not claimed that they represented eternal values, vastly superior to particular standpoints? – And how very short-lived the majority of these eternal values have turned out to be in the event! Dialectics themselves are no eternal values – far from it. But I owe it to you to show you as well as I can the rigorous nature of the dialectical method – above all, in the transition to a negative dialectics. In fact, this may well be the principal task confronting me.

Now, you all know that when we speak of dialectics in the succinct sense that I have tacitly been assuming – the ancient Greek concept of dialectics coincides more or less with epistemology and logic, and is far more general than what I have been explaining to you – you all know that dialectics in the sense of contradictions both in things and in concepts exists in two major versions: an idealist version which may to a certain degree be regarded as the pinnacle of philosophical speculation, and a materialist version which has been turned into an official world-view that dominates a very large portion of the globe (and as such it has degenerated into the very opposite of itself). And you may well want to ask me why I do not simply declare myself satisfied with this alternative but choose instead to speak of something else, namely a negative dialectics. You may well ask further whether I am not the kind of professor who tries to brew his own little philosophical soup in the hope that one day he may obtain a chapter to himself in Ueberweg-Heinze (or one or other of its continuations).<sup>15</sup> At this point I should like to mention an objection that has been raised by an extremely knowledgeable source, namely by

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someone from your own circle, someone from amongst those present here today. Given that the concept of dialectics contains the element of negativity precisely because of the presence of contradiction, does this not mean that every dialectics is a negative dialectics and that my introduction of the word 'negative' is a kind of tautology? We could just say that, simply by refusing to make do with the given reality, the subject, thought, negates whatever is given; and that as a motive force of thought subjectivity itself is the negative principle, as we see from a celebrated passage in Hegel's *Phenomenology*<sup>16</sup> where he remarks that the living substance as subject, in other words, as thought, is pure, simple negativity, and is 'for this very reason, the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis.' In other words, thought itself – and thought is tied to subjectivity – is negativity, and to that extent negativity, and especially dialectical thinking, is negative dialectics from the outset. I should like to respond to this in detail next time. For now I wish only to set out the problem as it has been put to me and to say that it calls for an answer.



# LECTURE 2

11 November 1965

## *The Negation of Negation*

### *Notes*

In response:<sup>1</sup>

- 1) In Hegel dialectics is positive: reminder that minus times minus equals a plus. The negation of the negation is an affirmation. The young Hegel's critique of positivity. To be illustrated by the critique of abstract subjectivity by the institution: V49<sup>2</sup>  
Insertion 2 a

[*Insertion:*] The positive that results from the negation of negation is the same positive that the young Hegel criticizes, a negative born of immediacy.

Contrainte sociale

As Hegel has shown, the institution is right to criticize abstract subjectivity, i.e. it is necessary and specifically on behalf of the subject as self-preservation.

It destroys the illusion of the subject's being-in-itself, which is itself an *aspect* of social objectivity. – However, is not superior to it, but remains external to it to this day, compulsively collective, repressive. – The negation of the negation does not inevitably result in positivity. Today, in a situation that is secretly felt to be questionable, a concept of abstract positivity predominates. 'Herr Kästner'.<sup>3</sup>

With the erosion of all substantive givens, all ideology becomes increasingly thin, more abstract. Observed in émigrés under pressure.

Whatever is positive ('positive view of life, positive shaping [of life]', positive criticism) is already deemed true in itself, i.e. the movement of the concept is arbitrarily halted. Positivity as fetish, i.e. no one asks what is being affirmed. However, this makes it the negative, i.e. open to criticism.

This is not the least of the factors that led me to the conception and naming of a negative dialectics. [*End of inserted passage*]

This remains valid for the whole: the totality of all negations becomes positive. 'What is rational is actual.'<sup>4</sup>

This has now been put on notice. Just as the positive insinuation of meaning is no longer possible without lying (– after Auschwitz who can still venture to assert that life has a meaning!), so too the theoretical construction of a positivity from the quintessence of all negations is no longer possible.

- 2) This means that dialectics becomes essentially critical. In several senses:
  - a) as critique of the claim that thing and concept are identical.
  - b) as critique of the hypostasis of the spirit that implies (ideology critique). The force of this thesis compels us to make the greatest efforts.
  - c) as critique of the antagonistic reality with its potential for annihilation.

This critique also relates to dial[ectical] mat[erialism] in so far as it sets itself up as positive science. Hence negat[ive] dial[ectics] = ruthless criticism of all that exists.

11 November 1965

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Last time, I had started to reply to the question why there is any need for such a concept as negative dialectics, and whether, in the light of the determining role of negativity in dialectics in general, it is not simply a tautology – I am sure that you will remember this. And I had briefly listed the factors that justified this objection. These were the factors in the Hegelian conception of dialectics that lead to the equation of thinking as such with negativity. I should like now to attempt a provisional response to this very weighty objection. You will have to be clear in your own minds that Hegel's theory repudiates this concept of negativity qua subjectivity; that in the Hegelian

dialectic this concept of negativity does not have the last word but that it is, if I may use the cliché, a positive dialectics. It is no accident that in the history of philosophy Hegel's theory has been given the name of objective idealism. You just need to be mindful of a very simple, elementary fact – if you don't mind my postulating the situation of your first semester here, the situation of a student fresh from school. You must be mindful of the fact that you once learnt in arithmetic that a minus number times a minus number yields a plus, or, in other words, that the negation of negation is the positive, the affirmative. This is in fact one of the general assumptions underlying the Hegelian philosophy. And when you inform yourselves about Hegel, starting with that triadic scheme about which I quoted last time some uncomplimentary remarks by Hegel himself, you will come across this idea that the negation of a negation is an affirmation. What is meant by this can best be seen in Hegel's criticism of what he called abstract subjectivity as practised by the objective social institutions and forms that he sets up in opposition to it. The idea that he develops repeatedly as early as the *Phenomenology*, admittedly with a somewhat different emphasis, and then above all in the *Philosophy of Right*, in the very crude form in which I have explained it to you – this idea is that the subject, which as thinking subject criticizes given institutions, represents in the first instance the emancipation of the spirit. And, as the emancipation of the spirit, it represents the decisive transition from its mere being-in-itself to a being-for-itself. In other words, the stage that has been reached here is one in which spirit confronts objective realities, social realities, as an autonomous, critical thing, and this stage is recognized as being necessary. But Hegel goes on to reproach spirit for restricting itself in the process, for being itself narrow-minded. This is because it elevates one aspect of spirit in its abstractness to the status of sole truth. It fails to recognize that this abstract subjectivity, which is itself based on the model of Kant's practical reason and, to a certain extent, on Fichte's subjective concept of free action – that this subjectivity is a mere aspect that has turned itself into an absolute; it overlooks the fact that it owes its own substance, its forms, its very existence to the objective forms and existence of society; and that it actually only becomes conscious of itself by conceiving of the seemingly alien and even repressive institutions as being like itself, by comprehending them as subjective and perceiving them in their necessity. Here we see one of the crucial turning points of Hegel's philosophy, not to say one of its decisive tricks. It consists in the idea that subjectivity which merely exists for itself, in other words, a critical, abstract, negative subjectivity – and here we see the entrance of an essential

notion of negativity – that this subjectivity must negate itself, that it must become conscious of its own limitations in order to be able to transcend itself and enter into the positive side of its negation, namely into the institutions of society, the state, the objective and, ultimately, absolute spirit.<sup>5</sup>

This, then, is the model of that positive negativity: the negation of the negation as a new positive that appears in Hegelian philosophy as a new model. Incidentally, it should be pointed out that one of the very striking features of Hegel's philosophy, one whose significance has not been sufficiently appreciated, is its dynamic nature. By this I mean that it does not regard its categories as fixed, but instead thinks of them as having emerged historically and therefore as capable of change. Even so, in reality its conceptual apparatus contains much more that is immutable, incomparably more that is constant, than it lets on. And these constants come to the surface to a certain degree against the intentions of this philosophy. They can be seen in the fact that certain arguments frequently recur – in Hegel's *Logic*, but also as early as the *Phenomenology*. I believe I have often made the point – and I direct this comment particularly to the future specialist philosophers among you – I would consider it an especially vital task to identify the constants in Hegelian philosophy whose presence is indicated by these recurring arguments. And the feature that I have just described to you is one such constant, one that recurs in diverse forms in Hegel, above all when Hegel is dealing with matters of substance and not simply with the categories of logic or nature philosophy. Now it is quite remarkable, a historical fact, and one that is perhaps of key importance for what I wish to explain to you today, that this negation of the negation that is then postulated as a positive is a notion that the *young* Hegel sharply criticizes in essays which Nohl published with the title of *Early Theological Writings*.<sup>6</sup> In their central thrust these youthful essays amount to an attack on positivity, in particular on positive religion, positive theology, in which the subject is not 'at home' [*bei sich*] and in which this theology confronts him as being something alien and reified. And since it is reified and external and particular, it cannot be the absolute that religious categories claim it to be. Moreover, this is an idea that Hegel does not repudiate or abandon later on; he merely reinterprets it. In general, he abandoned or rejected very few of his ideas. What he mainly did was to change their emphasis, albeit sometimes in a way that turned them into their opposites.

The argument that I have just outlined to you is one you can find in the actual programme of Hegel's entire subsequent philosophy, in the so-called Difference essay, '*On the Difference between the Systems*

of *Fichte and Schelling*,<sup>7</sup> much as I have just explained it to you. In line with this critique the positive realities that are defended in the *Philosophy of Right* against the negativity of a merely thinking subjectivity dependent upon nothing but itself, the realities that today we would term coercive situations – these situations are in reality the expression of what in Emile Durkheim’s language would be called *contrainte sociale*.<sup>8</sup> Now Hegel has rightly shown that the institution represents a critique of abstract critical subjectivity, that is to say, the institution is necessary, necessary also in the sense that the subject needs it in order to sustain itself. Mere being-for-itself, the immediacy of the subject that believes in its own self-sufficiency, is in actual fact pure deception. Human beings are in fact ζῶον πολιτικόν, ‘political animals’, in the sense that they can only survive by virtue of society and social institutions to which, as autonomous and critical subjectivity, they stand opposed. And with his criticism of the illusion that what is closest to us, namely our own self and its consciousness, is in fact the first and fundamental reality, Hegel has – and this is something we must emphasize – made a decisive contribution to our understanding of society and the relationship of individual to society. Without this Hegelian insight, a theory of society as we understand it today would not really have been possible. – So what I am saying is that he destroyed the illusion of the subject’s being-in-itself and showed that the subject is itself an aspect of social objectivity. Furthermore, he inferred from this the necessary fact that in its dealings with abstract subjectivity, the social aspect proves to be the stronger and prevails as such. However – and this is precisely the point at which criticism of Hegel has to begin if we are to justify the formulation of a *negative* dialectics – we must ask this question: is this objectivity which we have shown to be a necessary condition and which subsumes abstract subjectivity in fact the higher factor? Does it not rather remain precisely what Hegel reproached it with being in his youth, namely pure externality, the coercive collective? Does not the retreat to this supposedly higher authority signify the regression of the subject, which had earlier won its freedom only with great efforts, with infinite pains? This mechanism of coercion binds subjectivity and thought into the objectivity that stands opposed to it. In view of this dependency and of what we might call the logic of the facts, a logic that leads to the triumph of objectivity, it is not obvious why an insight into this mechanism should mean that this objectivity must itself be in the right. The situation suggests pangs of conscience imposed from outside. This is something I experienced most tellingly in my dealings with a Hegelian Marxist in my youth, namely with Georg Lukács, who at the time had just quarrelled with

his party. In connection with that he explained to me that the party was in the right, even though his ideas and arguments were better than the party's. The party was in the right because it embodied the objective state of history, while his own position, which was more advanced both in his view and in terms of the sheer logic of the ideas involved, lagged behind that objective state of affairs.<sup>9</sup> I believe that I do not have to spell out for you the implications of such a statement. It would imply simply that, with the assistance of the dialectic, whatever has greater success, whatever comes to prevail, to be generally accepted, has a higher degree of truth than the consciousness that can see through its fraudulent nature. In actual fact, ideology in the Eastern bloc is largely determined by this idea. A further implication is that mind would amputate itself, that it would abdicate its own freedom and simply adapt to the needs of the big battalions. To accept such a course of action does not appear possible to me.

And this is why I would say in general – I have exemplified this in *one* instance only – that the thesis that the negation of the negation is positive, an affirmation, cannot be sustained. The negation of the negation does *not* result in a positive, or not automatically. The situation today is one that secretly everyone finds deeply dubious, but it is also one that is so overpowering that people feel they can do nothing about it, and perhaps they can in fact do nothing about it. Nowadays – in contrast to what Hegel criticized as abstract subjectivity or abstract negativity – what predominates in the general public is an ideal of abstract positivity, in the sense familiar to you all from Erich Kästner's venerable but still effective joke in one of his poems where someone enquires: 'Herr Kästner, Where's the positive side?'<sup>10</sup> I cannot resist telling you that my eyes were opened to the dubious nature of this concept of positivity only in emigration, where people found themselves under pressure from the society around them and had to adapt to very extreme circumstances. In order to succeed in this process of adaptation, in order to do justice to what they were forced to do, you would hear them say, by way of encouragement – and you could see the effort it cost them to identify with the aggressor<sup>11</sup> – 'Yes, so-and-so really is very positive . . .' And what this means is that an intelligent and sensitive person is rolling up his sleeves and washing dishes, or whatever other allegedly useful social work is required of him. The more everything is sacrificed to pre-existing objects of consciousness, and the less is left over for ideology to feed off, the more abstract all ideologies necessarily become. In the case of the Nazis, it was race, something that even the most stupid people have ceased to believe in. I would guess that at the next stage of

regressive ideology people would be expected to believe in 'the positive', in the same spirit as marriage advertisements regard a 'positive attitude to life' as especially commendable. I am also aware of an organization that has given itself the title: 'Association for positively improving your life'. I did not make this up, as you may be tempted to believe; it really exists. And, of course, what this 'Association for positively improving your life' amounts to is a training programme that helps people to lose their fear of public speaking and turns them into more effective salesmen in the eyes of both God and man. This is what the concept of positivity has come to. Underlying it is the conviction that the positive is intrinsically positive *in itself*, without anyone pausing to ask *what* is to be regarded as positive or whether it is a fallacy that something that exists and is 'positive' in the sense that it has been postulated, that it exists, and that it is furnished with the good, the higher, the approvable attributes – the attributes, in short, that belong among the connotations of the 'positive'. And if I can indulge myself in a little linguistic metaphysics for a moment, it is significant and really quite interesting that the term 'positive' actually contains this ambivalence. On the one hand, 'positive' means what is given, is postulated, is there – as when we speak of positivism as the philosophy that sticks to the facts. But, equally, 'positive' also refers to the good, the approvable, in a certain sense, the ideal. And I imagine that this semantic constellation expresses with precision what countless people actually feel to be the case. Incidentally, this is what we also find in practice when we hear people saying that 'positive criticism' is indispensable. I heard this myself a few days ago when I was staying in a hotel in the Rhineland. The hotel was extremely noisy, but was otherwise very good. When I told the manager that he ought to have double-glazing installed, he explained to me that this was quite impossible for any number of good reasons, but then he added: 'However, I am of course always extremely grateful for positive criticism.' Now, when I speak of 'negative dialectics' not the least important reason for doing so is my desire to dissociate myself from this fetishization of the positive, particularly since I know full well that the concept has an ideological resonance that is connected with the advances made by certain philosophical trends and that very few people are aware of.<sup>12</sup> We have to ask *what* has to be or has not to be affirmed, instead of elevating the word 'Yes' to a value in itself, as was unfortunately done by Nietzsche with the entire pathos of saying yes to life. This yea-saying was to be sure just as abstract as the nay-saying to life we find in crucial passages in Schopenhauer and that so infuriated Nietzsche.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, therefore, we might say, putting it in dialectical terms, that what appears as the positive is essentially the negative, i.e. the thing that

is to be criticized. And that is the motive, the essential motive, for the conception and nomenclature of a negative dialectic.

What I have told you up to now about that model that is so characteristic of the structure of Hegel's thought holds good likewise for his philosophy as a whole. I mean this in a very strict sense. The fact is that what we might call the secret or the point of his philosophy is that the quintessence of all the negations it contains – not just the sum of negations but the process that they constitute – is supposed to culminate in a positive sense, namely in the famous dialectical proposition with which you are all familiar that 'what is actual is rational'.<sup>14</sup> It is precisely this point, the positive nature of the dialectic as a whole, the fact that we can recognize the totality as rational right down into the irrationality of its individual components, the fact that we can declare the totality to be meaningful – that is what seems to me to have become untenable. The positivist trivialization of Hegel already objected to this conclusion in the nineteenth century. And it must be said that, in its resistance to Hegel, fallacious though its reasoning was and at fault in its failure to grasp that this positivity of the whole did not simply mean that all was well with the world, but that this positive totality was infinitely mediated – for all that, it must be admitted that the criticism of Hegel's core thesis by the positivist philosophers of the nineteenth century<sup>15</sup> was not without merit. Nowadays, however, the positive suggestion that the actual is the rational, in other words, that it has a meaning, is no longer tenable. The idea that everything that exists is meaningful in any *other* sense than the assertion that everything can be explained by a particular, uniform principle, namely the principle of the mastery of nature – that has become quite impossible. I do not know whether the principle that no poem can be written after Auschwitz can be sustained.<sup>16</sup> But the idea that we can say of the world as a whole in all seriousness that it has a meaning now that we have experienced Auschwitz, and witnessed a world in which that was possible and that threatens to repeat itself in another guise or a similar one – I remind you of Vietnam – to assert such an idea would seem to me to be a piece of cynical frivolity that is simply indefensible to what we might call the pre-philosophical mind. A philosophy that blinds itself to this fact and that in its overweening arrogance fails to absorb this reality and continues to insist that there *is* a meaning despite everything – this seems to me more than we can reasonably expect anyone who has not been made stupid by philosophy to tolerate (since as a matter of fact, alongside its other functions, philosophy is capable of making people stupid). In this context, I remember very well a junior seminar I gave with Paul Tillich shortly before the outbreak of the Third Reich. A participant spoke out very sharply on one occasion against



the idea of the meaning of existence. She said life did not seem very meaningful to her and she didn't know whether it had a meaning. The very voluble Nazi contingent became very excited by this and scraped the floor noisily with their feet. Now, I do not wish to maintain that this Nazi foot-shuffling proves or refutes anything in particular, but I do find it highly significant. I would say it is a touchstone for the relation of thinking to freedom. It raises the question whether thought can bear the idea that a given reality is meaningless and that mind is unable to orientate itself; or whether the intellect has become so enfeebled that it finds itself paralysed by the idea that all is not well with the world. It is for this reason in my view that the theoretical notion of a positivity that represents the sum of all negativities is no longer possible – unless philosophy wishes to live up to its reputation of worldly innocence, something it always deserves most when it attempts to become overly familiar with the world and to ascribe a positive meaning to it.

From what I have said up to now, you will have grasped the idea that the concept of dialectics, of negative dialectics, becomes *critical* – and this is a factor that should help to support the choice of the term 'negative' in a not insignificant way. Unlike the kind of dialectics that the late Hegel called for, one in which the affirmative could be discovered at the end of all the negations, this concept calls for the very opposite. And I should like here to propose in a general way the thesis that the negative dialectics I have tried to expound to you is in its essentials identical with a critical theory. I would suggest that the two terms – critical theory and negative dialectics<sup>17</sup> – have the same meaning. Perhaps, to be more precise, with the sole difference that critical theory really signifies only the subjective side of thought, that is to say, *theory*, while negative dialectics signifies not only that aspect of thought but also the *reality* that is affected by it. In other words, it encapsulates not just a process of thought but also, and this is good Hegel, a process affecting things. This critical character of dialectics has to be dissected into a series of elements. The first of these is the one I attempted to explain last time – as you will perhaps recollect – namely the relation of concept to thing. We shall return to this question. We shall see that the thesis of the identity of concept and thing is in general the vital nerve of idealist thought, and indeed traditional thought in general. Furthermore, this assertion of the identity of concept and thing is inextricably intertwined with the structure of reality itself. And negative dialectics as critique means above all criticism of precisely this claim to identity – a claim that cannot of course be tested on every single object in a kind of bad infinity, but which certainly can be applied to the essential structures

confronting philosophy either directly or as mediated through the themes of philosophy. Furthermore, dialectics as critique implies the criticism of any hypostasization of the mind as the primary thing, the thing that underpins everything else. I remember how I once explained all this to Brecht when we were together in exile. Brecht reacted by saying that these matters had all been settled long since – and what he had in mind was the materialist dialectic – and that there was no point in harking back to a controversy that had been superseded by the unreal course of history. I am unable to agree with this. On the one hand, it seems to me that the book whose authority he relied on, Lenin's book on empiriocriticism,<sup>18</sup> in no way succeeds in delivering what it undertakes to perform, namely a philosophical critique of the hypostasization of the mind or of idealism. It remains a thoroughly dogmatic work which simply presents a specific thesis with a torrent of abuse and in endless variations, without at all attempting a fundamental explanation. And the fact that materialist dialectics should have become a world-view in such a dubious sense, instead of becoming what it originally aspired to, namely a science in the higher sense, representing the most advanced state of knowledge, seems to me to be a product of this dogmatism. I believe furthermore that at present a true philosophical critique of the hypostasis of mind is fully justified because this hypostasis is proving irresistible to philosophy, which after all operates in the medium of the intellect, which thrives exclusively and at all times in the mind. I believe that everyone who has ever learnt to appreciate what great philosophy is will have experienced the force of this thesis of the primacy of the spirit that is to be found in every so-called first philosophy. And a form of thinking that simply retreats from this experience instead of reacting, once it has come to be thought dubious, by measuring itself against it and setting it in motion with the aid of its own power, any such thinking will be doomed to impotence. Do not forget that the very fact that thinking takes place in concepts ensures that the faculty that produces concepts, namely mind, is manoeuvred into a kind of position of priority from the very outset;<sup>19</sup> and that if you concede even an inch to this priority of spirit – whether in the shape of the 'givens' that present themselves to the mind in the form of sense data or in the shape of categories – if you concede even an inch to this principle, then there is in fact no escape from it. The enormous power of Hegel – that is the power which impresses us so hugely today and, God knows, it is a power that impresses *me* today to the point where I am fully aware that, of the ideas that I am presenting to you, there is not a single one that is not contained, in tendency at least, in Hegel's philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

# LECTURE 3

16 November 1965

*Whether Negative  
Dialectics is Possible*

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## *Notes*

3)<sup>1</sup> Today the concept of positivity, as an abstraction, has become ideology.

Criticism in itself becomes the object of suspicion.

In contrast, even at its most abstract the concept of the negative can be justified – as resistance, even if abstractly it does not possess its own positive aspect – this lies in what is negated.

But: what is at issue is determinate negation, i.e. the immanent critique that confronts the concept with its object and vice versa.

Negativity in itself is not a good – that would be a bad positive.

Otherwise, nothing but the vanity about standing above the objects because one is not in them. Warning against narcissistic misuse. – Negativity towards one's own.

Perhaps there is even a positive movens, but it may not express itself (prohibition on images!), i.e. it must not postulate itself. The fixed, positive, must not be denied – but it is purely an aspect, cannot be reduced to this.

In H[egel] the positivity of the dialectic is at the same time its premise (i.e. the subject, spirit) and its τέλος, it carries the system.

This results in two questions that I must try to answer by developing this line of thought:

- 1) Is negative dialectics at all possible? I.e. what is the source of determinate negation without the positive postulation guiding it. On this point: what is the product of the neg[ation] of the neg[ation]. My reply: always a bad positivity. Index falsi. – The gravest reservation to concept of synthesis. Incidentally, in H[egel] the so[-called] synthesis (which plays an astonishingly minor role in his texts) is not simply the better and higher, but the self-assertion of the thesis in the antithesis, the expression of non-identity; in this respect not so very different from emp[irical] phil[osophy]. – Difference of nuance; these are crucial in phil[osophy]

Introd. 3 a<sup>2</sup>

- 2) Is there – and this is the same thing, differently worded – a dialectics without system? Benjamin's thesis and its task.

16 November 65

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Since these lectures are entitled 'Negative Dialectics',<sup>3</sup> I may perhaps be allowed to cast one further glance at the concept of positivity in the form it currently possesses. I believe that I already pointed out to you last time that the concept of positivity in itself, in abstracto, has become part and parcel of ideology today; and that critique in itself has started to become suspect, regardless of its content. In the final analysis, setting particular problems to one side and focusing for once on the larger philosophical architecture, it is this fact that has induced me to talk to you about negative dialectics. Now it would be quite false and superficial (and something I would like very much to prevent) if you were to restrict the phenomenon under discussion to the dominant attitude towards positivity, and, together with that, towards negativity as well. What we are considering here is a process that can probably be followed throughout the length and breadth of contemporary attitudes, namely, a process to which the concept of reification can be said to apply. This concept is one that I very much hope to be able to articulate fully for once and to expound to you at a theoretical level – even though it may be thought to be more of a sociological task than a philosophical one.<sup>4</sup> What I mean by this – and it is perhaps not entirely unimportant for you to have me draw your attention to this – is that concepts – and here we have already reached the theme of dialectics – are no longer measured against their

contents, but instead are taken in isolation, so that people take up attitudes to them without bothering to inquire further into the truth content of what they refer to. For example, if we take the concept 'positive', which is essentially a concept expressing a relation, we see that it has no validity on its own but only in relation to something that is to be affirmed or negated. Then we find that simply because of the emotional values that it has acquired, that have accumulated around the word, the term is wrenched out of the context in which it has validity and is turned into an independent and absolute thing, the measure of all things. In a similar way, as I pointed out in my introduction to the senior sociology seminar last week,<sup>5</sup> the great controversy about intellectuals that is such a popular topic of debate nowadays has been conducted in such a way that people have discussed the intellectual as an anthropological, spiritual or moral type, without inquiring about the intellectual issues that are at stake; or whether intellectuality in the succinct sense is the organ by means of which we perceive ideas adequately, and so forth. I have the impression that this tendency on the part of a reified consciousness to bring all the concepts in the world to a standstill simultaneously and to fetishize them, much as happens with the headlines in advertisements, that this tendency is all the more damaging as its universal prevalence prevents people from becoming properly aware of it. And I would take the view that the work of philosophy is concerned not so much with negativity as such – I shall have something to say on this question shortly – as that each person should keep his own thinking under surveillance and regard it with a critical eye in order to resist this reified way of thinking. And if I were to formulate in what way a negative dialectics should come to the assistance of your own thinking – and after all, such a goal is by no means contemptible in a course of lectures – I would see its benefit in bringing this tendency to your attention and preventing you from succumbing to it by making you aware of it.

This tendency can of course be traced back very far both socially and in the history of philosophy. Its principal cause is undoubtedly the irrevocable loss of absolutely binding uniform categories.<sup>6</sup> This means that the less the mind possesses predetermined so-called substantial, unquestioned meanings, the more it tends to compensate for this by literally fetishizing concepts of its own devising which possess nothing that transcends consciousness. In short it makes absolutes of things it has created. And it achieves this by tearing them from their context and then ceasing to think of them further. Now, I would say that, in the light of this situation, the concept of the negative is not without a certain value, even in the abstract and hence *misleading*

way in which I have been obliged to introduce it. Its value is its right to resist such habits of thought, even if it does not 'have' a positivity of its own. For it is precisely this 'having something', having it as something fixed, given and unquestioned on which one can comfortably rely – it is this that thought should actually resist. And the very thing that appears as a flaw in a philosophy that does not have this quality is in truth the medium in which philosophical ideas that are worthy of the name can thrive. If we start by thinking quite simply of the position of subjective consciousness, in other words, of the intellectual behaviour of each one of us, we could say that such resistant thinking contains positivity in its resistance to the very elements I have attempted to explain to you with the concept of the reified consciousness. But I believe that, if you wish to grasp what I am aiming at but am forced to explain to you in stages, you should be clear in your minds from the outset that we are not speaking here about negativity as a universal, abstract principle of the kind that I was initially forced to develop – or not to develop, but that I placed at the start of my argument because I had to start somewhere, even if I do not believe in an absolute beginning. Instead, the negativity I am speaking about contains a pointer to what Hegel calls *determinate* negation. In other words, negativity of this kind is made concrete and goes beyond mere standpoint philosophy by confronting concepts with their objects and, conversely, objects with their concepts. Negativity *in itself*, if such a concept were not nonsensical – since by virtue of its being in itself, a concept that exists essentially only in context, i.e. *for others*, turns into its own opposite – negativity in itself is not a good to be defended. If it were, it would be transformed into bad positivity. And this false idea of negativity in itself is reflected in the vanity of a particular attitude which proves very tempting for young people, particularly if they have not yet been fully initiated into the relevant disciplines. The attitude that emerges is one that Hegel referred to in a celebrated passage in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, one I constantly allude to and which I would urgently like to recommend for close study by all of you who attend these lectures. Hegel speaks in the Preface about the vanity and vacuity of anyone who stands above the main issues because he is not inside them.<sup>7</sup> The abstract negativity involved in instantly sniffing out the defects of phenomena, from the outside, as it were, in order to be able to assert one's own superiority to them serves merely to gratify one's own intellectual narcissism and is therefore open to abuse from the outset. And resisting this temptation is surely among the primary requirements of the discipline of dialectics, one that cannot be over-emphasized – even though it does contain a productive element. This is our

dissatisfaction with what we are being fobbed off with; we feel we are better than the swindle that is being foisted onto us. I have no wish to deny this. Nevertheless, we cannot allow this to be the end of the story, and this is what is implied in the call for determinate negation.

A further implication is that such a mode of thinking also imposes the obligation to reflect ceaselessly on oneself. I should like to say at this point that among the objections that have been urged against my ideas – and they are very numerous, that is to say, if people can think of nothing better (and, unfortunately, in general nothing much does occur to them) they say: does he also apply the principle of negativity to his own ideas? This is a classical instance of what I call a bad abstraction. The issue is not that I should take an a priori negative attitude towards my own writings simply because I am critical of all sorts of phenomena in accordance with a very specific and thought-out theory. After all, if I believed that my own ideas, which in fact constitute themselves only through a process of determinate negation, were in general mistaken or untrue, then I would not bother expressing them. The fact that I do express them means that I have put as much self-reflection into them as I am capable of. But it would make matters all too simple for my critics if they could just join this discussion from outside with the demand that ‘Well, if he has got a negative principle or if he thinks negativity is such an important matter then he ought really to say nothing at all’. I can answer such critics by saying only that they should be so lucky! I mean to say that in all probability – and this is as far as one can go in this respect – there is perhaps a so-called positive motive force of thought; if one does *not* wish it, and I say ‘it’ intentionally, because the ‘it’ cannot be expressed – well, this means that there can be no determinate negation because there won’t be anything at all. But I believe that precisely this aspect of positivity, which acts as a corollary to negativity, is conjoined with the principle of negativity because it resists being fixed once and for all in an abstract, static manner. If it is true that every philosophy that can have any claims at all to the truth lives from the ancient fires, i.e. it secularizes not just philosophy,<sup>8</sup> but also theology, then we have identified here, or so I believe, an outstanding point in the secularization process. It is the fact that the prohibition on graven images that occupies a position of central importance in the religions that believe in salvation, that this prohibition extends into the ideas and the most sublime ramifications of thought. Hence, to make this quite clear, the issue is not to deny the existence of a certain fixed point, it is not even to deny the existence of some fixed element in thought; we shall in due course, I hope, come to discuss the meaning

of such a fixed element in dialectical logic in very concrete terms. But the fixed, positive point, just like negation, is an *aspect* – and not something that can be anticipated, placed at the beginning of everything. You may well ask me about what I said earlier on: if you admit that the positive, like the negative, is no more than an aspect, and that neither may be regarded as an absolute – why then do I privilege the concept of negativity so emphatically? If you did put this question to me, I would say that I can give you a proper answer only after you have seen a full account of the matters we have only begun to explore, and in particular if I succeed in providing you with a cogent and immanent critique of the premises of traditional thought with their roots in identity philosophy. I must therefore ask you to be patient; I cannot provide you with a proper answer at this moment. However, for practical purposes, from the point of view of our ordinary experience, I would say that the world simply overflows with positivity; and that this positivity itself turns out to be negative to such a degree that, faced with such negativity, it behoves us to assume the attitude that is defined by the concept of a negative dialectics.

This is in fact very different from Hegel, a difference that cannot be obscured cosmetically. It is a difference that is not confined to so-called general attitudes, but extends into individual features. For infinitely rich though Hegel is, and however much every serious philosophy has to learn from him, it is not possible to overlook the differences, particularly at this juncture, or to dismiss them as the superficial differences of systematic approach. In Hegel, the positive nature of dialectics – in other words, the fact that the whole, the quintessence of all negations is the positive, the meaning, reason, indeed the godhead and the Absolute – is the premise that actually sets the dialectic in motion. By the same token, it is also the result that is supposed to emerge, and emerge inexorably, from this dialectic. And this circular procedure was one of which Hegel was particularly proud; he therefore made use of the circle as an image with which to compare his philosophy.<sup>9</sup> And we might well also take up the analogy provided by a term from a completely different sphere, namely that of mathematics, a term probably formulated first by Henri Poincaré,<sup>10</sup> who said that, rightly understood, Hegel's entire philosophy was a gigantic tautology.<sup>11</sup> That would be all very well were it not for the fact that his philosophy desired to have it all, that it was unwilling to make any sacrifices, that there was no concept that was so incompatible with itself that it would have been prepared to refrain from devouring it and claiming it for itself. In short, on the one hand this philosophy presented itself as a gigantic analytical proposition, but on the other hand it claimed simultaneously to be



*the* synthetic proposition par excellence. In other words, it claimed that this analytical proposition captured in the mind that which is not itself mind, and identified with it. It is precisely this twofold claim, the assertion that something can simultaneously be both a synthetic and an analytical proposition, that marks the point at which I believe we have to go beyond Hegel, if we are to take him seriously (and there is no better way to show him respect than to take him utterly seriously). It is here that critical thinking and Hegel have to part company. And it is here that I identify right from the start the point at which I differ from the form he gives to dialectics, a form that even so I regard as not only the most consummate form attained to by dialectics, but also the greatest achievement of philosophy as such hitherto.

Now, what I have attempted to outline to you up to now leads us to two questions to which I hope to be able to provide some answers by developing further my line of thought and which I would ask you to think of as thematic in these lectures. The first question is: *is a negative dialectics at all possible?* Can we speak of a dialectical process if movement is not brought into play by the fact that the object that is to be understood as distinct from spirit turns out itself to be spirit. Where then are we to look for the source of *determinate* negation in the absence of the positive postulate to accompany it from the outset, namely the postulate of spirit in which everything is included? We could also approach this question by inquiring – and this is a question I have already touched on – what this would mean for what Hegel calls the negation of the negation. I should like to answer this by saying that the negation of the negation is not simply the positive, but that it is the positive both in its positive aspect and in its own fallibility and weakness, in other words, its *bad* positivity. We might say therefore, or rather it is a methodological principle – if I may speak of such a principle for once without your pouncing on me like vultures and claiming that I do have a general methodological principle after all; the issue is not whether one has any fixed or universal principles, but the standing, the function of such principles in the context of a philosophy – so we might perhaps say (this is a formula I have already tried out on earlier occasions)<sup>12</sup> that the Spinozist proposition, one very characteristic of identity philosophy, that *verum index sui et falsi*,<sup>13</sup> in other words, that the true and the false can both be directly read off from the true, is a proposition whose validity we cannot accept; but that the false, that which should not be the case, is *in fact* the standard of itself: that the false, namely that which is not itself in the first instance – i.e. not itself in the sense that it is not what it claims to be – that this falseness proclaims itself in

what we might call a certain immediacy, and this immediacy of the false, this *falsum*, is the *index sui atque veri*. So here then, although we shouldn't exaggerate it, is a certain pointer to what I consider 'right thinking'.

Now, what I have been suggesting implies the gravest possible objections to the concept of *synthesis*. And I have to confess to you that I cannot help myself, my intellectual reactions are instinctive, I react as it were with my nerves. And so-called theoretical thought is to a great extent no more than the attempt to pursue intellectually the path taken by these instinctive reactions through the mind. If you happen to read the little article on philosophical thinking I recently published in the *Neue Deutsche Hefte*<sup>14</sup> you will be able to understand better just what I have in mind. At all events, from very early on I have always felt a violent antipathy to the concept of synthesis. And without my knowing what it meant – initially at least, it was probably no more than an act of resistance on my part. I was someone who tended to extremes, who detected something false in syncretism and who instinctively objected to happy mediums, following Arnold Schoenberg, who had written that the middle road is the only one that does not lead to Rome.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, I believe that in my attitude to the negation of the negation, which according to the triadic scheme is what a synthesis actually is, my instinctive antipathy has at least been properly conceptualized. At the same time, I should like to draw your attention to the fact that the status of synthesis in Hegel is actually somewhat anomalous. The fact is that, when you read the texts closely, you find that there is much less said about such syntheses, such positivities, than you might expect initially. And I believe that if you were to trace Hegel's use of the term 'synthesis' [*Synthese*] purely lexically – as opposed to the concept of 'Synthesis', as used by Kant in his epistemology – you would find that it occurs very rarely indeed, in contrast to such concepts as 'positing' [*Setzung*], 'position' or 'negation' – and this tells us something about the situation. It is grounded in the subject matter; it is no merely external trait of Hegelian language. In the three-stage scheme – if we allow for once that such a thing is to be found in Hegel – the so-called synthesis that represents the third stage as opposed to negation is by no means simply better or higher. If you consider an example of such a three-stage dialectic – we might look at the famous triad of Being, Nothing and Becoming<sup>16</sup> – you will find that this so-called synthesis is actually something like a movement, a movement of thought, of the concept, but one that turns backwards and does not look forward and produce something complete to be presented as a successful achievement on a higher plane. Hegelian syntheses tend – and it would be rewarding

to follow this up with detailed analysis – to take the form that the thesis reasserts itself *within* the antithesis, once this has been postulated. Thus once the identity of two contradictory concepts has been reached, or at least asserted in the antithesis, as in the most famous case of all, the identity of Nothing with Being, this is followed by a further reflection to the effect that, indeed, these *are* identical, I have indeed brought them together – Being, as something entirely undefined, is also Nothing. However, to put it quite crudely, they are not actually entirely identical. The thought that carries out the act of identification always does violence to every single concept in the process. And the negation of the negation is in fact nothing other than the ἀνάμνησις, the recollection, of that violence, in other words the acknowledgement that, by conjoining two opposing concepts, I have on the one hand bowed to a necessity implicit in them, while on the other hand I have done them a violence that has to be rectified. And truth to tell, this rectification in the act of identification is what is always intended by the Hegelian syntheses.<sup>17</sup> This structure – we are speaking here of a structure of dialectics – this structure is not something that can always be strictly sustained, and I know very well that you could show me quite different structures in Hegel's *Logic*. But I would venture the claim that the *intention* is always *this* intention. And, incidentally, this has the remarkable consequence that the movement of thought which enables us to characterize dialectics as a radically dynamic mode of thought is by no means always a forward movement, a unidirectional movement, but is always also a backward movement that always incorporates within itself, at any rate in its intention, the very things from which it distances itself. Moreover, one of the most astonishing features of the Hegelian dialectic and one that is especially hard to grasp is that, on the one hand, categories are ceaselessly promoted as things that are changing and becoming, while, on the other hand, they are logical categories and as such *simply have to* retain their validity, as in any traditional logic or epistemology. However, if that is the case, then the reason for it lies precisely in the fact that, thanks to this retrograde tendency implicit in the forward movement, whatever advances is simultaneously laid to rest; so that Becoming and Being are also identical in this sense too (this at any rate is the intention of the Hegelian dialectic). So if what I have said is correct, that is, if the so-called synthesis is nothing but the expression of the non-identity of thesis and antithesis, it follows that such an expression of non-identity is not so very far removed, not exactly worlds away, from what I meant by the concept of a negative dialectics as it might have seemed at first glance and even after my general description of it. And we see from

this that the distinctions – and this is actually the great demand that philosophy makes on its adepts – the distinctions that really count in philosophy are not the distinctions to be drawn between large-scale, opposing positions. (This is something I have adverted to on a number of occasions in earlier lectures, but I may perhaps be allowed to repeat it in the hope that it may be of assistance to you in your own studies.) If you compare the great systems with one another, for example, the rationalism of which Descartes was the pre-eminent exponent with Francis Bacon, the founding father of empiricism, you will find that on countless issues they not only say exactly the same thing but that they actually *mean* the same thing, albeit making use of different conceptual tools. The intentions of these philosophies lie much closer to each other than might be expected from their general philosophical or axiomatic positions. But the crucial differences are to be found precisely in such minimal nuances as the distinction between the concept of synthesis in Hegel and the version of the concept of negative dialectics that I have been at pains to formulate. The differences are to be found in such minimal nuances. And the ability to think philosophically is essentially the ability to experience the large-scale implications of these seemingly minute differences.

I have told you of the questions that I feel it is incumbent upon me to answer through this method, however indirectly. The question of the possibility of a negative dialectics leads me to a second question, one that differs from the first one only verbally, but is not so terribly different in point of substance. This is the question of whether dialectics is possible without *system* – and, beyond that, whether you can have philosophy without system. The concept of philosophical system has long since been discredited, first of all by Nietzsche's statement, with which you are all familiar, about the dishonesty of systems,<sup>18</sup> and even more so by the efforts of the various neo-Kantian epigones, such as Heinrich Rickert's so-called open system,<sup>19</sup> in which the discrepancy between the conceptual apparatus and the claims made by his philosophy is immediately obvious. In consequence, no very great act of intellectual courage is required to declare that one is opposed to system. And today, when no one with any ambition will have any truck with systems, it is almost better to inquire whether philosophy is possible without systems than simply to continue to assure everyone in sight that no system is possible. What I am attempting here and would like to show you is the possibility of philosophy in an authoritative sense without either system or ontology – that is what I am aiming at. But to give you an idea of the serious import of these matters, I may perhaps conclude by saying that a thinker like

Benjamin, who enjoys the reputation of an essayist and micro-analyst, vigorously defended the idea that philosophy is not possible in the absence of system – this essay is to be found in the volume of *Zeugnisse* [Testimonies].<sup>20</sup> And the thrust of his thinking actually pushed this question of the *possibility of philosophy without system* to the point of a sort of catastrophe. It is a question in which we shall have to immerse ourselves deeply in the course of these lectures – but with the twist previously referred to, that is to say, in the light of the received wisdom that *a philosophical system is not possible*.

# LECTURE 4

18 November 1965

*Whether Philosophy is  
Possible without System*

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## *Notes*

[Insertion 3a:] Beginning 18. XI. 65

*Ad vocem* system.

Universally discredited, more important to see the necessity for it.

According to all traditional conceptions of philosophy, a philosophy that is not a system is doomed. Traditional conceptions set out to provide an explanation of the world, the ground of the world as a whole.

System = the form which claims to provide this whole.

At the same time, distinction between system and systematization.

Systematization is a uniform mode of presentation, a schema in which there is space for everything, an organization of subjective reason.

System was the development of the subject itself from a principle, dynamic and all-inclusive, so 'that nothing should be left out'. Prototype: Fichte.

So great is the need for system that today systematization has taken its place unobserved. The explanation is assumed to be that the facts should find their proper place in an organized scheme that has previously been abstracted from the facts themselves.

This need ensures that even bodies of thought that claim to be anti-systematic (Nietzsche), or a-systematic, are latent systems.

Haag's insight that, in Heidegger's concept of Being, subject and object are so undifferentiated the one from the other that it assumes the function of a system, admittedly without becoming transparent as such, unlike the great philosophical systems. Combines totality with the renunciation of comprehension.

But the fact that its presence is undeclared causes the impulse to system to be transformed, it is no longer what it was.

Negative dialectics is, from this standpoint, the consciousness of its transformation.

In that case,<sup>1</sup> does thought not become random, arbitrary? Answer: it is accompanied by the figure of (a false) positivity; philosophically, as always, it is accompanied by the historically given shape of thought. It takes its cue, as it were, from the resistance. Instead of the system, [there is] the coercion of the facts.

Only: the power of the system must be capable of being transformed into the criticism of the individual. Criticism in a twofold sense: of both the concept and the thing! Still to be discussed. Thought that consumes the system within itself. The power that is liberated by blasting open the individual thing is what once animated the system, for this is the power which makes the phenomenon, as something non-identical with its concept, more than itself. Aspects of the system to be salvaged: that the phenomena are objectively interconnected, not merely by virtue of their classification. However, this must not be hypostasized or imposed on them from outside, but is to be discerned from within them, from their innermost determination, and the method for doing this is a negative dialectics.

(1)<sup>2</sup> Philosophy appeared obsolete. Feuerbach theses. Question of the non-identity of phil[osophy] today, its irrelevance, *une barque sur l'océan*.<sup>3</sup> Philo[sophy] seems to belong to an incomparably restricted world. Cottage.<sup>4</sup>

To be revised since it has not been realized; not the point from which it can be convicted of nullity.

18 November 65

### *Transcript of the lecture*

You will recall that last time I had moved on to consider the concept of system. I should like to prepare you gently for the fact that I shall repeatedly return to this concept in the course of these lectures. I find myself forced to keep coming back to this concept, which incidentally I discussed inadequately in one of my books, *Against Epistemology*.<sup>5</sup>

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And I have the definite feeling that I owe you a clear explanation at this point, but that I am unable to offer you an uninterrupted account. Instead I have to keep reverting to this topic from time to time. I should like to begin by inviting you to exercise your minds in a way that is not so easy for anyone nowadays and to reconstruct for yourselves the processes that drive philosophy towards the system. Today it has become much easier to assert that systematic philosophizing has become impossible – and, in consequence, we must renounce attempts to secure everything that has given the concept of system such enormous emphasis. And I place such great value on this because I believe that you will understand my approach to philosophy only if you see it in its relation to the idea of system and not simply as a random body of thought indifferent to system. A further factor is that in a certain sense the themes that formerly underlay philosophical systems will also be preserved in my own efforts – that, at any rate, is my intention. According to the traditional conception of philosophy, a philosophy that lacks a system is doomed from the outset, namely doomed to arbitrariness, doomed – as modern logic would say – to see its elements unconnected and hence deprived of any binding coherence and unambiguous shape. At the root of this situation is the fact that the traditional conception of philosophy as it has come down to us from Plato to German idealism has set itself the task of explaining the universe – or at least the ground of the world from which the totality might be derived. From this angle, system means the form governing such a totality, in other words, a form from which nothing is left out. Accordingly, the philosophical conception of system is extraordinarily ambitious, so ambitious that it almost coincides with the ambitions of philosophy itself.

In order to make sure that we understand one another, we ought to clarify the distinction between system in this emphatic sense of the word and the thing that has largely come to replace it, namely the systematization of thought. By systematization I understand – and I believe that this is not just playing with words but describes something that corresponds to the facts of a systematic presentation today – by systematization I understand a unified form of presentation, in other words, a scheme in which everything that belongs to the subject matter concerned or to the philosophical topic (if that can be regarded as a subject area) finds its place, the proper place belonging to it. It is therefore an organization of subjective reason. Perhaps the best-known and most effective type of such a systematization today is the functional, structural theory of society developed by Talcott Parsons, a theory that has come to come to exercise such an extraordinary



influence on sociology.<sup>6</sup> I am not concerned here with the sociology but with the structure of such thinking, which resembles a plan or reference system that can be designed and in which every conceivable phenomenon can be readily accommodated. It seems to me highly significant that at this very moment we should find ourselves in a situation where what we can describe as a genuine philosophical system, that is to say, the development of an objective reality, an ostensible Being-in-itself from a unified standpoint – that this should be supplanted in great measure by what we may think of as systematizations. I take this as a sign that the need to create systems is far greater than the discrediting of the idea of system by philosophers might suggest. And it is this that compels us to examine the concept of system in greater depth. Thus what I have in mind here is system in the strong, properly philosophical sense – as opposed to this concept of systematization, an organizational schema of subjective reason, a schema that can be created by a process of classification. System in this philosophical sense is the development of the fact from a principle, in a dynamic manner, in short, as a development, a movement that draws everything into itself, that takes hold of everything and is itself a totality; it claims objective validity such that, as Hegel would put it,<sup>7</sup> nothing between heaven and earth can be conceived of as being outside such a system. Fichte's philosophy may offer us the most consistent example. Fichte did in fact attempt to derive everything, including the finite subject and its opposite, the finite Not-I, from a single idea, namely the I, the absolute subject [the self-conscious mind]. And I believe that, if you wish to form a clear idea of the concept of system in the strong sense, you would be well advised to read the two introductions that Fichte subsequently added to his *Science of Knowledge*.<sup>8</sup> In them you will be able to feel with the entire force of Fichte's logic the need to create a system, a need that is no longer felt by people's enfeebled consciousness today. And, for my part, it is my belief that an a-systematic or anti-systematic form of thought can compete with the system nowadays only if it feels this need itself and – if I may anticipate this programmatic point – if it is also capable of absorbing into itself something of the energy that was formerly stored up in the great philosophical systems. The need for such a system is so great that today systematization – the organizing schema; what might be called the pale imitation of system in an age of positivism – has imperceptibly come to be accepted as a substitute for system. At the same time, what can be urged against all these systematizations is this – and I should like to emphasize this since I am well aware, without really understanding it, of the fascination that is exerted nowadays by such systematizations: it is one thing

to establish a scheme by abstracting from the facts and their sequence so as to organize them more transparently; it is quite another matter, and a highly questionable one at that, to treat such a scheme as if that had been what system aspired to be and what philosophy must always be, namely the explanation, the *interpretation*, of whatever this scheme contains.

This need ensures – and I should like to draw this to your attention so that you should become aware of the seriousness of this matter, distant though it has become from us – this need ensures that even philosophies that are as anti-systematic as Nietzsche, or as a-systematic as modern phenomenology and ontology, are latently systems nevertheless. Husserl, who began with individual analyses of the phenomena of consciousness and their correlatives, was finally honest enough to admit that, as soon as one sets out to reduce everything that exists to the structures of consciousness, this presupposes the existence of a system. And this explains why in his late phase his phenomenology regresses to a system of sorts; indeed, we might even call it straight out a system of transcendental idealism.<sup>9</sup> But even in Heidegger matters are more complex than might appear at first sight. It is undoubtedly the case that one of the reasons why Heidegger's thought was once felt to be so fascinating was the fact that it claimed to be necessary and logical without being accompanied by the clunking sounds of conceptual machinery. The fact is, however – and I am grateful to Professor Haag for pointing this out to me in conversation a few days ago<sup>10</sup> – that, at the very least in Heidegger's case as well, the latent function of the system can be seen in the circumstance that his concept of Being contains what philosophical systems traditionally attempt to demonstrate: namely the identity of whatever exists with thought in so far as it is implied that this concept of Being is an undifferentiated, immediate unity of the elements from which, precisely because it is undifferentiated, we can then derive the various modes of being and the distinctions of the ontological and the ontic. In short, the concept of Being in his thought has a quite similar 'generative' function and at the same time a similarly all-encompassing function of the sort that systems possessed in the tradition of German idealism – admittedly with the qualification that the relation to such an originary principle has ceased to be transparent. In other words, such a principle is not the product of a logical deduction; nor is it a principle to which recourse may be had, a rational principle in its own right. Paradoxically, then, we might speak in Heidegger's case of an irrational system of philosophy. It combines, we might say, the claim to totality or, as he himself says in a number of places, at least of *Being and Time*, it combines the claim to totality with the

renunciation of comprehension.<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, you can already find this curious coupling implied in Kant, since Kant expressly defends the idea of a system of transcendental idealism and had formed the plan of supplementing the three Critiques with a positive system of this sort, while at the same time rejecting the idea of comprehending the objects ‘from within’ as intellectualistic and Leibnizian – even though the reality is that, if philosophy had succeeded in conceptualizing everything that exists without leaving a remainder, it would necessarily have comprehended the phenomena it had subsumed. But this is just one of the many questions that remain unresolved – magnificently unresolved, we must add – in Kant.

I should now like to bring to your attention changes that are becoming evident in the function and shape of philosophical systems. It would be cheap (and something I would not wish to do for all the world) if someone were to argue that, OK, if Heidegger’s philosophy is a system after all, *malgré lui*, that shows he is an idealist and there is nothing more to be said on the topic. I do not wish to deny that I regard Heidegger’s philosophy as an idealism in disguise. But what is happening here is that the concept of system no longer puts in an appearance as such, but that it survives in a latent form; not everything it contains is explicitly derived or subsumed under its constitutive, generative concept. This circumstance brings about a qualitative change in the concept of system itself. This means – and I am not embarrassed to say that at this point I feel a certain emotion – that the path on which system becomes secularized into a latent force which ties disparate insights to one another (replacing any architectonic organization) – this path in fact seems to me to be the only road still open to philosophy. Admittedly, this path is very different from the one that passes through the concept of Being, exploiting en route the advantages provided by the neutrality of the concept of Being. And it is from this standpoint that I would ask you to understand the concept of a negative dialectic: as the consciousness, the critical and self-critical consciousness of such a change in the idea of a philosophical system in the sense that, as it disappears, it releases the powers contained within itself. This is along the lines of what we may say of theology, since in this latter case the process of secularization released the idea of the system as the idea of a coherent, meaningful world. After hearing what I have been saying, you may be less inclined to regard the question of whether philosophy can be anything but a system as purely a matter of antiquarian or academic interest. In this context it is worth recalling once again that Benjamin in his early essays insisted that philosophy is not possible in the absence of system.<sup>12</sup> The road that led him to abandon this insight

was very tortuous and painful, and his ideas on the subject remained fragmentary. I believe that it is no exaggeration if I say that to this day the question of whether philosophy can exist without system has not been tackled with the seriousness and energy that it calls for. For at first sight it appears as if the thinking that has entirely dispensed with the unity provided by system – the thinking that, as it were, plunges heedlessly into the act of thinking (if I may put it in this unkind way) – were simply being confided to the mercies of contingency and whim. And this very criticism, that of the aperçu-like nature of my thinking, has frequently been levelled at me too, until finally – simply because so many things came together and created a context – it then lost ground in favour of other objections, without my having had to put my cards on the table<sup>13</sup> and without my having had to show what joins up my various insights and turns them into a unity. And these reflections, some of which I am trying to convey to you in these lectures, are my attempt to make up for lost time.

The answer, the highly provisional answer to the question of whether a philosophy that is no longer able to be certain that the totality of all that exists and can be thought can be deduced from a single unified factor – the answer to be given to this question is very closely linked to reflections on the concept of positivity and the critique of positivity that we have been considering in the last few lectures. Perhaps we may say that such thinking is guided by the shape of the positive reality, however open to question, that confronts it. The structure of a mode of thought is no longer imposed on it by the authority and sovereignty with which it creates and generates its objects from within itself, but by the shape of whatever confronts it; and, in a narrower sense, it is dictated – and there is nothing new in that, since this has always been the case in philosophy – by the historically given shape of the thought with which it engages. We might say that in this sense the unity of thought is always to be found in whatever it negates in its historical context, in its specific situation. This is in harmony with the spirit of the meaning of Hegel's dictum that philosophy is its own time comprehended in thoughts.<sup>14</sup> We might say, then, that thought which aspires to be authoritative without system lets itself be guided by the resistance it encounters; in other words, its unity arises from the coercion that material reality exercises over the thought, as contrasted with the 'free action' of thought itself which, always concealed and by no means as overt as in Fichte, used to constitute the core of the system. I would ask you to combine this with an idea that I have hinted at in quite a different context, that of the idea of the secularization of system or the transformation of the idea of system, in other words, with the fact that philosophical

systems have ceased to be possible. Perhaps you will allow me to formulate this once again in programmatic fashion, in thesis form, as opposed to spelling it out to you in detail. My postulate would then be that the power of the system – what at one time was the unifying power of a structure of thought as a whole – had to be transformed into the criticism of individual detail, of individual phenomena. Criticism here has a double meaning. What criticism means – and I refuse to separate these two aspects in the way that scientific practice has dinned into us – what criticism means is on the one hand criticism *in the noological sense*, in other words, criticism of the truth and falsehood of statements and judgements and of conceptions in general. But criticism must also be brought into a necessary connection with a *criticism of phenomena*. These [two aspects] are measured here against the yardstick of their concept because their non-identity with themselves, which they always claim they possess, also tells us something about their rightness or wrongness. I cannot go further into this question of the twofold meaning of ‘criticism’ at this point. I should just like to point out that, whenever I speak of criticism, I have in mind this double meaning which is at the same time a unity. And I can refer those of you who are interested in this point to the debate with the English logician of the social sciences Karl Popper, which appeared in the volume containing the contributions to the so-called Kleiner Tübinger Soziologentag.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps you could have a look at it yourselves. That, then, would be the programme I want to put before you here. And this programme may well come closest to something that Nietzsche had in mind. Thinking would be a form of thinking that is not itself a system, but one in which system and the systematic impulse are consumed; a form of thinking that in its analysis of individual phenomena demonstrates the power that formerly aspired to build systems. By this I mean the power that is liberated by blasting open individual phenomena through the insistent power of thought. This power is the same power that once animated the system, since it is the force which enabled individual phenomena, non-identical with their own concepts as they are, to become more than themselves. This means that something of the system can still be salvaged in philosophy, namely the idea that phenomena are objectively interconnected – and not merely by virtue of a classification imposed on them by the knowing subject. However, we should not hypostasize this interconnectedness, in other words, we should not turn it into an absolute. Nor should it be imposed from outside, since it is to be found in the phenomena, in their inner determination. And negative dialectics in so far as it is a method – and it is only a method in one of its aspects – should help us in this task.

Ladies and gentlemen, at this point I expect – quite apart from the fact that all of this is necessarily programmatic in character; but I have to present you with my programme so that I can persuade you of the necessity of the steps by which it can be fulfilled – at this point, then, I expect that you will all want to raise an objection. You will all want to say: Aren't you being rather naïve in expecting philosophy to deliver something of which it is no longer capable? In the age of the great systems – in modern times, let us say, from Descartes to Hegel – the world possessed a certain visibility. I must add that there was something of a discrepancy between this visibility and the clarity of these systems – I need mention only the infinitely complex Hegelian system. Even so, the fact is that these systems came into being in a world in which people knew their way around. God knows that I do not mean by this that the world was what Cooley in his sociology has described as a 'primary community'<sup>16</sup> – it certainly was not that. But right up until the early days of the Industrial Revolution it did possess this quality of visibility that was like that of a small town in contrast to a giant metropolis, with its endless tangle of elevated railways, subways, reversing triangles and the like. And I believe that, if we approach philosophy with the sort of claims that I am making, it is our duty to become aware of a certain naïvety. This consists in the fact that, in general nowadays, in the models it applies to reality, philosophy behaves as if the visibility of existing circumstances allowed it to survey all living creatures and subsume them under a unifying concept – this is something it still takes for granted. We might say, then, that there is an element of provincialism in philosophy today. In the same way, it is a sign of the times that whatever resists the general trend, whatever does not allowed itself to be prescribed to, has a certain naïvety and backwardness about it, even if it likes to represent itself as progressive and advanced. In this respect, the provincial elements that I have highlighted in *The Jargon of Authenticity*<sup>17</sup> are no mere accident but are to a certain degree integral to the subject itself, because the traditional conception of philosophy can only be validated if thinking behaves as though it still inhabited the traditional society in which philosophy was able to function. However, once we have recognized the pressures on philosophy to remain provincial, a situation I described in *The Jargon of Authenticity* far less forthrightly than was necessary, we find ourselves confronted with a dual obligation. On the one hand, we must cast off our provinciality. In other words, we should cease to speak as if we could explain a substantive world from within itself, as Hegel believed he was able to do, given that this world's substantiveness has long since slipped out of the reach of the philosophical mind. On

the other hand, if we wish to continue to philosophize and not to act as if we confused a comfortably furnished cottage with the Pentagon, we have to undertake the task, the quite unavoidable task, of describing the path that will turn our thoughts back to philosophy – or, if not describing it, that is a task that goes beyond any reasonable expectation, then at least attempting to reconstruct it in our minds. Only in this way, or so I believe, only by recovering this renewed sense of the necessity of philosophy can philosophy be cured of the provincialism that lurks in the conviction that it is possible for someone to enter his study, or, since such things do not exist any more, to go into his seminar, or, since that doesn't really exist either, to go into his office and believe that he can comprehend the universe from that vantage point equipped only with paper, pencil and a selection of books. I do of course believe that a thinker who fails to rise to this challenge has a priori absolutely no *raison d'être* at all. And I believe further that positivist schools of thought that resist philosophies which reject this challenge are in the right. It is impossible to ignore the smell of the stale atmosphere pervading that 'philosophical cottage'. And if philosophy aspires to anything at all, it must tear down that cottage as fast as possible, and the very last thing it must do is to confuse it with the old shelteredness, to say nothing of a new one.<sup>18</sup>

Well, all of that is more or less illuminating. You will find the question of the necessity of philosophy, or rather of the road that will lead thought back to philosophy, rather less illuminating. I believe that my best course will be to remind you of the position that with some justification has been regarded as one possible end of philosophy. I am thinking here of Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach', the most famous of which goes: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.'<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, this sentence has placed handcuffs on philosophy with its suggestion that philosophy is nothing more than ideology. On the other hand, it postulates the implied claim that, by finally realizing the ideals of philosophy, above all the freedom of human beings from institutions alien to them, this act of realization turns philosophy itself into an abstract, isolated, merely intellectualized form of reflection that renders it superfluous.<sup>20</sup> And in the tradition I come from myself – in so far as it is a tradition of critical philosophy – this was a very essential motif. Now, I also believe that this vantage point from which philosophy appears to be obsolete has itself become obsolete in the meantime. And it would be ideological in its turn, namely dogmatic, if we were not to concede this. The transition that Marx believed was just round the corner, in 1848 or thereabouts,

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did not take place. The qualitative leap that would change the world did not occur. And the proletariat failed to constitute itself as the subject-object of history, as it was supposed to according to Marx's own theory. We shall scarcely exaggerate or go too far if we conclude from these observations – whose consequences for a critical theory I do not wish to discuss here; these questions are highly complex – we shall not go too far if we conclude that the failure to convert philosophical theory into practice means that we cannot think of philosophical theory as superseded, obsolete or superfluous, at any rate not in the sense that was suggested by that Marxian idea. And in the next lecture I should like to take up this idea of the actuality of philosophy<sup>21</sup> and infer its continued relevance from the fact that the abolition of the subject itself failed to take place.



# LECTURE 5

## 23 November 1965

### *Theory and Practice*

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#### *Notes*

23.XI.65<sup>1</sup>

No dichotomy of theory and practice; Feuerbach theses not to be interpreted in this way. The meaning is not that phil[osophy] lags behind the aspect of its realization. On the one hand, i.e. according to the state of the forces of production, it would in fact be more possible than ever; thwarted by relations of production. But

- 1) it should not be thought of as if it were all about to happen, at least in its general trend, especially as in M[arx] that possibility goes against the trend. Anyone who fails to recognize this commits himself to the bad.
- 2) It is wrong to infer from practice any restriction on thinking. Brecht and idealism. But the fact that philosophical idealism was criticized only dogmatically by Lenin is a case of false, i.e. heteronymous, practice.
- 3) Interpret means elucidate, not necessarily recognize. My thesis: interpretation is criticism. Without interpretation in this sense, there can be no true practice. M[arx] probably really did mean to say that philosophers should abandon their activities in favour of politics.
- 4) Ambivalence in M[arx]: on the one hand, he calls for complete scientific objectivity; on the other hand, phil[osophy] is

denounced. There is a problem in this; but it has to be thought through.

- 5) No relapse into mere contemplation. We cannot think any true thought unless we want the true. Thinking is itself an aspect of practice. The intention remains change – but against pseudo-activity. Against the over-hasty question of practice that shackles the forces of production. Probably only the non-restricted thought is capable of being practical.

23 November 65

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Ladies and gentlemen, I have received a letter from one of you that I found extremely moving. It was connected with what I said last time about the Theses on Feuerbach and also took issue with some of the statements contained in my essay ‘Why Still Philosophy’ from the collection *Interventions*.<sup>2</sup> Before responding to this letter (and I wish to do that) I would like to begin by carrying on with the observations that I was really only able to touch on last time, so that they came out much more crudely than I had intended (as is always the problem in such cases). What I wanted to say quite simply was that if the ‘nucleus of time’<sup>3</sup> and the transition to practice are as crucial as they are in the Marxist conception – then we cannot retain our detachment at the level of theory from the fact that the transition to practice did not occur in the way in which it had been predicted. We cannot bring the moment of transition to a standstill – I was tempted to the use the term of ‘the moment’, favoured by Kierkegaard or Tillich<sup>4</sup> – we cannot conserve the moment or bring it to a standstill. And today we simply cannot think any more as Marx thought, namely that the revolution was imminent – simply because, on the one hand, the proletariat in his day was not integrated in bourgeois society and, on the other hand, bourgeois society did not yet possess the vast instruments of power, both actual physical instruments of power and also psychological instruments in the broadest sense, that it now has. Both factors, together with the increasing process of integration, have come together to make the concept of a revolution highly problematic nowadays. Ideas of practice cannot afford to ignore the fact that, on the one hand, the revolution has turned into an administratively introduced despotism, and, on the other hand, this is opposed by the mere technical innovation of the atomic bomb – Jürgen von Kempster has written an extremely interesting article about this and I would recommend that you look it up in *Merkur*.<sup>5</sup>

The fact is that the possibility of a violent overthrow of existing society by the proletariat has come to seem touchingly innocent, and this means that the entire problem of reformism<sup>6</sup> – even the famous question of reformism which as you know was violently attacked in classical Marxism – has now assumed a completely different aspect from the one it had previously. And I wanted in the first instance merely to make you aware of this entire problem complex. A revolutionary practice that has been endlessly postponed and has to be deferred further to the Greek calends, or else to be utterly transformed, can no longer act as the court of appeal that authorizes us to dismiss philosophy as hopelessly out of date. My view would be that, to reflect on why it did *not* happen and why it *could* not happen – this theoretical question is a matter of no small significance for a philosophy that claims to be relevant today. It belongs, if I may express it in this way, to a dialectical anthropology which is assuredly no small part of the problem of philosophy in our time.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, philosophy's own claim to identity as proclaimed by Hegel faltered at the crucial step, namely the transition to practice in which, according to Marxist doctrine, the realm of freedom is supposed to coincide with the realm of necessity.<sup>8</sup> Hence philosophy itself is in need of radical self-criticism and must give some thought to why all that failed to come to pass. Last time I spoke to you of the idea of the de-provincialization of philosophy and, in doing so, I had all this very much in mind. I was very aware that philosophy, particularly in the way that German idealism interpreted itself as a philosophy of history, entirely ignored these truly decisive world-historical factors. Perhaps I may strike a personal note here: in *The Jargon of Authenticity* – about which I shall have more to say presently – I attacked a number of representatives of philosophy, such as my Tübingen colleague Bollnow, by quoting from their writings. My intention was not to arouse any feelings of hostility towards them. I do not know Mr Bollnow personally; I have never met him. I wanted only – and you would do well to read such books from this philosophical standpoint – I wanted only to offer you some graphic illustrations of the provincialization of which philosophy needs to be cured. I wished to call for an antidote to the view that 'all is right with the world' so as to enable philosophy to transcend the realm of edifying Sunday cant. For it is undoubtedly true that philosophy has become a secularized theology in the less than positive sense that it lapses into a preaching tone – something that unfortunately can already be seen in Hegel on occasion and that a progressive theology would no longer trust itself to adopt nowadays.

I would like now to come back to the letter I received from one of you. I believe that it expresses in a very admirable and, if I may say so, very succinct way something that I am certain has occurred to you in response to the issues that I touched on towards the end of my last lecture and the beginning of this one. I am very well aware that many of you have felt very strongly about what I have said and that your genuine interest in philosophy has been aroused. For that very reason I would like to discuss this particular question in greater depth. I should like to start by saying that there is no simple dichotomy between theory and practice,<sup>9</sup> and that presumably Marx himself did not believe in a simple dichotomy either – this letter pointed this out and I believe that, if you reflect a little, you will not find what I have to say objectionable. It is quite certain that it would be a mistake to interpret the Feuerbach Theses as the expression of a purely practical view. What speaks against such a view is Marx's criticism of the theory of absolute action, independent of theory, that he levelled at the various anarchist currents of his time, whose pure activism he equated with this lack of theory. When Marx talks about 'science' a number of different things are run together. One aspect of it quite certainly is the model of the natural sciences, which he was far more impressed by as a model for the social sciences than is possible for us nowadays – or, at any rate, for those of us in the non-conforming trends of sociology. On the other hand, what this concept of science probably meant to him was that society could be understood theoretically and that it had to be explained theoretically by reference to its own concept, i.e. the concept of exchange, in order for us to be able to act correctly. That was his belief. And when he says, 'Hitherto the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways', what that 'hitherto' implies is not the renunciation of theory and the view that all we need to do is to wade in with our fists and there will be no more need for thought. This idea is in fact fascist, and it would be grossly unjust to Marx to impute such views to him. Nor did I mean to suggest that philosophy can regress to a state prior to its 'realization' and that we can comfortably make ourselves at home with Aristotle's notion of the dianoetic virtues,<sup>10</sup> in which philosophy is sufficient unto itself. For philosophy – I believe that sometimes it is important to state the obvious – differs from art in that it is no autonomous structure complete in itself, but that it constantly refers to a reality outside itself, outside its own ideas. It is in fact this relationship between thought and that which is not thought that constitutes the core theme of philosophy. If philosophy is concerned with the real, then it is evident that a purely contemplative relation to this reality, a relation that does not envisage any practical action, is

nonsensical because an act of thought about reality is – whether consciously or not – always a *practical* act.

However, when we say that philosophy must not regress to a point anterior to its realization, we have to point to something far more drastic from the side of the object, namely to something that the feeling of imprisonment, of incarceration, which we all have, makes us all too prone to forget. And this is why I am so very grateful to the writer of this letter, since he has made me realize that something had to be said that I suppose had seemed so obvious to me that I omitted to say it and the result was that I gave a misleading impression. The fact is that this too is a very drastic situation – namely the fact that from one perspective, that of the forces of production, it would be possible to organize the world in such a way that there would no longer be any want and hence deprivation and pressure, and that this would be immediately possible now. In this sense the saying of Franz Pfemfert ‘Now or in a hundred years’ is as topical now as it ever was.<sup>11</sup> And if we fail to follow up this idea that the forces of production could satisfy human needs and enable mankind to enter into a condition worthy of human beings – if we fail to give voice to this thought, then we certainly will be in danger of giving ideology a helping hand. Such an outcome is prevented only by the *relations* of production and by the extension of the forces of production into the machinery of physical and intellectual power. I believe, then, that we have to begin by saying this, and that a possible starting-point for a correct practice is to rethink how to put a society on the right path when, on the one hand, it threatens to stagnate owing to the ossified relations of production and the attitudes resulting from that situation, while, on the other hand, it ceaselessly produces the forces that initially promote destruction but that tomorrow or the day after, if I may put it crassly, could actually make possible a paradise on earth. But I believe that we have to make a distinction here; the gentleman who wrote the letter said we must make distinctions, and I am more than happy to oblige. So in my view it would be a mistake to believe that, even with the inconceivable acceleration in the relations of production that we have witnessed, the transformation into the realm of freedom might be on the verge of taking place, in line with the historical trend. The situation is rather that society has discovered ways and means of channelling the unstoppable growth in the forces of production and of keeping it under control. In consequence, what Marx regarded as the self-evident equivalence between the advances of the forces of production and the emancipation of mankind has ceased to hold good. Moreover, it is not enough for us to live in hope that the history of mankind will move towards

a satisfactory state of affairs of its own accord and that all that will be required from us is a bit of a push from time to time to ensure that everything works out. Even though – and here too I would rather err on the side of caution – we should bear in mind, and in this respect Marx was undoubtedly right to maintain that the forces of production, in other words human energies and their extension in technology, have a tendency of their own to overcome the limits that have been set by society. To regard this overcoming as a kind of natural law, however, and to imagine that it *has to* happen in this way, and that it has to happen *immediately*, that would render the entire situation harmless, since it would undermine every kind of practice that placed its reliance on it. And, finally, in taking the link between theory and practice seriously, one of our most vital tasks is to realize that thought is not a priori impotent in the face of a possible practice. This was in fact the point of Marx's criticism of an abstract utopia.

To fail to recognize this is to fail to recognize that the possibility we have to hold on to today is not simply one that goes along *with* the trend, with the historical tendency, but one that runs *counter* to it. I would say that anyone in this position will probably find himself subscribing to the bad tendency, that is, the negative, destructive trend. I would maintain, further – and I believe that this is the point that will be of immediate importance for you, and I would ask your indulgence if my remarks are excessively *ad hominem* – that there is a very great risk that the idea of practice will lead to a shackling of theory. By this I mean that ideas of all sorts are restricted by the insistence on the question 'Yes, but what must I do in practice? What can I do with this idea?' Or even, 'If you think in this way, you will stand in the way of some possible practice or other.' It is always happening that when you address the enormous barriers facing every conceivable political intervention stemming from the relations of production and the social institutions built around them – that when you address this, you instantly receive the reply 'Yes, but . . .', an objection that I regard as one of the greatest dangers in intellectual life. Indeed, how can we hope ever to get anywhere if we think in this way? We shall never be able to achieve anything since we shall be forced to sit around twiddling our thumbs! And I would say the feature that seems to me to be characteristic of the application, the consistent application, of the Feuerbach thesis I referred to earlier is actually the idea that theory itself should be captured from the end-point of the *terminus ad quem*. Perhaps I may be allowed to tell you about an incident that took place a long time ago, it must be twenty-four years, between Brecht and myself in Los Angeles.<sup>12</sup> I had just worked out the main thrust of my book *Against Epistemology*, a

book that did not appear until many years later. My idea was not to criticize idealism dogmatically by contrasting it with a materialist philosophy, but to explode idealism from within, by judging it according to its own yardstick. I explained this to Brecht on one occasion. It did not occur to Brecht to take this idea at all seriously. Instead, he remarked that there already existed a book that was, so to speak (he often expressed himself in such terms), a classical book – he meant Lenin’s book on empiriocriticism. In it all that work had already been done; this was a book that had authority, and if anyone were to undertake this philosophical chore once again it would simply be a wasted effort. . . . And I could not avoid the impression that he tended a little bit to think that, if Lenin had accomplished this in such a book, it was something of an impertinence on the part of someone who was unable to boast of a comparable political success to do all that was claimed and recited – in what I can only call unending and desperately monotonous repetitions. Now, I would say that the standpoint adopted by Brecht – who after all has to be taken very seriously in such matters – seems to me not only theoretically insufficient; it seems to me not only to replace the strenuous effort of the Notion<sup>13</sup> with dogma, but I would say – and I say this with particular emphasis to those among you who are inclined to give absolute precedence to practicism – that such a view contributes to a *bad* practice. For to take a dogmatic view of that book of Lenin’s, or indeed all books by Lenin or even all the books ever produced by Marxism, is the precise equivalent of the procedures adopted by administrations that have set themselves up in the name of Marxism, that have absolved themselves of the need for any further thought and that have done nothing but base their own acts of violence on these theories without thinking them through and developing them critically. I believe that this is a particularly drastic example. Those of you who have escaped from the East – and this will be true of quite a number of you – will remember how over there materialism was dogmatically institutionalized as a kind of world-view to which people had to commit themselves. But by that very fact the authorities fell below the standards of their own theoretical ambitions, their scientific ambitions, in particular the claim that their consciousness was to be the most progressive consciousness; and that we should make this insight our own. Such claims are trampled on. That is the decisive factor, and I would maintain that it simply cuts the ground from beneath the feet of a certain kind of practicism – to say nothing of its naïvety and helplessness in the current situation.

The letter I have received goes on to ask about the meaning of the word ‘interpret’, and in this connection a sentence of Marx’s was

referred to in which interpreting was said to amount to the same thing as 'recognition'.<sup>14</sup> Marx presumably used the notion of 'recognition' alongside that of 'interpreting'. If my correspondent (if I may refer to him in this way) asks me – and he puts his question in a very friendly way, he asks me very trustingly – whether 'recognition' is necessarily contained in the concept of interpretation, I would reply, No, it is not necessarily implied, but what is essential is what I have been attempting to explain to you in the course of these lectures – and this is crucial – namely, that interpretation is much the same as *criticism*; that there can really be no interpretation that is not critical interpretation – as opposed to affirmative interpretation. That is what might be described as the general thesis I should like to present you with here. But without *such* an interpretation, that is, without a fully thought-out idea in control of itself, I believe that there can be no such thing as true practice. That aside, I believe that Marx really did believe – and we have to think back to the period in which the writings we are considering here were written, that is to say, around the year 1848 – that philosophers would in fact be best advised to pack it in and become revolutionaries, in other words, man the barricades – which, as is well known, cannot be found anywhere nowadays, and if they were to be erected in any advanced society today they would be quickly eliminated by police or security guards. But he probably did mean something of the sort. And the idea was this – I believe this shouldn't be softened up too much – that the end of classical German philosophy (as it was called at the time) would be succeeded by the heritage of socialism in which this philosophy would realize itself, and in so doing – in this respect Marx and Engels were good Hegelians – would negate, would abolish itself so that there would in fact no longer be any place left for philosophy. I believe that if we do inquire into Marx's view of this problem we find that his position was highly ambivalent. And this ambivalence points to the presence of a problem that needs to be thought through anew and in a principled way. It is always the case that whenever thinkers as powerful as Marx or Hegel or Kant arrive at an impasse it is not a good idea to be too clever in resolving the resulting antinomies. In general, it is far better to assure oneself of the necessity of such antinomies. On the one hand, as a student of classical economics, Marx called for full scientific objectivity. If you look at the passage that Horkheimer and I quoted in the preface to Dr Schmidt's book on Marx you will see how resolutely he expressed himself on the subject of a science that has a *thema probandum*.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, he was unsparing in his denunciations of a self-contained philosophy. The possible answer that suggests itself is of course that the realm for which he



demanded autonomy in this sense was science, and that to a certain degree he naïvely played science off against philosophy, which he dismissed as old hat, while at the same time he endorsed a science based on a Darwinist model as the appropriate standard for his day. In the meantime, we have come to realize something that he and Engels also understood very clearly: that science is not only a force of production but that it is implicated in the social power relations and command structures of its age. It follows from this that we cannot simply transfer to science the authority purloined from philosophy or the authority denied to philosophy by criticism. Meanwhile, the conceptless science – it too has been subject to a dialectic of history; it is no longer the same as it had appeared to Marx and Engels – a conceptless science in the meantime has undergone a development, as a result of which it is quite certainly unable to carry out the critical function that the founders of a so-called scientific socialism had entrusted it with. If anything, it has been moving in the opposite direction. In consequence, so-called scientific problems inevitably turn into problems of how science is to reflect on itself, of how science is to be criticized, the way in which science understands itself. In other words, these problems refer science back to the philosophy from which they were originally stolen. And it is this very process of referring science back to philosophy by virtue of its own reflection on itself that appears to me to be so closely bound up with the call for the actuality of philosophy, its contemporary relevance, that I have raised here.

Finally, however, I should like to say that there is no intention here of advocating a relapse into contemplation, as was to be found in the great idealist philosophies and ultimately even in Hegel, despite the great importance of practice in the Hegelian system – no such a relapse can be contemplated here. The late Karl Korsch, who as you perhaps know had been Brecht's philosophy teacher, criticized Horkheimer and myself even more sharply, already in America and also later on, after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. His objection was that we had regressed to the standpoint of Left Hegelianism.<sup>16</sup> This does not seem right to me because the standpoint of pure contemplation can no longer be sustained. Though we should note, incidentally, that the polarity Marx constructs between pure contemplation on the one hand and his own political philosophy on the other does only partial justice to the intentions of Left Hegelianism. This is a difficult question, one that will be resolved only by the detailed analyses of the Left Hegelian thinkers that are only now starting to get under way<sup>17</sup> – although we cannot deny the impressive political instincts which alerted Marx to the presence of the

retrograde and, above all, nationalist potential in such thinkers as Bruno Bauer, Stirner and Ruge. Now, I believe that what has transpired since, in both theory and actuality, means that we need have no fear of such a regression from a dialectical theory which happens not to be naïve. At least, that is my hope. I mean that it is not possible to think a right thought unless one *wills* the right thing [to happen]; that is to say, unless, underlying this thought, and providing it with a truly animating power, there is the desire that it should be right for human beings to enter into a condition in which meaningless suffering should come to an end and in which – I can only express it negatively – the spell hanging over mankind should be lifted. For thinking itself is always a form of behaviour;<sup>18</sup> it is, whether it likes it or not, a kind of practice, even in its purest logical operations. Every synthesis it creates brings about change. Every judgement that links two ideas together that were separate previously is, as such, work; I would be tempted to say it always brings about a minute change in the world. And once thinking sets out in its purest form to bring about change in even the smallest thing, no power on earth can separate theory from practice in an absolute way. The separation of theory and practice is itself an expression of reified consciousness. And it is the task of philosophy to dismantle the rigidity, the dogmatic and irreconcilable character of this separation. But what I mean here by refusing to operate with the concept of practice, as many people do and as I am sure many of you do find tempting, is that I would not like to confuse practice with pseudo-activity.<sup>19</sup> I would like to prevent you from becoming involved in this, not so as to set myself up as an authority, but simply to impress you a little bit with the arguments I have put forward today in the hope that you will think these matters through yourselves; that you will not imagine that you are achieving anything essential if you become an ‘organizer’ – to use the term thought up in America to describe people who bring people together, organize them, agitate and do other things of this sort. In every activity, there has to be a relation to the relevance, the potential it contains. Nowadays especially, precisely because decisive activity is blocked and because, as I have already explained often enough, thinking itself has become paralysed and impotent, chance practice has become a substitute for the things that do not happen. And the more people sense that this is not actually true practice, the more doggedly and passionately their minds become fixated on it. This explains why I wish to proclaim my reservations about those who are too quick to call for action, about the ‘passport inspectors’ who no longer ask every practice for its theoretical justification – which is certainly just as misguided – but, conversely, demand that every thought produces

its visa: OK, but what can you do with it? My view is that such behaviour impedes action instead of promoting it. And I would add that the possibility of a valid practice presupposes the full and undiminished awareness of the *blockage* of practice. If we measure a thought immediately by its possible realization, the productive force of thinking will be shackled as a result. The only thought that can be made practical is the thought that is not restricted in advance by the practice to which it is directly applied. So dialectical, in my view, is the relation between theory and practice. And I hope that I have succeeded, as far as was at all possible in my reduced condition today, in going some way to satisfying the request for a fuller explanation of what I said last time.

# LECTURE 6

## 25 November 1965

### Being. Nothing. Concept

#### Notes

The moment of transition cannot be conserved. We cannot continue to think that the revolution is imminent, a revolution that, on the one hand, has turned into a despotism and, on the other, is scarcely possible any more (administrative act, Red Army).

Practice endlessly postponed can no longer serve as an appellate court against philosophy. – The process of reflection about why this did not happen *is* philosophy. This includes the most advanced social insight: no shell or framework [*Gehäuse*].

Conversely, philosophy, whose claim to identity failed the decisive test, the transition to practice, is in need of radical self-criticism. Deprovincialization. Hence attack on Bollnow.<sup>1</sup>

Is phil[osophy] still possible = is dialectics possible. An unpedantic concept of the latter.

For this is the highest form of philosophy; it is the attempt to incorporate the non-conceptual into itself, that which is heterogeneous to philosophy, in short, to extend phil[osophy] to the essential, the very thing it suppresses in its traditional, affirmative form.

Situation: Thought thrown back on phil[osophy]. Furthermore: the pause for breath nowadays creates the opportunity for this.

Another reason why the world has not changed is that too little is interpreted. E.g. the uncritical acceptance of the domination of nature in Marx. – This has its practical implications.

On the other hand, phil[osophy] in its highest form hitherto cannot be salvaged. Objections have been raised to the identity of thought and being. If the world were = to spirit, it would be meaningful.

At the macro-level: because the world can no longer be said to be rational, meaningful: the reality of history has shaken thinking to its innermost core.

Philosophically: because identity as a theoretical idea is false. To be shown with reference to the first step in Hegel's Logic. *Logic* I, 110.<sup>2</sup>

(2)<sup>3</sup> In order to be able to teach the identity of Being + Nothing, Being, as the indeterminate, becomes indeterminacy, a concept, and in consequence the result – absolute spirit – is mischievously anticipated.

Hence an aporia: reference back to phil[osophy], and: this no longer suffices. Things work neither with philosophy nor without it. At issue is the question whether philosophy still has the right to speak of substantive, meaningful and hence essential matters.

Otherwise, it lapses either into formalism or into the randomness of unconnected and non-committal statements.

The regression to formalism and the non-committal has become acute in the history of phenomenology, [and] today in the increase in abstraction in H[eidegger].

Randomness as a risk in both content-based and uninhibitedly spontaneous philosophy [*Drauflosphilosophieren*]; likewise, the j[argon] of a[uthenticity] ubiquitous where the new ontology speaks of content: hypothesis of transitory and agrarian conditions.

25 November 65

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Towards the end of the lecture before last, and then, during almost the whole of the last lecture, we were concerned with the highly complex problems of the relations between theory and practice. I should like now to return to the reflections in which these rather extended observations had their place – namely, to the specific philosophical questions relating to the programme of a negative dialectics, if I can refer to it in this abbreviated way. Reflection about why a practical change did *not* take place, in other words, why practice finds itself in these difficulties or in this standstill situation – such reflection is itself an important part of what we can call philosophy today. In a certain sense, then, because the predicted transition from theory to practice did not take place, the interaction between theory and practice must revert to theory. Admittedly, this includes the most advanced insight into the processes of society; and if I am attempting to convey to you a conception of philosophy that is utterly opposed

to the idea of philosophy as a basic or overarching science, in short the idea of philosophy as a 'shell' [*Gehäuse*] – the reason is to be found in this fact. And likewise, without my going into this question at greater length in the course of these lectures, you will be able to understand why I refuse to accept the current separation of philosophy and sociology. On the other hand, it has to be said that the fact that the transition to practice that has been implicit in philosophy ever since Hegel has failed, contains the further implication that philosophy itself should be subjected to the most rigorous process of self-criticism, a self-criticism that must self-evidently take its lead from the latest forms assumed by philosophy.<sup>4</sup> (I am not thinking here of a critique of the countless irrelevant studies that appear every year as products of the academic industry and seem to have no difficulty in finding publishers and printers.)

We must inquire, then, whether philosophy is still possible. If I equate this question with the question of the possibility of dialectics, I shall need to justify this from the positive side. The negative side is that the anti-dialectical philosophies are unable to withstand that self-critical scrutiny that I deem indispensable. At the same time, I should like to ask you once more to think of dialectics in as unpedantic a way as possible, that is, if you wish to understand what I mean by the question of the possibility of dialectics, I must ask you not to think of it schematically. Dialectics represents the attempt to incorporate into philosophy whatever is heterogeneous, philosophy's other, we might call it. To anticipate, we might say it wishes to import the non-conceptual into philosophy. In Hegel, in the sense of the identification of the non-identical,<sup>5</sup> in the sense of the questions I am describing to you, it is a matter not of *incorporating* the non-conceptual, but of *comprehending* it in its non-conceptuality. If that could be achieved, and so as to become able to speak of the essential matters that so often elude it, philosophy would have to come to terms with the very things that it has always suppressed in its traditional form right down to Hegel – I shall come on to speak about this shortly; the very things that in their traditional and, as we may also add, affirmative shape were carefully allowed to slip through the net. The situation, then, is that thought is thrown back on philosophy while, at the same time, philosophy itself has become problematic, problematic not just in the sense that it has become a special discipline, pursued in an unrelated and indifferent manner, but also in the far more serious sense that in its present form it manifestly does not match up to its own expectations. This fact of being thrown back onto philosophy has its real equivalent in the present situation. We find ourselves in a kind of historical breathing space. We are in a

situation in which it is once again possible to give serious attention to thought, thanks to current material conditions and also to the relatively peaceful climate, at least in the Federal Republic. And the attempts to confuse us about this and to keep on crying wolf have become ideology at this moment in time because an analysis of contemporary society suggests that in the long run a situation in which reflection is possible cannot last – so that we should seize the opportunity while it is there. And I would say that this opportunity implies a kind of obligation for us all, and especially for you, to put in some serious thought and not allow yourselves to be diverted by the feeling that mental activity should be subordinated to the hectic bustle of everyday activity; there is something of a moral obligation here that reality imposes as much on you as on me (if I may say so). The fact that the world was not changed was certainly not simply to be attributed merely to intellectual factors, but *one* reason why it was not changed was probably the fact that it was too little interpreted.

This reminds me of one particular problem that Marx does not deal with adequately and in which I and a few like-minded people see something of great importance. In Marx the principle of the *domination of nature* is actually accepted quite naïvely. According to the Marxian way of seeing, there is something of a change in the relations of domination between people – they are supposed to come to an end, that is, such domination should disappear – but the unconditional domination of nature by human beings is not affected by this, so that we might say that the image of a classless society in Marx has something of the quality of a gigantic joint-stock company for the exploitation of nature, as Horkheimer once formulated it. The fact that, according to Marx, the labour performed by animals does not lead to the production of surplus value – even though the costs of reproduction are lower in animals than the time or energy expended – the fact that, according to an explicit passage in *Capital*,<sup>6</sup> their labour produces no surplus value is merely the crassest symbol of this. I have no wish to become embroiled in romantic reflections on nature, but I believe that, when I say that there has been too little interpretation, we have alighted on a very crucial problem. If there is only *one* truth, it is not possible to criticize radically the principle of domination on the one hand, while unreservedly acquiescing in it in an undialectical manner on the other. If it is the case – as Marx and Engels taught, although I am by no means sure that it is the case – that domination over external nature called for societies in which domination prevailed through the millennia because things wouldn't have worked otherwise – and that this situation is supposed now to be radically transformed all of a sudden, then you need a very strong

faith (to put it mildly) to imagine that the forms of the domination of nature should persist in accordance with idealism, in accordance with a Fichtean idea of absolute subjectivity, *without* forms of domination making their appearance [in society]. If in the Eastern-bloc countries the bureaucrats have eaten their fill and have formed themselves into a class, this is undeniably connected to the process of industrialization with its utterly ruthless and undialectical demands for the domination of nature, whereas for a seriously liberated vision of society that includes the relationship between man and nature, the relation to the domination of nature has to be changed if it is not constantly to reproduce itself in the internal forms of society. I am providing you with this illustration only so as to show you something of the highly practical significance of which interpretation, in other words, philosophy, free reflection, is capable.

On the other hand, philosophy in its highest form hitherto, and that was Hegelian philosophy with its attempt to comprehend the non-identical, albeit to comprehend it by *identifying* with it – this philosophy is beyond redemption. The assertion of the identity of being and thought, which stands behind the entire philosophical tradition, has succumbed irrevocably to the protests against it. If the world were truly at one with spirit, if it were the product of spirit, permeated with spirit, this would mean with inexorable necessity that the world would be meaningful in its current form. However, that very fact, the very assertion that, as people put it, the world has a meaning, can simply not be maintained in the light of all that we have experienced in our own epoch of history. A philosophy that blinds itself to these experiences and that clings instead to the thesis of meaningfulness in epistemology and the related realm of metaphysics, without allowing itself to be deterred by the truth that the world really does not have a meaning any more – such a philosophy really would sink to the level of idle chatter and professional reassurance worthy only of the contempt held in readiness by certain philosophical trends such as the positivists, as well as the common or garden opinions of the ordinary man. Philosophy, then, particularly when measured against its thesis of the identity of thinking and being, is shaken to the core by the historical experience of their separation. This situation has of course its philosophical form, and not merely a form arising from a pre-philosophical consciousness. And it is the philosophical form that is the truly authoritative one. If we were only to say: thought cannot blind itself to experience, this would be just as dogmatic – as long as it remains consistent in itself – as the opposite idea that does not give a fig for the world with which it would like simultaneously to be identical. Just as *the one* assurance is narrow



and vacuous, so, too, such a critical repudiation would lack validity. We can show, therefore, that, as a theoretical idea, identity is itself false, an idea obtained by sleight of hand. And this demonstration, this compelling *negative* demonstration, is what I regard as the central problem of philosophical criticism today.

I should like to illustrate this with reference to an example taken from the most important text dealing with philosophical identity, namely, Hegel's *Logic*, a passage right at the start where Hegel discusses the transition from being, as the most indeterminate category, to nothing. The statements I have in mind are to be found in Book I of the *Logic*, in the section entitled 'Quality'. It is around page 110 of the Glockner edition of Volume 1 of the *Science of Logic* if you would like to take a look at the relevant passage.<sup>7</sup> You will perhaps be aware that Hegel's *Logic* begins by referring back to Aristotle, but with an implicit subjective turn. It begins with the concept of 'being', and Hegel says of this being – we might almost say 'inferred' or shows through his phenomenology – that it is identical with nothing. Whether he is undertaking an analysis of the concept or whether he is analysing the underlying substance is a question we shall have to leave to one side here because Hegel would say that, given such a bad universal as 'being', the distinction between concept and thing would itself be a determination that would do violence to the indeterminate character of the substratum 'being'. Now, we should take a closer look at this thesis that the concept 'being' is indifferent to the distinction between the concept 'being' and the thing 'being' – and see what the position is. In the passage I have referred to, Hegel is concerned with the empirical nullity of concepts such as that of empty space which result from abstractions – as indeed he would admit of the concept of being as a concept mediated in itself in the course of the *Logic*. And the course of the *Logic* itself may be said to be the determination, the statement of the stages of abstraction that have to be passed through if something like the concept of being is to come into existence at all. To this extent, these movements, the progressive movements of Hegel's *Logic*, are also *retrograde* movements and have always been so from their very inception. That is to say: being is the indeterminate – and he in fact calls it that in connection with certain observations by Jacobi, to whom he is not well disposed: so, being is the indeterminate. In the very next sentence, however, we read, 'They [i.e. the thoughts of pure space, pure time, pure consciousness, or pure being] are the results of abstraction; they are expressly determined as *indeterminate* and this – to go back to its simplest form – is being.'<sup>8</sup> Now, listen carefully here to how he goes on! In the *Science of Logic* the crucial statements are generally to be

found in its subtle linguistic transitions. And it might well be the case that at this point a decision of immeasurable philosophical significance and of equally significant dubiousness has been pre-empted. So, Hegel continues: 'But it is this very *indeterminateness* which constitutes its determinateness;' – that is, the determinates of being – 'for indeterminateness is opposed to determinateness; hence, as so opposed, it is itself determinate or the negative, and the pure, quite abstract negative. It is this indeterminateness or abstract negation which thus has being present within it, which reflection, both outer and inner, enunciates when it equates it' – that is, being – 'with nothing, declares it to be an empty product of thought, to be nothing.'<sup>9</sup> Now, ladies and gentlemen, please note that at first, when he speaks of being, Hegel talks about '*the indeterminate*', but goes on imperceptibly to replace 'indeterminate' with '*indeterminateness*'. I believe that the majority of people reading Hegel with a certain lack of guile will ignore this linguistic nuance and be inclined to attribute it to the laxness of expression that predominates in Hegel, the reasons for which I have attempted to unravel in my essay 'Skoteinos'.<sup>10</sup> I believe, however, that at this point, at this decisive point, we cannot take the easy way out, but really have to take Hegel at his word. Just reflect for a moment on the difference between 'the indeterminate' and 'indeterminateness'. The language is right to make a distinction here. 'The indeterminate' is in the nature of a substratum. To be sure, the concept of the indeterminate does not distinguish between concept and thing, but precisely because there has been no determination the distinction between the determinant, namely the category, and the thing does not emerge as such in this term. But in this absence of differentiation appropriate to it, it does possess both: both the concept and the thing that is undetermined. However, when Hegel substitutes 'indeterminateness' for this, the concept, namely, the absence of determinateness *as such* takes the place of *what* is undetermined – through what Kant would have called a 'subreption', that is, a misrepresentation. The purely linguistic slippage from 'the indeterminate', the term that denotes what is underlying, to *indeterminateness* is itself the turn to the concept. And it is only this conceptual abstraction that is equated with being through this manoeuvre – that is, basically we have here a primal act of identification that eliminates the element of being that *is*, that is to say, that is not indeterminateness but merely something that has not been determined – this act of identification, I repeat, is what allows Hegel to equate this being, as something purely conceptual, with its pure conceptualization, namely, *indeterminateness*. You can see, then, that the equality of being and nothing depends on thinking of being as indeterminateness; in other words,

being is supposed from the outset to belong to the conceptual sphere. If it were still the indeterminate – as Hegel writes at first and in tune with the term he has somewhat condescendingly taken over from Jacobi – it would not be possible to equate it with nothing. For a something can be undetermined, but it cannot be said of it that it is ‘as good as nothing’. But as a general conceptual form from which every recollection of its underlying reality has been driven away, indeterminateness cannot be treated in the same way as something contrasted with a concept; it is in fact no more than a concept, pure concept, and *by virtue of that* it is nothing. And it is through these means that the entire method of dialectics that unfolds so magnificently in Hegel’s *Logic* is set in motion.

What I believe I have shown you with reference to a small-scale linguistic detail can be said to have a far more general application. It shows that Hegel’s entire philosophy acquires its identity only by conjuring away the non-conceptual from the very outset. That is the very greatest temptation for philosophy. And it is far easier to succumb to this temptation and to interpret it as the movement of philosophy than to identify the untruth it contains. For when we speak, when we philosophize, we are in fact *always* dealing in concepts. Even when we speak of existing things, we cannot act as do Braque or Picasso in certain pictures from the Cubist period, or as early Dadaist painting attempted. By this I mean we cannot, so to speak, paste a piece of existing material into our philosophical texts.<sup>11</sup> And even if we wished to do so, it would presumably not do much to advance our philosophy. Incidentally, the fact that art continually and rather desperately makes efforts to do precisely that may suggest that the sensibilities of artists at just this point have detected something that actually would be a subject for philosophy, but that the complacent backwardness of the philosophers has somehow never allowed them to get a proper grip on it. Thus in philosophy we are obliged to make use *of* concepts in order to talk *about* concepts. And this means that what we are concerned with in philosophy – namely, the non-conceptual, that which the concepts refer to – is excluded from philosophy from the outset. Thus by virtue of its own methodology philosophy bars its own way to what it wishes to achieve, namely, to be in a position to judge matters that are not itself, that are not concepts. And I would like to suggest quite simply as a programme – I believe that you will all understand why I do so – that philosophy should reflect conceptually on this process in which it deals only with concepts and, by raising it to the level of the concept, should revise it and reverse it again, in so far as this can be achieved with conceptual methods. Whereas Freud remarks in a magnificent passage in the

*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* that psychoanalysis is concerned with ‘the dregs of the phenomenal world’,<sup>12</sup> we might say that in its own approach philosophy generally finds its object precisely in what it denies itself: the dregs of the concept, in other words, in what is not itself concept.<sup>13</sup> And the question of the possibility of a negative dialectics is the question of whether this process of disentangling can succeed. In other words, can the self-reflection of the concept succeed in breaking through the wall that the concept erects around itself and its concerns by virtue of its own conceptual nature. You will be able to see from this challenge confronting philosophy, and from the almost prohibitive difficulties it entails, that to be a philosopher today is not a piece of cake, as they say in Swabia. On the one hand, philosophy cannot simply be dispensed with. The naïvety of practice that philosophy distances itself from is not merely narrow-minded, it is also – for the reasons I have tried to explain to you today – intrinsically problematic. By this I mean it results in a *false* practice. But, on the other hand, the condition of philosophy itself is inherently so problematic and dubious that we really must propose curing it by means of an antidote even though we do not know just *how* it works or even *whether* it will work at all. And I believe that it makes sense to devote oneself to philosophy only if we seriously face up to this aporetic situation (to use the learned expression), in other words, this diabolical impasse from which we do not know whether we can find an escape. And by facing up to it, I mean asking ourselves whether philosophy is at all able to think about substantive matters, matters of substance, whether it has any grounds to do so and whether it is legitimate for it to speak about essential problems. If philosophy does not take up this challenge, if it fails in this task, then it has only two remaining options, both equally bad. On the one hand, it risks relapsing into formalism. The philosophical efforts of the last generation were a single-minded attempt to escape the formalism in which epistemology had become entangled. I need remind you only of the famous title of Scheler’s book *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*,<sup>14</sup> or of Bergson’s entire output, which was conceived as a critique of abstract universal concepts.<sup>15</sup> Now, with regard to the intensification of the aporia, the dilemma, of which I spoke, it is significant that the branch of phenomenology that tended towards the content-side of thought ended up reverting to formalism with something of a compelling logic. This is true of Scheler and also of the early Heidegger. For their mere assurance that ‘being’ is not abstract, that it is not even a concept, but that it is the most concrete thing imaginable – that assurance counts for nothing. To start with, as Hegel repeatedly insisted in his quarrel with Jacobi, being is the

most abstract concept imaginable. The reason why Heidegger has latched on to this concept is to be explained by the fact that – and I should like to make this clear to you – if philosophy does *not* retreat to this extreme abstractness it will run the risk of losing its way in vague, random, arbitrary postulates. And traditionally this will take the form of hypostasizing definitions that have been taken from history and have their meaning only in their historical context – and he uses such terms as if, whether they be ‘dispositions’ [*Befindlichkeiten*] of existence or even attributes of being, they simply existed as such. I believe that I do Heidegger no injustice if I say that his development from *Being and Time* to the so-called turn [*Kehre*] is connected with this. By this I mean that he pursued that process of emptying his philosophy of content that ultimately led to his cult of the word ‘being’ because he sensed that the material determinations of *Being and Time* – which incidentally is what made this book so influential – are not simply determinations of existence or being, but that they contain far more specificities and also, by the standards of a pure philosophy of origins, far more random, arbitrary elements than he was willing to admit at the time. In fact, there have been further additions to these ‘dispositions’, which became ever more optimistic as affluence increased – so that ‘anxiety’, ‘care’ and ‘death’ were gradually replaced by such concepts as ‘integrity’ [*Lauterkeit*]. This development from negative dispositions to positive ones is itself very instructive; I would seriously recommend that you look into this for yourselves. I would almost go so far as to say that philosophy in its current state in the academic world has become polarized, with the random and arbitrary on the one side and the formal on the other. Moreover, there is something like a functional connection between these two poles. By this I mean that if a content-based philosophy in its present form does not succeed in implementing the programme I have tried to set out for you today, it will be compelled to revert to those very formalisms from which it had once tried to break away. And the question or the problem facing philosophy is simply about how it can have both content *and* rigour at the same time. And that indeed can only become possible if the philosophers succeed in escaping from the equation of universal concepts with the substantive contents about which they have agreed to this day.

# LECTURE 7

## 30 November 1965

### 'Attempted Breakouts'

#### *Notes*

In Hegel the determinate particular is supposed to be determined by spirit because its determination is nothing but spirit: hence 'concepts'.

(3) Otherwise philosophy would have to resign itself to being no more than the methodology of the sciences.

Initial disagreement with H[egel]: Phil[osophy]'s interest to be found at the point where he and the whole of phil[osophy] are uninterested, in the non-conceptual. Krug's quill. Right and wrong. The non-conceptual – but where the concept of it becomes aware of something.

Hence, arrives as it were at the dregs of phil[osophical thought], at what is itself not thought. – Link to Freud: dregs of the phenomenal world. – The non-conceptual is mediated as the neglected, excluded, in which the parti pris of the concept [is to be found].

Bergson like Husserl stimulated this interest in the non-conceptual:

B[ergson] in the stratum beneath the conceptual; amorphous images

Husserl in the essence to be intuited from the particular, i.e. not classificatory.

In both, however, it remains mental, subjective, something in which in truth the concept was always implicit.

In B[ergson] the arbitrary, dualistic assumption of a particular mode of knowledge that remains dependent on the concept. Unmediated. Resigned to poetry, NB Proust not lacking in the conceptual. In Husserl the pure entities [*Wesenheiten*] are concepts, like the rest of them.

(4) The attempts by both to break out are idealist, hence doomed. In both cases, their objectivity is purely subjective. – Breakout not possible as an act, but only through self-reflection.

Philosophy faces the task of breaking out despite everything; without a minimum of confidence in doing so, it can't be done.

Philosophy must say what cannot be said. Against Wittgenstein. It must work away at this contradiction.

To this extent, its own concept is contradictory, dialectical in itself.

Utopia of cognition: to open up the non-conceptual with the aid of the concept, without reducing it to the concept.

Reconfiguring the idea of the infinite.<sup>1</sup>

Phil[osophy] should not 'be exhaustive'; it should not reduce objects to a minimum number of propositions.

(5) It is concerned with what is heterogeneous to itself without reducing it to prefabricated categories.

30 November 65

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Last time, towards the end of the hour, I spoke to you about the tendency of the latest ontological trends in philosophy to regress either to a new formalism – the very same formalism that the ontologies, orientated towards substantive contents as they were, had started out by attacking. Alternatively, they regress to relatively random content-filled propositions. As far as their randomness is concerned, you could say that, on the one hand, this was the risk run by every philosophy not orchestrated from a fixed point. On the other hand, you might object that to a certain degree the idea I am trying to expound to you is exposed to the same danger. I should like to leave the latter point open for the moment; we shall have to return to it in due course and examine it seriously. As to the first point, it would perhaps be just as well for you to remind yourselves that systematic philosophies, such as Hegel's, had a huge advantage – in terms of, what shall I call it, in terms of philosophical balance – a huge advan-

tage over the ontologies by basing themselves on the assumption that spirit is the sole reality and that all reality is reducible to spirit. Thanks to this general thesis, Hegelian philosophy never had to fear that it might sink to the level of mere existence in the same way as the ontologies which had no such explicit claims to fall back on. The random nature of the empirical is unavoidable here in such philosophy, at the moment when it returns from its furthest abstractions – whose abstract nature, incidentally, it denies. And in this context we can perhaps understand that the material side of, say, Heidegger’s philosophy should have that peculiarly archaic quality that is so redolent of small-town or agrarian conditions that I tried to shine a critical light on in *The Jargon of Authenticity*.<sup>2</sup> But of course in such situations it is never enough just to make a critical case; the task of philosophy – what distinguishes philosophy from mere cultural chatter – is to analyse rigorously what has been criticized; to set the object of criticism in motion in order to comprehend it in its necessity. Heidegger’s philosophy, which claims not to be formal and which nevertheless needs to draw itself together into supreme, abstract categories, this philosophy, when it then enters into the material side of things, has every interest in making sure that the transition into materiality does not appear to be as haphazard as it must be in reality, given the vagueness of the concept of existence. In consequence, it almost inevitably has recourse in its material propositions to the past, to conditions that have become historical and that have acquired a kind of aura through that historicity; the aura that events have developed in this way and no other, and which in addition, if we may put it like this, are in a sense pre-ordained. This, then, has the further consequence that this philosophy assumes the mantle of the archaic for the additional reason that the idea of the concrete<sup>3</sup> that it has conceived is itself something not to be met with in modern society precisely because modern society is ruthlessly abstract and functional. Thus if the concrete is to be presented without criticism as an existent thing, it can be sought only in those more or less natural conditions that, because they have been condemned by the course of history and have passed away, are able to assume something of the illusion of reconciliation. That, then, might be described as the philosophical history of those archaisms and those socially reactionary implications that are assumed by ontological trends in philosophy when they venture into material realms. They then represent what might be called hypostases of the transitory belonging to the realm of being. The effect of ascribing the transitory to being as one of its qualities is, on the one hand, to facilitate its escape from its own transitoriness and fortuitousness, while, on the other, it borrows from the past and



the historical that colour of the concrete from which it derives its attractiveness as a philosophy.

Now – I have already told you that in Hegel, in contrast, the determinate particular can be determined by spirit simply because that determination is itself basically nothing but spirit. And the way in which this happens – last time, I explained this with reference to a very clear instance from the *Science of Logic* – the way in which this happens is that from the outset Hegel presents existing reality in the form of concepts, reduced to the realm of concepts, a tactic that enormously facilitates this act of identification. This, then, is the profoundest reason, the philosophical explanation for the fact that Hegel’s philosophy, which has the absolute concept as its *terminus ad quem*, deals only in concepts from the very outset. If this were not so, his philosophy would according to his own view be forced to resign itself to being no more than a methodology for the sciences and the like. I believe that this allows us to distinguish quite precisely between the programme I am trying to expound to you and Hegel’s philosophy, to which it is so closely related. The distinction I would make is to say that the interest of philosophy can be found to lie at the precise point where he and the entire philosophical tradition have no interest, namely, in the *non-conceptual*. One of Hegel’s earlier critics – his name was Krug<sup>4</sup> – objected that if he really wished to do justice to Hegel’s philosophy he would have to be able to deduce the quill with which he had been writing – this is Krug’s famous ‘quill’. Hegel responded to Krug’s argument in a very cavalier fashion, i.e. very disdainfully – using an apologetic τόπος that frequently recurs in Hegel in the most varied contexts – stating that it was not the task of philosophy to concern itself with such trivia as quills, but to devote itself to essentials.<sup>5</sup> This controversy, like most controversies, is very hard to resolve. Idiomatic though Krug’s example may be – for who would want to deduce a quill he holds in his hand? – his argument contains a point of interest, precisely the interest that Hegel’s philosophy fails to satisfy. And if I may give you this little tip – whenever Hegel displays an unusual arrogance in dismissing an argument, we may suspect that there is an underlying reason for it. Despite the pathetic nature of the example he gives – Plato took the view that there was no reason for examples not to be pathetic;<sup>6</sup> in this respect, as in others, I do not agree with Plato – nevertheless, Krug realized that philosophy, an emphatic philosophy, failed to make good one of its most essential claims at this juncture, namely, it failed in its attempt to comprehend the non-conceptual. That is what is implied in Krug’s criticism. On the other hand, it must be said that Hegel was in the right against Krug since it can obviously not be the task

of philosophy to concern itself with such trivial matters. I believe that this is an area where we cannot really make progress with a priori philosophical arguments. For whatever strikes us about a determinate particular and, if you like, a non-conceptual thing, whatever the concept extracts from it – that cannot really be observed in any such non-conceptual, opaque something or other from the outset. For if we already knew, if it were already an assured meaning, we would have no need of the effort and labour of a philosophy designed to unearth this very information. On the other hand, however, there must presumably be something there that attracts our attention in the first place and that probably can only be grasped by a process of theoretical reflection capable of anticipating such matters – this, incidentally, is yet another valid insight we owe to idealist philosophy. To take the most famous instance in modern times: the attention paid by Freudian psychology to the dross, the ‘dregs of the phenomenal world’, to otherwise neglected phenomena, such as promises or involuntary actions or slips or other things of the same sort – what these things *mean* individually cannot be anticipated; and any attempt to find out what they mean in advance could of course entirely miss the mark. However, if you have a theory like Freud’s, and a well-formed theory of repression, you will be able to see in advance that such apparently lifeless, obscure objects may contain something of interest that has been pulled out of shape. And in fact, what the three principal themes of Freudian psychology have in common – involuntary actions or slips, dreams and the neuroses – is that they all combine an element of the non-conceptual or, as we would say nowadays, the absurd, the irrational, with a relevance, an essential importance *for the concept*.

I think, then, that philosophy – and for that matter almost every material discipline – ought to follow Freud’s truly brilliant example and concentrate on matters that have not been pre-digested by the pre-existing concepts of the prevailing philosophy and science. A further factor in favour of such an approach is that it allows us to see far more of objects on which the generally dominant, conformist way of thinking has not yet left its imprint than where that is not the case. The French Surrealist movement has shown that it had an extraordinary flair for this in ways that have both philosophical and meta-psychological implications. We might say that the non-conceptual itself, when we approach it for the first time, when we grapple with it, is already mediated by concepts in a negative sense – it is the neglected, the excluded; and the fact that the concept has not granted it access tells us something about the prejudice, the *parti pris* and the obstacles imposed by the concept. We see this very clearly in the

group of phenomena to which Freud turned his attention, since they – for reasons that he explained very precisely – have always been subject to a very high degree of repression. There is such a thing as societal repression, and one of the organs of the philosophically inclined – if indeed we may speak of an organ in this context – is the ability to sense something of this repression, to sense what has been repressed in certain objects by the general consciousness, and to be attracted by the very things that pass unobserved or by what people prefer to regard as undeserving of scrutiny. If the method I am trying to describe to you constantly tends towards micrology, in other words to immerse itself in the minutest details, it does so not out of philosophical pedantry, but precisely so as to strike a spark, and my predilection for such matters is connected with factors such as these. For in general the concept tends to magnify its objects; it perceives in them only what is large enough to compare with other objects. Whatever falls through the net is inevitably the most minute thing, but it may well contain the very thing that cries out for philosophical explanation. This interest of philosophy in the non-conceptual about which I have been telling you at such length is not new; we can say that in the last generation of philosophers – that is to say, two generations ago in your case, while for me it is the generation I regard as my spiritual forebears – in that generation interest in this question was very much alive. And whatever products of that generation have any claim to be *modern* are defined by this need.

I shall mention only two of the most important representatives of this trend, and I do so because in their cases the need of which I have been telling you is not merely a matter of *Weltanschauung*, as it is with Klages,<sup>7</sup> but one that has entered into a particular symbiosis with science in an attempt to acquire an authoritative validity. I am thinking here of Bergson and Husserl, both of whom individually, but in very different ways, announced an interest in something that diverges from classification. Both men, incidentally, were acting under the coercion of the same situation; both were resisting the universal dominance of causal, mechanical thinking and reacting to the unsatisfactory implications of cause-and-effect thinking for the desire to comprehend. Faced by classification, Bergson judged the non-conceptual to be the higher truth and sought it out in a stratum of more or less amorphous images residing beneath consciousness and the conceptual – in short, in an unconscious world of images to which Freudian psychoanalysis points again and again and which aspires to become something like an immediate knowledge of things in contrast to the objects of consciousness arrived at through a process of abstraction. That at least is the theory as he formulated it in what I

think is his most seminal and remarkable work, *Matières et mémoire*.<sup>8</sup> Husserl, in contrast, resembles Bergson in certain respects, but remained true to rationalism in a traditional sense to a far greater degree than Bergson – Husserl taught that ‘pure entities’ [*Wesenheiten*], that is, what is philosophically relevant (I suppose we must also say: concepts), are to be extracted from particulars by a process of intuiting; that is, these pure entities are the fruits of a particularly disposed ‘attitude’ towards experience, to the concrete and particular, and not, as is generally supposed, the product of a comparative process of abstraction. In Husserl’s case, this is connected with a realist view of concepts, namely, that the logical unity of kinds or species possesses an objectivity that is not produced by the abstract mental operations of the subject. And the knowing mind in its attentiveness to every individual being is supposed to be capable of becoming aware of this objectivity in a relatively simple manner; all he has to do is to omit everything that is merely individuated, in other words, tied to space and time. This turning against definition in time-space is something he shares, remarkably enough, with Bergson’s theory of images. The concept, then, is supposed to be contained within each particular from the outset and has no need to be uncovered by the mediating interventions of the subject. This is something that Husserl tried to explain and to refine in a whole series of analyses – starting from his study of ‘The Ideal Unity of the Species’ and the controversy about the ‘modern theories of abstraction’ from the *Logical Investigations*;<sup>9</sup> and then in the ‘Sixth Logical Investigation’ about categorical intuition, which contained the doctrine of the intuitability of the concept in an extreme form;<sup>10</sup> and finally, intensified to an extreme, in the introductory chapter on essence and existence that opens the *Ideas*: ‘General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology’.<sup>11</sup> In both, however, the non-conceptual to which their philosophical efforts are devoted remains something mental, subjective. And, in truth, the concept always forms an implicit part of the non-conceptual.

Bergson dogmatically assumes, wilfully, it would seem, a duality of knowledge. On the one hand, there is this profound cognition of essence, nourished by images; and, on the other hand, there is the current form of classificatory knowledge. And these two kinds of knowledge persist side by side as two possibilities, in a dualistic fashion. Indeed, Bergson’s entire philosophy, very remarkably for a metaphysician of life, which is what he was, maintained a strictly dualistic character right into his late work on *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.<sup>12</sup> In the process, he fails to realize that the so-called intuitions or those images that are supposed to possess a

pre-conceptual objectivity in the subject cannot be expressed except through the medium of concepts. And he fails to explain the relations between these two types or possibilities of knowledge, any more than he spells out in concrete terms the nature of what he thinks of as the higher type of knowledge to be found in 'real duration'. We could say that there is a sense in which he resigns himself to the idea of knowledge as literature: literature is assigned the task of accomplishing what philosophy was supposed to achieve. And we do in fact possess the magnificent experiment on the part of a writer, the greatest novelist of our era, who attempted to put Bergson's thesis to the test. I am speaking here of Proust. However, it is a very interesting fact, one that has probably never been properly taken into account by the prevailing Proust tittle-tattle – that Proust made incomparably greater use of the rational forms of cognition than are to be found in Bergson's programme, which incidentally he never fully endorsed. We might almost say that Proust's attempt to put Bergson's philosophy to the test is what has gone some way to refuting this attempted Bergsonian breakout, and this is because, in order to arrive at the concrete, indissoluble experience that he pictured to himself, Proust has made use of the very rationality – by which I mean the ego psychology – that would have been precluded by Bergson's own theory.<sup>13</sup>

As far as Husserl is concerned, I have tried to show in *Against Epistemology* why his attempt to break out failed as well. I should like to add only one point to this here, since I am reluctant to repeat material in these lectures when you can easily read it up for yourselves in print. The strange fact in Husserl – and here too astonishingly little has been written about it in the relevant literature – is that what gazes out at us when I extract the pure entities from the individuations or the individual phenomena (instead of appropriating them by a process of comparison) – that what gazes out is at bottom nothing but the good old concepts of classificatory logic. So what we have here is really no more than an attempt at an ontological vindication of the concepts that are supposed not to be concepts established by the cognitive mind, but to belong intrinsically to the things themselves. But if we then look at what individual experience yields up in Husserl, what opens up to individual experience, we simply find abstract categories that are just like the categories of ordinary scientific discourse. And in consequence, in his late phase, when he sought to underpin this entire theory with a transcendental logic, these were categories with which he could effortlessly communicate.<sup>14</sup>

These, then, are the two great attempts of the last fifty to sixty years to break out from philosophy, from the realm of 'ready made' concepts. Although pursued with extraordinary energy, they must be

regarded as failures on the grounds that they were both idealistic, that both men hoped to escape from the sphere of concepts by developing the concept of immanent consciousness – the ‘stream of consciousness’ – as the true foundation of cognition. In this respect they were in agreement with the entire dominant tradition of idealist epistemology, as they were in simultaneously believing that by an act of will this subjective element that they had identified in the stream of consciousness itself could be awarded the dignity and the predicates of a higher objectivity. I should like to draw a lesson from this that I believe could be fruitful for the method I wish to develop further for you. It is this: this kind of breakout is not possible as an act that plunges head over heels, as it were, into a type of cognition that has not been produced by the subject; it does not plunge, then, into the alleged objectivity of the pure entities or into an allegedly trans-subjective world of images that is nevertheless located somehow in the subject. Every attempt at a breakout that is initiated by the subject, out of subjective whim – we might also say: out of subjective freedom of choice – is doomed to futility. This is because of its origins in arbitrary subjective choice, which necessarily forces it back into the sphere from which it desires to escape. We might say that the objectivity in which it immerses itself really has a kind of mirror effect. If a breakout is at all possible, it cannot be the product of the postulate of something alien to the subject; it cannot result from postulating a Not-I – we know of course from the history of philosophy that the subjective postulate of the Not-I was in fact the zenith of idealism.<sup>15</sup> Rather, if such a breakout exists as a possibility, the only path leading to it is that of the critical self-reflection of the subjective sphere. In the course of that self-reflection, this insight recognizes itself – in a compelling, conclusive manner – as something that is not *merely* subjectivity, but as something that necessarily presupposes a relation to the very thing that, as idealist, it had hoped to be able to bring into being. In other words, the subject is shown that it is itself something postulated, or, at any rate, that it is *also* something postulated, and not simply by demonstrating that the Not-I is itself a postulate. At the same time, what survives from the attempts of these philosophers is the *task* of engineering a breakout. Bergson’s influence on the culture of his age and Husserl’s equally significant influence on the discipline of philosophy – though I would not at all wish to equate that discipline with culture – demonstrates that, for all their lack of success, what they aspired to reflected a very profound collective need. But if we have no confidence in the feasibility of such a breakout from the sphere of the manufactured concept into the non-conceptual realm essentially belonging to that concept, this would

rule out philosophizing of any kind. You may well reply: then why philosophize at all – and I can give you no answer to that. Nevertheless, if you feel such a need, it cannot be satisfied without an element of confidence in the possibility of a breakout. And this confidence itself is inseparable from the confident *utopian* belief that it ought after all to be possible to obtain access to that which is not already shaped in advance, staged or reified. For this reason, I would maintain that Wittgenstein's statement that 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'<sup>16</sup> is the anti-philosophical statement par excellence. We should insist instead that philosophy consists in the effort to say what cannot be said, in particular whatever cannot be said directly, in a single sentence or a few sentences, but only in a context. In this sense it has to be said that the concept of philosophy is itself the contradictory effort to say, through mediation and contextualization, what cannot be said *hic et nunc*; to that extent philosophy contains an inner contradiction, that is, it is inwardly dialectical in itself. And this perhaps is the profoundest vindication of the dialectical method, namely, that philosophy in itself – as the attempt to say the unsayable, before it arrives at any particular content or any particular thesis – is dialectically determined. It would be the *utopia of cognition* – if anyone were to draw a particular inference from what I have tried to explain to you today – we would achieve the utopia of cognition if it might prove possible to grasp the non-conceptual not by means of some allegedly superior non-conceptual methods, but by unlocking the non-conceptual by means of the concept, and the self-criticism of concepts – without reducing what has been comprehended, the non-conceptual, to concepts by main force.<sup>17</sup>

What I would like to do now is to explain this to you in greater detail, by telling you about philosophy's changed attitude towards a concept that has deeply concerned philosophers in modern times, particularly since Leibniz, the philosophical founder of the infinitesimal calculus – namely the idea of the *infinite*.<sup>18</sup> In general, we can say that in a sense philosophy, at any rate modern philosophy, consists of the sustained effort to grasp the nature of the infinite. In the same way, over great expanses of time the modern history of philosophy has run parallel to the spread of the infinitesimal calculus in the positive sciences. It could be objected that it cannot be the task of philosophy to be 'exhaustive', to use the schoolmasterly expression. Even when I was still at school, I never understood why teachers would write at the end of an essay that the topic had not been fully 'exhausted'. This was because even then I was aware that the human mind was concerned with intensity, depth of immersion, and not a

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sort of quantitative completeness – of the kind, incidentally, that has an honourable pedigree going back to Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode*, where exhaustiveness according to the criteria of right knowledge has an explicit role to play.<sup>19</sup> As a kind of counterblast to Descartes, we could say that philosophy should not be exhaustive; it should not reduce its objects to a minimum of propositions or concepts. For the idea that a maximum number of objects should be reduced to a minimum number of categories contains by implication the very primacy of the concept over the non-conceptual that I believe philosophy has to abandon with the utmost decisiveness and clarity. The task of philosophy, then – and I would like to finish today on this programmatic note – is to concern itself with what is different from itself, heterogeneous, and not with the attempt to import everything that exists into itself and its concepts. Its task is not to reduce the entire world to a prefabricated system of categories, but rather the opposite, viz. to hold itself open to whatever *experience* presents itself to the mind. And I should like to say more about this concept of experience and the altered relation towards infinity in my next lecture on Thursday.



# LECTURE 8

2 December 1965

## *The Concept of Intellectual Experience*

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### *Notes*

‘Infinite’ in Hegel [is] as much as Goethe’s ‘If you wish to seek the Infinite . . .’.

Changed attitude towards the concept of the infinite, which had degenerated into waffle in idealism.

Reason for the inner hollowness: drowning out profound doubts by publicity.

In idealism, the aim is for an infinite object to be captured by a meagre finitude of categories. This makes philosophy finite, conclusive. Hence the narrow, small-town model. Even provinciality has its systematic basis.

This ambition to be scotched.

Phil[osophy] can no longer dispose of something infinite.

Epicharmus’ maxim.<sup>1</sup> To be added; that it can capture the immortal only in the configurations of the mortal. – It possesses, if anything at all, only the finite.

As against this, it becomes infinite in a certain sense: no longer to be fixed in a corpus of countable theorems; open in principle. However, not determined mollusc-like, but in its openness: that is actually the problem. Its specificity, not softness, increases as it surpasses itself; this comes from the object.

Its contents to be sought in the undiminished multiplicity of the objects. It opens itself up to them in all earnestness, does not use them as a mirror, does not confuse its own reflection with the concrete realities.

Such a philosophy would be full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection: 'intellectual experience'. This change in the concept of experience too is prepared for in Hegel and German idealism as against Kant. The contents of experience are no examples for categories (refer to 'The Handle, the Pot and Early Experience').<sup>2</sup>

Motor – the unguaranteed expectation that every particular that comes good must imagine that totality in itself that constantly eludes it, admittedly in accordance with a pre-established disharmony.

(6) Meta-critical turn against prima philosophia – this [turn] opposes a finite phil[osophy] that sounds off about infinity while disregarding it.

Does not wholly capture any of its objects. Should not create the phantasm of a totality, but truth should crystallize in it.

Model: works of art unfolding in their philosophical interpretation.

What can be seen as the regulated advance of abstraction or as subsumption under concepts is technology (Bergson aware of this), but a matter of indifference to philosophy that does not conform.

Phil[osophy] has no object guaranteed to it, can in principle always go astray.

So much is true about scepticism and pragmatism; but the problem is not to abandon a vigorous philosophy in response, but to channel it.

Only [make clear] that this not the same thing as induction, the mere facts.

2 December 1965

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Last time, I started to tell you about the difference between my project – you see, I am using the word<sup>3</sup> myself; you can see what a state I am in – the difference between my project and traditional philosophy by reflecting upon the concept of the infinite. The concept of the infinite had originally come into philosophy in connection with the infinitesimal calculus that Leibniz had discovered independently of Newton.<sup>4</sup> And Kant – who came from the Wolffian school, that is indirectly from Leibniz – picked up this motif; we may say that the antinomy chapter [in the *Critique of Pure Reason*] is based essentially on the mathematical concept of infinity in the sense used in the calculus, together with the paradoxes that involves.<sup>5</sup> If the concept

of the infinite lost its centrality so quickly, it is probably due to the estrangement from mathematics and natural sciences that has affected philosophy ever since Fichte, and especially since Schelling, notwithstanding the fact that he was a 'philosopher of nature'. I believe that it would be a very rewarding task for someone to write a monograph on the concept of infinity from Kant to Hegel – seemingly a task in the philosophy of history, but in reality one that would quickly lead into substantive philosophical questions. Such a history would reveal changes in the concept that would have a lot to do with what we might call the subterranean change in the climate that took place during this period. When Hegel speaks of the infinite and infinity he does so very much in the spirit of Goethe's maxim that he who seeks the infinite should go out in every direction in search of the finite;<sup>6</sup> in other words, because every finite movement, as something finite, must necessarily negate itself, the epitome of finite movements already represents the step into positive infinity. Now, the idea that the negation of the finite implies postulating the infinite may be said to be the general thesis of Hegel's entire philosophy, if indeed it is possible to reduce Hegel's philosophy to a general thesis. But on the other hand, used in this way the concept of infinity seems to have departed from its mathematical meaning; I would almost go so far as to say that it has eroded its core meaning. However that may be, we can say that when we read the great writers of German idealism, especially Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, it is difficult to avoid the impression that they have used the word 'infinite' in a rather loose and unconsidered way and that they have not really felt the responsibility implicit in the concept. It is not until we reach the Marburg neo-Kantians that it is once more treated rigorously, much as it had been in Leibniz, where it is regarded as the mediating category between the *mundus sensibilis* and the *mundus intelligibilis* – whereas there is no trace of this in what we might think of as classical German idealism. To put it bluntly, this means that in idealism the concept of infinity had really degenerated into a cliché, a kind of commonplace twaddle – which is what always happens when concepts come to form part of a repertoire without being thought through properly, by which I mean, without having been confronted with the contents that they purport to represent.

Because of this a peculiar hollowness insinuated itself into the discourse about the infinite that came to prevail in philosophy – a hollowness that has perhaps done more than anything else to bring official academic philosophy close to idle chatter with all its vagaries. One sometimes has the feeling that talk about the infinite is attempting to drown out profound doubts, as if philosophy, itself

a finite activity, were unable to grasp the infinity it is blathering about. For the claim to identity, philosophy's absolute claim to identity, that is, the claim that simply everything should go into its determinations without remainder, is of course necessarily a claim to a positive infinity. And it seems to me that for this very reason, because philosophers do not fully trust this claim, they invoke this shibboleth of infinity again and again. So in idealism we might define it in this way: a meagre, finite number of axioms – and even in Hegel, for all his talk of dynamism, the axioms represent something finite, almost countable numerically, a kind of network or list of categories; that is to say, such a meagre, finite number of axioms is supposed to encapsulate an infinity, an infinite object. Because of this – and this is the polar opposite to the claim to infinity asserted by these philosophers – philosophy shrinks to a finite, conclusive thing that imagines that it has a mental overview over everything that exists. In an earlier lecture I spoke to you of the narrow, almost small-town atmosphere that clings to even the greatest philosophical conceptions nowadays.<sup>7</sup> It is as if philosophers wished to stuff an infinite cosmos into a tiny, cottage in which they could oversee every detail. But if this is so, it is because this provinciality is connected with their ambition to enclose the infinite in a finite network of axioms. You may perceive here, or at least glimpse, the extent to which philosophical statements sound sociological, or quasi-sociological, when you first hear them, but then turn out to be an intrinsic part of the subject, of the philosophical problematic.<sup>8</sup> If you read the *Critique of Pure Reason* from this angle you will see that this narrowness, which Benjamin has gone so far as to describe as a precondition of humanity in his book *German Men and Women*,<sup>9</sup> comes through in Kant's figurative language, that is, in the similes in which he necessarily speaks – I do the same thing of course – of the territories of pure reason that criticism conquers or is repulsed by.<sup>10</sup> We hear of the land of truth – 'a charming name', Kant adds – or of an island enclosed in unalterable boundaries surrounded by the infinite ocean.<sup>11</sup> And in general the concept of the infinite in Kant is often associated in a way that reminds us of the Storm and Stress movement, with the idea of the oceanic, the so-called oceanic feeling. And because reason now imagines that it has firmly entrenched itself in this narrow world while at the same time it has to bring tidings of the tininess of the realm it has secured – because of this Kant's critical and incorruptible philosophy finds itself infected by those overtones of sentimentality, of innocence, that more than any other factor makes it impossible to philosophize in this or any related manner today. In short, this claim that a finite system of categories – think for a moment of Kant's Table

of Categories, from which Hegel's *Logic* is not actually separated by the abyss that would really suit Hegel best – this claim that a finite system of categories can really provide us with secure knowledge while at the same time we shall be given a dispensation from all questions that go beyond it – just picture this for yourselves and I believe it is not unreasonable for me to say that this entire claim is one that must be scotched. In this sense it would be axiomatic that philosophy no longer has anything infinite at its disposal.

This is why I used that fragment of Epicharmus as a motto at the beginning of my *Against Epistemology*, with its message that mortals must think mortal thoughts, and not immortal ones,<sup>12</sup> a statement, incidentally, that taken to its logical conclusion contains within itself something like the critique of the traditional identity claim. It was a remarkable coincidence that a few years later the late Reinhold Schneider, the Catholic writer and philosopher, used the same motto for his last book – quite certainly without his knowing mine.<sup>13</sup> It is evident, then, that this motto has a weight of its own that it is very hard to escape. Thus if philosophy possesses anything at all, then it can only be finite, and not infinite. I believe that only if we begin with this restriction, that is, only if we reflect upon our own provinciality – what I call our provinciality – and raise it to the level of consciousness, only then will it become possible to rid ourselves of this narrow-mindedness. We should add, perhaps, that only in the categories of the finite, or, to follow Epicharmus, only by speaking of mortal thoughts, can immortal thoughts be grasped, whereas every attempt to comprehend transcendence in other categories is doomed from the outset – an insight, incidentally, that is anticipated in Hegel's stance as I described it earlier. What I said then was that, in contrast to traditional thought, the very fact that philosophy renounces the attempt to possess the infinite allows it to hope that it can be more than the naïve hypostasis of its own finiteness. We could phrase this positively and say that this reformulation of the task of philosophy means that in a sense philosophy itself has become infinite – namely, not something to be fixed any longer in a restricted number of theorems as we find in Kant's 'system of principles', but fundamentally open. And this leads me to call for an *open* philosophy in contrast to systematic philosophizing. That in turn at once brings me to the problem to which *Lebensphilosophie* has succumbed. *Lebensphilosophie* was itself motivated to be anti-systematic by the contrast it set up between the vital and the rigid, and this led it to conceive of something like the idea of openness. The problem with this is that such an open philosophy can easily become mollusc-like or, as Theodor Haecker shrewdly if waspishly noted, it can degenerate into

a 'philosophy of the somehow or other'.<sup>14</sup> And the entire trick with philosophy – it's a trick that I keep circling round, but it looks different from different angles, depending on the categories I make use of – the entire trick with philosophy would be to learn how to philosophize in an open way without becoming mollusc-like, in other words, without becoming attached to any and every conceivable object. Instead, the aim would be to follow its inner necessity while at the same time pursuing an objective compulsion. I would venture a proposition that may seem paradoxical in the light of normal philosophical practice, but that is in fact very simple and illuminating. This is that the more philosophy opens itself to its object, the less it misapplies the objects with which it is concerned as instances of that finite system of coordinates that it is wont to make use of for demonstration purposes – then the more easily it will shed that mollusc-like character. For the mollusc-like, in other words, the arbitrary, what traditional philosophers like to criticize as a bottomless abyss, tends in general to be nothing more than the expression of a certain arbitrariness in the relation of thought to what has been thought; it tends to consist in the fact that ideas, which in general seem to be preformed in the shape of such a system of coordinates, attach themselves to every conceivable object, many of them somewhat randomly, and then set about manipulating them until they end up looking the way one wants them to look. If, on the other hand, the attempt is made to satisfy the requirement that I think of as the true requirement of philosophy, namely, the requirement of unreserved openness to the object – something Hegel probably intended when he spoke of 'freedom to the object'<sup>15</sup> – if, in other words, the object is not conceived as something entirely indeterminate but, instead, thought constantly measures itself against the object by approaching it spontaneously, then it follows that thought will have more structure rather than less, more definition and authority. And this, I would say, is the only genuine response to the accusation of being mollusc-like. If, in contrast, respectability is conferred on the system of categories, for example, in our method of approaching a topic, by saying, 'I as ontologist, I as Protestant, I as Marxist, think this or that' – that is when the thinker acquires something of an arbitrary status vis-à-vis his object. By this I mean something determined by his starting point that prevents him from arriving at any sort of authoritative cognition.

It follows that philosophy should seek its contents in the unlimited diversity of its objects. It should become fully receptive to them without looking to any system of coordinates or its so-called postulates for backing. It must not use its objects as the mirrors from

which it constantly reads its own image and it must not confuse its own reflection with the true object of cognition. I would say that this confusion is in general the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος*, the first lie, of modern philosophy. If we take Kant's, with its assertion that nature is something that is produced by reason, as being prototypical for this way of thinking<sup>16</sup> – this lie can be expressed simply in the form that knowledge directed at *natura naturata* is no knowledge at all; for such knowledge possesses nothing in its object but the knowing subject itself. In consequence, by resigning itself heroically to this situation, it simultaneously misses out on the very thing that defines the concept of knowledge: that it fails to recognize whatever is not at one with cognition. Ladies and gentlemen, such a philosophy, which on the one hand does not presume to apprehend the infinity of objects but on the other hand does not reduce itself to the finite – such a philosophy would amount to a full, undiminished experience in the medium of conceptual reflection. We might also say, it would amount to intellectual experience. By making use here of the term experience, I note that the turn I am making here, or to which I would like to make some contribution and that I would like to make you think plausible, includes a salvaging of empiricism, albeit in a somewhat convoluted, dialectical fashion. I mean by this that cognition always proceeds in principle from below to above, and not from the top down; it is concerned with leaving things to themselves and not with a process of deduction – admittedly with a completely different emphasis, a completely different cognitive objective from those to be found in empirical philosophies.<sup>17</sup> And this turning of the concept of experience into a concept of intellectual experience is also anticipated in Hegel and German idealism – as opposed to Kant. I would say that this concept of intellectual experience is one that was undoubtedly envisaged by thinkers between Fichte and Hegel, and it is one that gave their philosophies the substantiality that distinguishes them from formalism; it is a concept that would have to be liberated from its idealist premises. This concept of intellectual experience is one that should be followed up, indeed, I would almost say that, if only it were followed up in all seriousness (something that the idealist always only 'announced' – it is the famous distinction between being given the menu and serving up the actual meal), philosophy would be able to escape from the sphere of idealism altogether. The contents of this experience – and this too sounds highly nominalist – are identical with the concept of experience as this is contrasted with deduction. The contents of such experience provide no models for categories, but they become relevant because they enable the *new* to show itself – whereas the flaw in the entire gamut of current empiricist trends is

that, as a theory of cognition, empiricism seems to me to be unable to allow for the possibility of an Other, of something new in principle. What prevents it are its own rules, which had come into being in the heroic age, the exuberant phase of empiricism from, say, Bacon onwards. If any of you would like to familiarize yourselves a little more deeply with this concept of intellectual experience – in contrast, let us say, to the vague philosophizing about everything and nothing characteristic of *Lebensphilosophie* – should any of you be interested in my position with regard to this, perhaps I can refer you to my short text entitled ‘The Handle, the Pot and Early Experience’, which is to be found at the beginning of the festschrift for Ernst Bloch.<sup>18</sup> In this essay I tried as a very young man to explain my idea of intellectual experience – by contrasting it with Simmel’s philosophy which was very similar thematically. By referring you to this essay, I may perhaps be spared the need to enter into further explanations of this point. The motor of an experience of this sort, of what drives a person to seek this sort of intellectual experience – and this is what counts above all in philosophy – is the admittedly unwarranted, vague, obscure expectation that every singular and particular that it encounters ultimately represents the totality that constantly eludes it – I am speaking in Leibnizian terms here – admittedly, in the sense of a pre-established disharmony.<sup>19</sup> I am saying that such an expectation is more likely to express itself in the form of the pre-established disharmony that reveals itself in such experience than as the harmonizing thesis that has characterized experience in the great rationalist systems which, in their late phase at least (rather like German idealism), were the attempt to unite *vérités de raison* with *vérités de fait*, that is, the truths of reason and the truths of experience. The meta-critical turn against a first philosophy that I am trying to explain to you from a number of angles is the turn against a finite philosophy that sounds off about the infinite and simultaneously is unable to appreciate as infinite the infinite which constantly eludes it. According to this view, philosophy does not have full possession of any of its objects – and this too forms part of the specificities of dialectics among which, if we only grasp it with sufficient energy, a negative dialectics seems to me to take shape. Philosophy’s aim is not to create the phantasm of a totality; it is something in which truth is supposed to crystallize.

This last statement may perhaps sound too apodictic and, unintentionally, so high-flown that, despite my sceptical view of illustrative examples, I feel under something of an obligation to explain what I mean. And perhaps you will forgive me if I have recourse to the realm of art (even though there are cogent arguments against doing so). In particular, I should like to refer to the relationship between works of



art and the philosophy of art simply because I believe that what I am trying to explain to you here – that philosophy is not infinite; that no philosophy is wholly in possession of its objects, but that truth is crystallized in it – that this can best be illustrated with reference to the products of art. We can perhaps say that in this sense works of art represent something like a positive infinity – I am speaking here implicitly only of authentic works of art. This is because, on the one hand, they are finite, circumscribed givens in time or space, while, on the other hand, they have an infinite quantum of implications that do not reveal themselves spontaneously and hence stand in need of analysis. The unfortunate expression ‘the multi-layered nature of works of art’, open as it is to every kind of abuse, reminds me – I regret having to make this concession – of this state of affairs which is after all part of the nature of works of art and which should not be confused with the cheap belief in the irrational nature of art. When you analyse works of art, that is to say, when you work out the various structural relations they contain, and the implied meanings contained in these structural relations; when you undertake an immanent analysis of works of art, which to be sure is never without assumptions but which means that you have to know what is there if you are to extract it – all that is something that has to be made clear from the start, if you want to play it straight. But once it has been made clear, analysis can be very helpful in articulating the infinite meanings contained in works of art. And we can say that there is a sense in which works of art have their life in such a process, a process made possible only by a philosophy of art which includes analysis and, in particular, a micrological analysis. Works of art live because the advance of analysis gradually increases our knowledge of their objective intellectual meanings; in other words, through a process of analysis that progressively captures their truth content. You may say that it is too easy to use art as an illustration because works of art *are* bundles of meaning – and we have already said that the world can never be said to possess meaning in the same way as works of art, which are artefacts, and which are spirit because they are the products of the human spirit. But even so I believe that this procedure, which the examination of works of art suggests to us, must in a certain sense be prototypical for cognition in general, for the philosophical cognition of reality. And only if we have the possibility of experiencing things in the way I have described with reference to works of art, only then will it become possible to understand what I have tried to explain to you about the concept of an intellectual experience, in contrast to the pointedly *non*-intellectual [*geistig*] experience of the empirical sciences.

As opposed to this intellectual experience, as its counterpart, everything that can be described as the so-called controlled advance of abstraction or as the mere subsumption under concepts is merely technology in the broadest sense. And I would say that, if there is such a thing as a critique of enlightenment by the enlightened consciousness, then that is where we can perceive a dialectics of enlightenment. For if we think of enlightenment as the standpoint of progressive consciousness, as long as this consciousness stops short at the concept of intellectual experience or regards it as something uncertain and insecure, it remains imprisoned in the realm of the mere domination, the mere control of what has not been comprehended. This is the insight to which Bergson gave voice in our age and in opposition to the endless pressure of the positive sciences and the reified world, and he did so with an abstractness and stubbornness equal to that pressure. It is an insight that must not be allowed to disappear again, now that Bergson has articulated it and Scheler, following him, has echoed it. All the knowledge which is available to the controlled advance of abstraction and the mere subsumption beneath concepts is in principle indifferent to philosophy, to an emphatic concept of philosophy in the sense in which the Stoics understood the concept of indifference:<sup>20</sup> these are matters in which philosophy actually has no interest and on which it should not dwell unless it persists in operating below the threshold of what it envisages objectively, regardless of whether it wishes to or not. This means that, in contrast to these well-tended and well-defined procedures, a philosophy that is worth its salt is the opposite of what is generally presented to you as such in the course of your pre-philosophical education. The fact is that philosophy does not have any particular guaranteed object of study; it is possible to think philosophically only where thinking can go awry, where it is fallible. The moment that nothing can happen to philosophical thought, that is, the moment it finds itself in the realm of repetition, mere reproduction, at that moment philosophy will have missed its mark. And if I may permit myself to say this, I would say that the point at which philosophy – with all the doubts and fallibilities associated with the word nowadays – the point at which it is able to demonstrate its true actuality, if indeed it has one, consists in the resistance it offers to the prevailing need for security, in contrast to all current modes of knowledge which have more or less adjusted their sights so as to conform to that need. It is the point at which it realizes that – as Nietzsche would have put it<sup>21</sup> – knowledge that is not dangerous does not deserve to be thought. The danger referred to here is concerned less with the threat of nihilist bombings or the smashing of ancient tablets of laws than quite simply

with the fact that knowledge that fails to go beyond the already known is in danger of itself being declared false, untrue and obsolete – that such knowledge simply cannot be true. And this is just another way of stating – and this is something I keep returning to – that truth content contains an element of time instead of subsisting in time and appearing as something eternal and indifferent to it. Thus far there is truth in the scepticism and pragmatism that in John Dewey,<sup>22</sup> for example, has depicted with a truly magnificent open-mindedness and seriousness the possibility of a philosophy that lays itself open to falsehood. The problem is only to make sure not to surrender philosophy's high ambition to be the knowledge of *essentials* but to channel this ambition towards intellectual experience.

# LECTURE 9

## 7 December 1965

### *The Element of Speculation*

#### *Notes*

In contrast to the totality of method, phil[osophy] contains as an essential component an element of play that the growing trend to science wished to expel from it. Without play no truth. NB chance.

It is the most serious thing of all, and hence not as serious as all that.

Whatever takes aim at something that it is not a priori and over which it has no authorized power always also belongs to the sphere of the uncontrolled that is tabooed by the conceptual. Speculative ratio contains an intrinsic element of the irrational.

Dedication of mimesis.

To that extent, the aesthetic element of phil[osophy], although quite different from Schelling's understanding of it, not an accidental feature of phil[osophy].

However, philosophy must incorporate it [*aufheben*] in the binding nature of its insights into the real.

(7, intro.)<sup>1</sup> No borrowings of phil[osophy] from art, especially no appeals to intuition. Critique of the concept of intuition; the so-called intuitions are not qualitatively different from other forms of knowledge, they are no lightning bolts from above. They are an element: without inspiration, no phil[osophy], but it must 'stand up'. Today life [?] [is] against inspiration. They [the intuitions] are constellations of preconscious knowledge.

Phil[osophy] which aspired to become a work of art would be doomed from the outset: it would postulate that identity, the absorption of the object into it that is thematic in it, critically so.

What art and phil[osophy] have in common lies not in their form and their creative method, but in a mode of behaviour that prohibits pseudomorphosis.

The philosophical concept does not relinquish the yearning that animates art as something non-conceptual and that, being non-conceptual, achieves fulfilment only blindly, and whose fulfilment escapes from non-conceptual immediacy as semblance.

The organ of phil[osophy] is the concept which serves at the same time as a wall between philosophy and that yearning. It negates yearning; that negation is something phil[osophy] can neither circumvent nor submit to.

The idea of philosophy: to reach beyond the concept by means of the concept.

(7) Phil[osophy] cannot escape speculation even after it has renounced idealism.

By spec[ulation], I mean, in distinction from the strict Hegelian concept, here only: motivated to think further than is warranted by the facts.

Positivists would not find it hard to identify speculative elements in Marxist materialism such as 1) the objectivity and totality of the social process that is by no means immediately given or capable of being abstracted from any data. 2) the 'metaphysics of the forces of production' – (M[arx] much more of a German idealist than might be supposed, not merely in his methods). Refer to the idea that freedom = conscious acceptance of necessity.

7 December 1965

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Ladies and gentlemen, I should like to tell you, so that you may adjust your arrangements, that next week I shall give my lectures right through the coming week, but that I shall not lecture on the 21st and the entire Christmas week, now that I have heard that I will be most unlikely to have any listeners in the Christmas week itself. It is not possible to please everyone in situations such as this. But I have definite information that in the run-up to Christmas there will be so few listeners that it will not be possible to lecture – I am very sorry about that.

Last time, I drew your attention to a certain connection between the concept of negative dialectics and scepticism – and even pragmatism, in the sense that philosophy has no guaranteed object,

that in principle it can always go astray. Thus, in the type of thought I am attempting to describe and if possible to justify to you, there is an element that has something in common with empiricist trends. And if last time (it was, I believe, last time) I spoke to you about the concept of intellectual experience, what I wished to convey was that the concept of intellectual experience, the concept of experience, contains this element. Admittedly, you must be very clear in your own minds that this concept of intellectual experience is infinitely far removed from the trivial concept of experience. This is because the concept of the fact, of data, that is canonical for empiricist philosophies and which is based on sense experience, that is, on *sense* data, has no validity for *intellectual* experience, which is the experience of something already intellectual and is an intellectually mediated experience. Hence you must be sure to understand me correctly when I tell you that the connections with empiricist trends that I have identified in negative dialectics are ironic connections that take issue with the identity-postulating system. This concept of experience contains a constitutive intellectual element – it is an intellectual experience of the very kind that is denied by empiricist philosophies. I should not wish to conceal from you the fact that, quite apart from the element of unsupported claims, of fallibility, which I believe I have made sufficiently clear to you, there is yet another crux, one that seems to me to be much more serious, since I do not anyway regard an absolute certainty free of all doubt as the *τέλος* of philosophy. This crux is that the concept of an intellectual experience – that is, a reflective mode of behaviour that is possible only in the shape of a process of sublimation taken as far as is possible, in other words, one that is not simply based on brute facts, but which sets these brute facts in their proper context and at the same time in their proper meaning – this concept of intellectual experience always contains the possibility of what might be called a spiritualization [*Spiritualisierung*] of the world. By this I mean the possibility that, by having intellectual experiences that go beyond mere immediate, sense experience, we may feel tempted to turn the object of experience into something spiritual [*geistig*] and by the same token to justify it. And if you attend closely to the idea of intellectual experience that permeates the Hegelian system you will find more than a trace of this attitude. I would say that the kind of intellectual experience meant by negative dialectics and conceived as a self-critical, self-reflective intellectual experience has as one of its principal tasks to be particularly critical (i.e. not naïve) on this very point. That is to say, it should constantly be on the alert to correct that built-in tendency to spiritualize its objects that accompanies its own methodology. I believe that in my own case

this is a matter of once bitten, twice shy, since I am very easily tempted – precisely by this concept of intellectual experience, and in general, by a certain canonization of the intellect as the yardstick of philosophy – to take intellectual phenomena more seriously than perhaps they deserve in reality. And I believe that only by realizing this, and only by remaining vigilant, will you be able to do any sort of justice to what I have in mind and what I would very much like you to grasp.

We can perhaps express this scepticism, this element of fallibility that philosophy must remain conscious of, and also of this spiritual element, by saying that, in contrast to all the methods that have been taught in the philosophical tradition, there is an essential element of *play* in philosophy. This is the element that the growing trend to make philosophy scientific would most like to expel, whether in accordance with the laws of the natural sciences, or – and this is particularly common nowadays – those of the philological disciplines. From this angle, I think one of Nietzsche's greatest achievements was the emphasis he placed on this element of play in philosophy. In this respect, if we set aside the Greeks, and especially Socrates, he really does stand out from the entire philosophical tradition, with the exception of the so-called moralists and their predecessor Montaigne<sup>2</sup> – who for this very reason are usually included in the ancestral roll call only as illegitimate fathers. But I would ask you not to think of this playful element of philosophy as something merely psychological, but, as I just said, as something essential to the discipline itself. This is because philosophy goes beyond whatever secure knowledge that it possesses, and because it knows this, and because it is fallible, it also possesses this playful element without which it could not be philosophy in the first place. It does not just flirt with playfulness in its motives or methods; rather playfulness is deeply embedded in it and candidly so. I would go so far as to say that without playfulness there can be no truth. And I would say further that the element of chance inherent in play makes an essential contribution to the truth – as the thing that under the general spell of identity thinking reminds us of the unthinkable. In this connection, let me remind you of a saying that I have myself applied to art in a spirit of playfulness, when I said that art is the most serious thing in the world, but then again, it is not as serious as all that.<sup>3</sup> I believe that only when we face up to this paradox, that is, only when we know that philosophy is concerned with the most serious matters and that it calls for the very greatest efforts on the part of the most advanced state of mind; but that, on the other hand, we are fully aware that it is merely one activity in a society dominated by the division of labour and in the life of our society it

has no more than a specialized significance – I believe that only when we face up to this strange duality of philosophy will we be able to *do* philosophy *properly*, namely, with the peculiar combination of seriousness and what can only be called playfulness, without which thinking cannot survive. This element of seriousness and of the not-quite-serious is something you will find, remarkably enough – I was extremely surprised when I first came across it – in the very thinker you would least expect to find it, namely, in Hegel (in the *Logic*, if my memory serves me, in one of the introductory sections), where he says that philosophy is itself merely one element in the actual life of mankind and should therefore not be turned into an absolute.<sup>4</sup> This is a humane concession on Hegel's part, which on the one hand reflects the greatest honour upon his capacity for philosophical self-knowledge, but on the other hand is inconsistent in a major way, since, according to his doctrine, philosophy is one of the 'moments' of what he calls 'absolute spirit', so that you might expect philosophy to merit the supreme and most utterly serious place in his system, much as it does in Aristotle whom he generally follows in so many ways. In reality, however, he proceeds quite unnaïvely and inconsistently in the way in which he combines the greatest mental exertions with the awareness of the restrictions placed on philosophy in reality.

Thus whatever goes in search of those elements that it does not already possess a priori – and that is presumably what we understand by philosophy – and whatever thought has no authorized power over, all that belongs to the sphere of the *uncontrolled* that is tabooed by the conceptual – and this is implied in the concept of play as opposed to seriousness. Thinking that is rigorously disciplined from the outset is just as incapable of engaging in philosophy as undisciplined thinking. And if we could represent the whole of philosophy as a system of countless squared circles, then *this* squared circle, with its insistence that thinking needs discipline as much as it needs indiscipline, would certainly not be the most worthless. Indeed, it consists essentially in a combination of the two. We might also say that speculative *ratio*, the kind of *ratio* that goes beyond the conceptual order of an already owned, positive given, necessarily possesses an *irrational* element in that it offends against the secure knowledge it already has. There is no rationality without this intrinsic element of irrationality. However, the moment this element of irrationality is postulated, or turns itself into something autonomous or even an absolute, it degenerates into illusion and lie. This feature undoubtedly represents the element of thought that Horkheimer and I in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* called 'the mimetic element':<sup>5</sup> in other words, the moment at



which living beings and consciousness make themselves identical with what differs from them. This is a form of response that has not simply been replaced by conceptual knowledge over a period of millennia, but has also been subjected to severe prohibitions. And we can say, if I may present you with yet another squaring of the circle, that it is the task of philosophy to appropriate on behalf of the concept that element of identification *with* the thing itself – as opposed to the identification *of* the thing itself – that is present – non-conceptually – in the mimetic stance and has been inherited by art. In that sense, we can say that the aesthetic element – albeit for quite different reasons than the reasons advanced by Schelling – is essential and not accidental. In Schelling, the aesthetic dimension of philosophy is justified basically with reference to identity-philosophy. This means that philosophy is supposed to depict the world like a work of art because the world is identical with spirit. If I draw your attention to the affinities between art and philosophy, I do so for almost the opposite reason. This is that only by registering the non-identity of spirit and world, spirit and reality, can philosophy acquire a share in the truth – and the stance that formerly guaranteed this and continues to do so today in a certain sense is the mimetic stance. However – and I believe that this is an important point, so that you will be able to obtain clarity about the very complex relationship between philosophy and art – philosophy must preserve [*aufheben*] this aesthetic dimension, incorporating it into its binding insights into the real. It is a constitutive element of philosophy that it should speak the truth about the real – and not just function for its own satisfaction. Philosophy as so-called reflective poetry is to be condemned from the outset and would always be a poor aesthetic product, never more than commercial art, just as aestheticizing philosophers who attempt to curry favour with art always produce works of the worst possible quality.<sup>6</sup> The point here is not that philosophy should borrow from art, and especially not that it should rely on the concept of intuition – as many believe.<sup>7</sup> Such borrowings would only be spoilt. Instead, the relationship between art and philosophy consists, I would say, in their *τέλος*, which does not remain satisfied with the classification of facts, but takes a completely different path in both activities; the content of the two spheres may converge,<sup>8</sup> but will be corrupted the moment the methods of art are transferred directly to philosophy. Though I should emphasize that I do not mean by this that philosophy has nothing to learn from art – and this is a matter I shall return to.

As for the so-called intuitions, they undoubtedly form an *element* of philosophy; in contrast, perhaps, to many positive sciences –

although this contrast may be an illusion – there is certainly no philosophy in which nothing ‘occurs’ to its practitioners. If you do not have a spontaneous relation to reality such that ideas leap into your mind suddenly and unexpectedly, but instead you sit there with a pencil in your hand methodically drawing inferences from premises, the result really will be the professorial philosophy of the philosophy professors that Schopenhauer denounced around 150 years ago.<sup>9</sup> But we have to be clear in our minds that these intuitions really are no more than an element in the tangle of thought, and not anything worthy of particular emphasis. And I should like to add, with reference also to certain effects of my own writings, that these intuitions must ‘stand up’ on their own, that is to say, when you have an intuition you must scrutinize it carefully to see whether it really does apply to what is intended or not. Nowadays, it often seems to me that there is a sterile polarity between, on the one hand, the method of logical deduction in which nothing more comes out than was put in to begin with and, on the other hand, a certain cult of intuition for its own sake, and this disqualifies itself because the intuitions involved are not really adequate to the task assigned to them. For the consequence is that they simply attach themselves to the matter in hand and become mere associations. Associations, I would say, are in this case not the truly seminal intuition that strikes home like a flash of lightning, but the very opposite. That is to say, by merely attaching itself to the problem, intuition simply takes away from it instead of setting the entire problem alight. And I would say that, if a mode of thinking won’t be dissuaded from endorsing intuition as one of its components, it must at least formulate a rigorous critique of intuition. Such a critique must not lead to the proscribing of intuitions, however, but to making sure that their relevance and precision can be controlled. This is, incidentally, a task – it is one of the cases where the methods of philosophy and art do not diverge entirely – it is a situation in which philosophy and art resemble one another. Every artist knows full well, as does every musician, since traditionally intuition plays a considerable role in music, not to mention every lyric poet, that intuitions have to be tested to see whether they really ‘stand up’, whether they really do what they are supposed to do or not. The ability to do this, something I once described as the capacity for spontaneity amid the involuntary,<sup>10</sup> is a crucial factor in determining the rank of works of art – and, I would add, in no small measure the rank of a philosophy as well. That aside, it is interesting to see how nowadays the taboo placed on the mimetic element tends to extend also to intuition. So much so that a genuine arch-positivist would say with pride that he never has any intuitions. I know a very

famous man who has frequently boasted to me of this, and I believe him. Today, however, the situation is that the absence of intuition really is regarded as a kind of scientific virtue because in the scientific community intuition appears to have been devalued to the status of a prejudice. If you have an intuition about something you do not keep an open mind towards investigating it; you can be said to know in advance what you want to find out. For this reason, even the worst kind of sterile pedant who never has any ideas at all is able to flatter himself that he embodies the superior intellectual principle.

These reflections will enable you to see how the elimination of this element that I am discussing really deprives thinking of the very qualities that qualify it as thinking in the first place. This is why it is so important that you should not think of this element of intuition, or whatever you want to call it, as something qualitatively different from other modes of cognition. The insight that illuminates a thing and sometimes seems to appear like a flash of lightning – although it doesn't occur all that frequently – is not in reality a lightning bolt from above. We may say that the so-called intuitions resemble rather certain rivers or streams that flow underground for long distances and then suddenly come to the surface and are there, but owe the illusion of suddenness to the fact that we do not know where they have been, or, to put it in a more educated way, the so-called intuitions are crystallizations of an unconscious knowledge. In contrast, a philosophy which aspired to be art would be doomed. For it would postulate the same identity with its object; it would call for the total, seamless absorption of the object that is supposed to be thematic in it, critically so. What art and philosophy should have in common is not their form and method of shaping their materials but a mode of behaviour that prohibits every pseudomorphosis of that kind, every external approximation of method. The converse is likewise true: works of art which imagine that they can become 'higher' works of art by concerning themselves with philosophical questions will find themselves devalued from the outset. The philosophical concept does not relinquish the yearning that animates art without concepts. In the absence of concepts that yearning fulfils itself blindly, and because it is blind it does not fulfil itself in fact but only appears to do so. And the non-conceptual immediacy characteristic of art actually succeeds in achieving fulfilment in a certain sense by making itself at home in its own semblance as a non-conceptual activity. The organ of philosophy is the concept, and there can be no derogation from this; and, at the same time, the concept is the wall between philosophy and that yearning which it may not relinquish. As the container of whatever existing thing it is concerned with, the concept negates that

yearning; and philosophy can neither circumvent that negation nor submit to it – that too is the squaring of a circle.

I would like to attempt to formulate an idea of philosophy, a definition, to sum up what I have been trying to explain to you. I am not so malicious as simply to hate all definitions and reject them. I just believe that definitions are far better located in the movement of thought, as its *terminus ad quem*, than as an introduction to it. And the definition I would venture is that the idea at the heart of philosophy is to use the concept in order to reach beyond the concept. This means that even after the renunciation of idealism, about which we are in agreement, philosophy cannot escape *speculation*. By speculation I mean something different from what Hegel meant by the word. This is because speculation for Hegel necessarily relates to identity, to the general thesis of identity. This is more essential than any other Hegelian category. But what moves me in the first place when I speak of speculation is something quite simple that may well be familiar to you from your ordinary use of the term. It amounts to the idea that one should keep on thinking in a motivated way, not blindly, but in a motivated, consistent way, going beyond the point where one's thinking is backed up by facts. There will be those among you who will say that anyone who speaks up in favour of a term like 'speculation' will smuggle in through the back door of philosophy the very idealism that has been ejected from the front. And, after all, 'speculation' was the form of thought through which thinking could take hold of the infinite; it was, so to speak, the royal road of philosophy. I believe that to equate speculation and idealism in this way is not justified. Instead of explaining that statement further – as will become possible only when the concept of a negative dialectics is much more advanced than I can expect of you at this point in my lectures – so instead of deducing it directly from the concept, I should like here to draw your attention to something else. This is that a thinker such as Marx, who was after all at the opposite extreme to idealism, was nevertheless a speculative thinker – and in fact nowadays the positivists and the usual critics of Marx, in contrast to older critics dating back to pre-fascist times, are smart enough to attack Marx as a speculative thinker and even a metaphysician. On the other hand, this would deprive the idea of non-idealist thought, of thought opposed to idealism, of every palpable meaning; thought would lose its bearings entirely if one were to draw someone like Marx onto the side of idealism – even though I would personally have a few things to say on that score. So I repeat that there are some speculative elements in Marx from which you can see very clearly, in an altogether paradigmatic fashion, what I mean when I say that a philosophy that

is non-idealist in principle can nevertheless not dispense with the element of speculation. In Marx's case, the situation is – as Dr Schmidt<sup>11</sup> has rightly pointed out on a number of occasions in the sociology seminar – that he maintained the speculative distinction between appearance and essence. This distinction is speculative because by definition essence is not a fact, not the sort of thing that you can put your finger on in any immediate physical sense, but something that transcends all the facts. The idea of the objective nature of the total social process and of the totality encompassing the whole of society is not itself an immediate given. And this idea of an objective social process taking priority over every subject, of a totality that comprehends not just all individual human beings but all individual social acts, is in fact the implicit premise underlying the whole of Marxian theory. Nevertheless, it is not an immediate given in the very radical sense that it is not possible to move from immediate givens to such concepts by referring to them or abstracting from them. Even so, these concepts in Marx have very real functions. In this sense, then, we can speak of a speculative element at this crucial point of Marx's theory.

On the other hand, we find something in Marx – and this brings him closer to idealism in a more specific sense – that Alfred Seidel, a friend of my youth, once called 'the metaphysics of the forces of production'.<sup>12</sup> This means that he attributes a simply absolute potential to the productive energies of human beings and their extension in technology. Even without great interpretative powers it is possible to discern in this the idea of the creative spirit, and ultimately Kant's 'original apperception'.<sup>13</sup> Thus this vast metaphysical pathos, this speculative pathos about the forces of production, expects that in a manner never properly explained, but one in which something like the metaphysical substantiality of these productive forces is presupposed, the latter would assert themselves victoriously in the conflict between the forces of production and the relations of production. Without this construct the entire Marxian approach would be incomprehensible. I have no wish to identify myself with this speculative side of Marx. I feel that this optimism about the forces of production has become problematic in the extreme. But I wish to bring it to your attention so that you can see how speculative elements have become embedded in a philosophy whose basic intentions are materialist. This metaphysics of the forces of production is reminiscent of the Hegelian World Spirit and leads ultimately to the persistence in Marx of a highly dubious theorem of German idealism. We find it explicitly stated, above all by Engels in the *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>14</sup> This is the assertion that freedom really amounts to doing consciously what is necessary,

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something that is of course meaningful only if what is necessary, the World Spirit, the development of the forces of production is in the right a priori and its victory is guaranteed. This belief is one that has led to some catastrophic consequences – in particular, all the anti-liberal and authoritarian perversions to which the doctrine of Marx and Engels has been subjected with its installation in the states of the Eastern bloc.

You can see from what I have said that the question of whether Marx was a materialist or a non-materialist is not as easy to decide as I suggested at the beginning of this brief discussion. But on the other hand (and with this I should like to finish for today) there is a profound need for a theory that goes the whole hog, in other words, a theory that does justice to the concept of theory instead of simply sacrificing it – there is a need for such a theory to take up a stance towards speculative concepts. The only thing is that these speculative concepts will then be subject to that fallibility which, as I explained to you at the start of this lecture, is inseparable from the nature of philosophy.

# LECTURE 10

## 9 December 1965

### *Philosophy and 'Depth'*

#### *Notes*

The phantasm of a secure foundation is to be rejected where truth claims require us to raise our game. The distinction between essence + appearance is real. E.g. the semblance of the subjectively immediate. But the semblance is necessary: ideology. – The speculative element [is] that of ideology critique.

Phil[osophy] is the power of resistance because it does not let itself be fobbed off with whatever its essential interest would like to talk it out of, instead of satisfying it, albeit with a definite No – Not to leave off was the element of truth in the great idealisms. To dispute the distinction between essence + appearance – the arch sin of positivism, is fraud.

Phil[osophy] as resistance stands in need of explanation, mediation.

Every attempt to express it immediately succumbs to what Hegel called 'empty depth'. On the concept of depth as a criterion of philosophy. – On the one hand, necessary; on the other hand, there is its false side. The talk about depth and the invocation of profound-sounding words no more ensures that phil[osophy] will be deep than an image will be metaphysical because it reproduces metaphysical visions and moods. – Images like those of impressionism that strictly exclude things of that sort may have the deepest metaph[ysical] content. The sadness of the sensual. Busoni [?]

Phil[osophy] has depth only by virtue of its intellectual staying power.

(8) Depth is an aspect of dialectics, not a quality in isolation. NB Nietzsche perceived its dual nature.

Against the German tradition of a justification of suffering.

The dignity of thought is not decided by its result, i.e. not the confirmation of transcendence. Affirmation is no criterion. The concept of meaning.

Likewise, depth not a retreat into inwardness, as if a retreat into mere being-for-itself were a retreat into the ground of the world. 'The quiet in the land'. Being-for-itself an abstraction, a particular.

The measure of depth today [is] resistance to bleating.

To be deep means: not to remain satisfied with the superficial, literally: break through the façade. – This means also that one should not remain satisfied with things that present themselves as deep, but that are pre-determined. Not even with Crit[ical] Theory.

Resistance is whatever does not allow its law to be prescribed by the given facts; to that extent it transcends the objects, but in the closest possible contact with them.

The concept of depth postulates the distinction between essence + appearance; it is as valid today as it ever was.

(9) The speculative surplus of thought over mere existence is its freedom.

Reason: the subject's need to express itself: allow suffering to speak. That is the reason for all depth. 'Gave me a God to say, etc.'

9 December 1965

### *Transcript of the lecture*

Two days ago I had a few things to say about the nature of speculation. I told you that even in Marx, whose theory may serve as the prototype of materialism, speculative elements are unmistakable, and I added a number of comments on what are after all very strong links between Marx's theory and German idealism, particularly in its Hegelian form. I believe that on the problem of speculation I should add that the phantasm of a so-called secure foundation has to be abandoned where the desire for truth demands that we raise our game, in other words, where it turns out that this supposedly ultimate and absolutely certain foundation is in fact not the ultimate, but is itself mediated – and is therefore not as secure as all that. I set aside here the consideration that one consequence of the postulate of absolute certainty underlying the rejection of speculation – which is itself the product of what we might call an inflated idealism, by which



I mean that we come to expect things of concepts that they cannot possibly satisfy, namely absolute certainty – one effect of this postulate is to muzzle thinking, thus preventing it from advancing beyond the point warranted by supposedly certain facts. To the extent that such concepts as certainty and factuality or immediate givens become the object of philosophical reflection, they cannot be presented as criteria for a priori thought. And it is the very ideas that are indigenous in this realm, that is to say, the ideas that concern themselves with the rightness or wrongness of such criteria which, looked at naïvely from the standpoint of factuality or givenness, appear as speculative. By uttering the word ‘appear’, I have arrived for the first time in these lectures at a distinction that cannot be taken seriously enough and that, if there is such a thing as a criterion of what is philosophy and what isn’t, must certainly qualify as such. This is the distinction between *essence* and *appearance*, a distinction that has been sustained in almost every philosophy – with the exception of positivist critique and certain invectives in Nietzsche – throughout the entire philosophical tradition. I believe that it is one of the essential motifs, I almost said one of the essential legitimating elements, of philosophy – that the distinction between essence and appearance is not simply the product of metaphysical speculation, but that it is real. If you would permit me to refer to the most convenient model for me, namely that of sociology, I would point out that subjective modes of behaviour in modern societies are dependent on objective social structures to a degree that is largely unsuspected by most people, and that in consequence we may think of such subjective behaviour as the mere appearances of those structures. In other words, the sphere of immediacy that we are all concerned with in the first instance, and which we are accordingly tempted to regard as a matter of absolute certainty, is actually the realm of the mediated, the derived and the merely apparent, and hence of uncertainty. On the other hand, however, this appearance is also *necessary*, that is to say, it lies in the nature of society to produce the contents of the minds of human beings, just as it is the nature of society to ensure that they are blind to the fact that they mistake what is mediated and determined for actuality or the property of their freedom, and treat them as absolutes. It follows that since the immediate consciousness of human beings is a socially necessary illusion, it is in great measure *ideology*. And when I said in my lecture on society (with which I opened the senior sociology seminar and which many of you have heard) that I regarded it as the signature of our age that human beings were becoming ideology,<sup>1</sup> then this is precisely what I meant. If anyone objects that I am lending support to the claim that in a sense

this would mean the abolition of human beings, I can only reply by saying in good American: that's just too bad. By this I mean that this abolition is being brought about not by the inhumanity of the idea that describes it, but by the inhumanity of the conditions to which this idea refers. And if you will permit me to make a personal remark, it seems to me very questionable for people to take offence at statements that go against their own beliefs, however justified and legitimate these beliefs may be, simply because they find such statements uncomfortable – instead of attempting to incorporate such statements into their way of seeing things and where possible making use of them to arrive at a correct form of practice. But all this is by the by. At any rate, I mean – and I believe that this will forestall any misunderstandings about what I have been saying about the concept of the speculative – that the speculative aspect should be identified with the critical, the anti-ideological element; it is whatever is not satisfied with the façade. This at any rate is what I understand by speculation: it is hostility towards the ideological as an alternative to resigning oneself simply to establishing facts, in very marked contrast to the habits of a science based on such a statement of facts – while the prevailing habit of thought is of course to conflate speculation and ideology. I hope that I have made myself clear – not simply through what I have said to you, but also from the entire context in which these ideas manifest themselves – and have been able to show you that speculation should have precisely the opposite function in a negative dialectics and – as I flatter myself – it actually does have it.

I wish to make use of this insight to point up a state of affairs that we still have to discuss. This is that in a negative dialectics not all dialectical categories make their appearance, only with the additional indicator of openness. Instead, in the philosophical turn I am labouring to explain to you in these lectures, the categories themselves become altered in their contents, just as the concept of speculation has changed. Speculation was originally a category that created meaning, whereas now, according to what I have just been telling you, it is essentially there in order to destroy the semblance of meaning usurped by merely existing actuality. Philosophy is the power of *resistance*: I believe that a definition of philosophy other than as the intellectual power of resistance simply does not exist. The power of resistance – by not allowing itself to be fobbed off with whatever might deflect it from its true interest; it does not let itself be fobbed off with the facts, as opposed to gratifying its essential needs, even if only through a decided No, in other words, by the demonstration of the impossibility of gratifying them. And by

refusing to relinquish this desire, to be deflected from it, and by insisting on cleaving to it – that was what was magnificent about the idealist philosophies and what enabled them to survive their basic paradigm, that of a false consciousness. And it was not by chance that this took the form of the distinction between essence and appearance. That distinction of course is almost universally disputed nowadays. The rejection of essence appeared first in Nietzsche in a much blunter form than in Marx, incidentally, since Marx was enough of a Hegelian to want to retain the concept of essence. However, I regard this attempt to deny the distinction between appearance and essence as the arch-ideology because it compels us to accept that the phenomena are just as they appear, since there is nothing else behind them. And the moment it is no longer possible to go beyond them, the moment they have to be accepted just as they are, there will no longer be any possibility of going beyond them in theory, particularly if you take the link between theory and practice seriously. But when I say that philosophy is resistance you must not misunderstand me. Resistance is in the first instance a category of impulse, a category of immediate reaction. If philosophy remains no more than this, that is to say, if philosophy can do no more than shake its head and say ‘I’m against it’ or ‘I don’t like this’ – it will remain in the realm of chance, of subjective reaction that has yet to be fully penetrated by thought. I would say that while this element of resistance yields the idea or the impulse behind philosophy, resistance must not only reflect on itself, if it is not to be irrational and hence ephemeral or even false, it must develop within a theoretical framework. If it fails to do this it will amount to no more than a paltry, abstract decisionism, a purely arbitrary mode of decision-making. Every attempt to say what philosophy wishes to say, directly, at a stroke – just as Fichte wanted in his first principle,<sup>2</sup> which as you will know was characterized by its remarkable vacuity – will result in what Hegel termed ‘empty depth’.<sup>3</sup>

I believe that I can now guide you to a discussion of the concept of *depth*, which is a standing theme in philosophy. If in these lectures I am attempting to explain to you certain seemingly unproblematic and self-explanatory categories, there can be no better starting point for a quite simple discussion from the point of view of a so-called naïve consciousness than if you were to follow me in some quite straightforward reflections on the concept of depth. There is something very striking about the idea that philosophy stands in need of such a thing or approach or dimension (or however you wish to describe it) as depth. An approach that is not deep, that contents itself with the nearest available facts without digging any deeper,

without insisting on the what? The whys? And what is the meaning of that? – Such an approach may be all sorts of things, but it is not philosophical. In this sense, we cannot afford to ignore the criterion of depth in philosophy, even though it is seldom made explicit, although it is frequently referred to. And anyone who has the quality of asking awkward questions, insisting on them and refusing to be fobbed off, is no stranger to the spirit of philosophy. On the other hand, you will feel a certain discomfort, as indeed I do, whenever the word 'depth' is mentioned. The word has pharisaical connotations. To claim the word and elevate it into a criterion for philosophy is to adopt something of an elitist attitude. One is oneself the deep thinker, and other people, those who do not think deeply, are superficial minds. And once you have manoeuvred yourself into this way of thinking, you feel quite satisfied with yourself, even if the products of such deep thought are none too pleasing. But as if that were not enough, the concept of depth contains other elements, especially here in Germany, and these may give us plenty of reason to be cautious about such a concept even though, on the other hand – as I have attempted to show you – it is indispensable. If we go back to Leibniz, we find that the concept of depth has become coupled in a peculiar way with his doctrine of theodicy,<sup>4</sup> the justification of suffering. The fact that depth has something to do with suffering, that it is the sort of thought that does not deny suffering, but looks it squarely in the eye – that is certain. But when you cast your eye over the history of German thought, you will discover that this element of suffering which is to be found in the depths, the philosophical depths, has been given an apologetic, and hence highly problematic interpretation. I should say *en passant* that, in uttering these reflections on depth, I make no attempt to give you a formal definition of the term, but I am trying instead to explain it more generally, particularly with regard to its antithetical nature, and to show how the term has acquired additional meanings over time as well as the connotations it possesses over and above its explicit meaning. If we do not pay heed to these overtones in philosophy this will certainly turn out to be just as grievous an error as if we have only a vague sense of what terms signify and do not rightly know how we should understand them. We must understand these terms precisely, but we also have to know what is not precise about them; that is one of the scholarly tricks that philosophy has to acquire, among many others. To return to this German tradition, it is one that relishes expressions such as the 'shallow Enlightenment' or 'shallow optimism', and its essence is traditionally summed up in the concept of the tragic. This leads me to comment that it is deeply dubious to transfer an aesthetic term

such as the tragic so glibly to the reality and the communal life of human beings and the ethical relationship they have to one another. According to this way of thinking, all thought that takes happiness seriously is deemed shallow, whereas thought is said to be deep if it treats denial and negativity as something positive that gives it meaning. It will perhaps surprise you to hear me polemicizing against making an absolute of negativity in the context of a negative dialectics – but that is how dialectics turns out to function in the real world. I believe that the position I am trying to explain to you could not be expressed more clearly than by pointing out that it is not prepared to endorse an idea of tragedy according to which everything that exists deserves even to perish because it is finite, and that this perishing is at the same time the guarantee of its infinite nature – I can tell you that there is little in traditional thought to which I feel so steadfastly opposed as this. What I am saying, then, is that this concept of depth, which amounts to a theodicy of suffering, is itself shallow. It is shallow because, while it behaves as if were opposed to the shallow, rather mundane desire for sensual happiness, in reality it does no more than appropriate worldly values which it then attempts to elevate into something metaphysical. It is shallow, furthermore, because it reinforces the idea that failure, death and oppression are the inevitable essence of things – whereas important though all these elements are and, connected as they are to the essence of things, they are avoidable and criticizable, or at any rate the precise opposite of what thinking should actually identify with. I believe that it is Schopenhauer's undying achievement, however critical we may be of his philosophy in other respects, that on precisely this issue – that is, the point where he breaks with and destroys the theodicy of suffering – we must say that Schopenhauer has escaped from the ideology of the philosophical tradition. This remains true even though in other respects, in particular in the abstract way in which suffering appears in his writings, he must be admitted to be deeply implicated in it.<sup>5</sup>

Let me add right away that the depth to which philosophy should aspire cannot be attained simply by talking about it or by adopting 'deep' attitudes that it claims as its own in contrast to allegedly shallower ones. It is especially true – and I believe that this cannot be said often or emphatically enough in Germany today – that all the talk about depth and the appeal to deep-sounding phrases no more guarantees philosophical depth than a picture can acquire metaphysical meaning because it reproduces some metaphysical mood or other or even depicts metaphysical events; or than a work of literature can acquire metaphysical meaning because it speaks of metaphysical sub-

jects or the religious opinions or actions of the characters it depicts. In general, we might even say the very opposite: such works of art have the greater metaphysical meaning objectively the less they talk about it or depict it. And it seems to me as if the position is the same with philosophy – although I am not unmindful of the difference, which is of course that philosophy must reflect its own substance, in other words, it must make its own truth content into its subject, a desideratum that does not exist for art in the same way. But, to give you an illustration, if you look at the painting of the late nineteenth century, a kind of metaphysical painting became prominent. It had a very great impact in France with Puvis de Chavannes, it could be found in England with the Pre-Raphaelites, and its dregs emerged in Germany in the Jugendstil painters, down to Melchior Lechter and similar figures. It featured such topics as 'Initiations at the Mystic Source'<sup>6</sup> and artists all had a high old time. I believe that you need only to have seen one of the great Impressionist paintings in which nothing of the like presents itself, and to have looked at it with an unprejudiced eye; you need only to look at such a picture with what I would call a modicum of metaphysical sensitivity for the situation to become quite clear: you will perceive something like a certain absence of sensuous happiness, a certain melancholy of sensuous happiness arising out of the picture before you; or else the expression of mournfulness from a realm that presents itself as a sphere of pleasure; or else the endless tensions that exist between the world of technology and the residues of nature that technology has invaded. . . . All such problems are really metaphysical problems, and they will become readily visible in the greatest paintings by Manet, whom I regard as a metaphysical painter of the first rank, but equally in those of Cézanne or Claude Monet and some of Renoir's. I think that something similar happens in philosophy too. Consider, for example, the way in which Nietzsche resists the positive introduction of any so-called metaphysical ideas. The violence with which his thought rejects such attempts shows much greater respect for metaphysical ideas than writings where they are celebrated in the style of the Wilhelminian commemorative speeches that, with the exception of Nietzsche himself, were ubiquitous in official German philosophy between 1870 and 1914. And I would say that the situation is much the same today. The more a philosophy – and I am thinking here of Heidegger – feels at home with 'deep' topics, the more completely it leads philosophers away from the obligations that are rightly imposed by the desire for depth, namely, the desideratum that such ideas be taken seriously.

We could say, then, that an essential aspect of the concept of depth is that the insistence on the idea of depth negates the average traditional manifestation of it. And the idea of a radical secularization of the theological meanings, in which something like the salvaging of such meanings can alone be sought, comes in fact very close to such a programme of depth. The dignity of a philosophy cannot be decided by its result. Nor can it be decided by whether it results in something affirmative or approving, or by whether it has a so-called meaning. The problem arises when philosophy is measured by its meaning such that only a philosophy that has a positive meaning is held to be deep, while one that disputes that such a meaning exists is said to declare itself content with the façade of life and to renounce any interpretation of it. Such a position is itself shallow because no one can say in advance whether the assertion that meaning exists does not serve the purposes of the façade, that is to say, it helps to confirm the world as it is, and to imply that if it has a meaning, that somehow vindicates it. And I would say that the effort or the resistance of thought consists precisely in refusing such an immediate assertion of the meaningful nature of mere existence. Likewise, depth cannot mean something like the sort of retreat into inwardness that evidently exercises a kind of inextinguishable attraction in Germany and in our schools – and by schools I do not mean schools of philosophy, but the schools to which our children are sent, as well as on people who are no longer children. This false concept of depth as mere inwardness, combined with the idea of ‘the simple life’ that one has to lead once one has retreated into one’s mere inwardness, continues to play a catastrophic role in our schools. And if I achieve nothing else I should like to persuade those of you who would like to or who must become teachers one day to be extremely distrustful of *this* idea of depth, one that is closely associated with the name of Mr Wiechert,<sup>7</sup> and to realize that we are not confronted here with depth but with common or garden notions. It is important to see that in reality those who are quiet in the land<sup>8</sup> are made to measure and as standardized as any products of the Culture Industry. If I have succeeded in making you aware of this I would be prepared to accept that the convoluted paths that I have led you along here have not been entirely to no purpose.

I believe that I need only remind you of those who are quiet in the land for you to realize where this kind of depth is leading, namely, to a pure evasion compared to which we have to stick with Hegel’s insight, and indeed Goethe’s, that depth does not involve immersion merely in the subject which, once it comes to reflect on itself, discovers nothing but an ‘empty depth’, but rather that depth is inseparable

from the strength to externalize oneself. If a person is deep, he will be able to make that depth a reality in what he does and what he produces. In contrast to that, the depth a person as an isolated subject is aware of may serve to enable him to think of himself as belonging to an elite, and indeed a declining and endangered elite, but it will have no substance. For if it had substance it could be expressed as an act of externalization. The individual who cultivates himself as an absolute and as the guarantor of depth, and who imagines that he can discover meaning in himself, is a mere abstraction, a mere illusion vis-à-vis the whole. Inevitably, the meanings that he then discovers in himself as an absolute being-for-himself are in reality not his own absolute possession but merely a collective residue, the dregs of the universal consciousness. And this is merely an older form of debasement, I would say, one that differs from its present incarnation only in that it has not quite kept pace with current forms of debasement. So what I believe is that the mark of depth nowadays is resistance, and by this I mean resistance to the general bleating. By bleating I don't just mean the cry of 'Yeah! Yeah!'" The latter, I would say, is an open and, if I may call it that, a relatively self-aware form of bleating, and as such is comparatively innocent. I am thinking rather of resistance to all those disguised and more dangerous forms of bleating of which I hope I have given you a few examples in my *Jargon of Authenticity*. Depth means to refuse resolutely to remain satisfied with the surface, and to insist on breaking through the façade. This means refusing to accept a preordained idea, however profound it claims to be; it means moreover that we should not accept one's own ticket, one's own slogan, one's own membership of a group as the guarantee of truth, but should place one's trust only in the ruthless power of reflection, without deciding that the truth is now fixed and that you have got hold of it once and for all. Where such attitudes survive, particularly in the tendency to identify with groups, I would say that they bear the marks of totalitarianism, however opposed to totalitarianism they may seem to be in their publicly declared views. Resistance means refusing to allow the law governing your own behaviour to be prescribed by the ostensible or actual facts. In that sense resistance transcends the objects while remaining closely in touch with them.

Thus the concept of depth always implies the distinction between essence and appearance, today more than ever – and this explains why I have linked my comments on depth to that distinction. That concept of depth is undoubtedly connected to what I described to you last time as the speculative element. I believe that without speculation there is no such thing as depth. The fact that in its absence



philosophy really does degenerate into mere description may well seem quite plausible to you. This speculative surplus that goes beyond whatever is the case, beyond mere existence, is the element of freedom in thought, and because it is, because it alone does stand for freedom, because it represents the tiny quantum of freedom we possess, it also represents the *happiness* of thought. It is the element of freedom because it is the point at which the expressive need of the subject breaks through the conventional and canalized ideas in which he moves, and asserts himself. And this breakthrough of the limits set on expression from within *together with* the smashing of the façade of life in which one happens to find oneself – these two elements may well be one and the same thing. What I am describing to you is philosophical depth regarded subjectively – namely, not as the justification or amelioration of suffering, but as the *expression of suffering*, something which understands the necessity of suffering in the very act of expression. Philosophy is in a sense what Georg Simmel missed in the majority of philosophers – their failure to express the world's suffering,<sup>10</sup> something which seems to have left so little mark on philosophy in general. And Tasso's statement that, when man falls silent in his grief, a god gave him the ability to say what he suffered<sup>11</sup> – that is a real, direct link between literature and philosophy.<sup>12</sup>



# The Theory of Intellectual Experience (Extract)

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(9) For suffering is the weight of objective realities bearing down on the individual. Whatever he experiences as his innermost subjectivity, its expression, is mediated objectively. This may help to explain why presentation is not a superficial aspect of philosophy, [11] a matter of indifference to it, but intrinsic to its idea. The element of expression integral to it, something both non-conceptual and mimetic, can be objectified only through its presentation in language. Philosophy's freedom is nothing but the ability to help its unfreedom to express itself. If the element of expression makes claims to be more than this, it degenerates into ideology; where philosophy relinquishes the element of expression and the duty of presentation, it is degraded to the level of science on which it should reflect and which its reflections should surpass. Expression and rigour are not polar opposites. Each stands in need of the other, neither exists without the other; expression is relieved of its contingent nature by thinking, at which it labours, just as thought labours at expression. Thought becomes convincing only through its expression, its presentation in language; whatever is loosely expressed is always poorly thought out. Through expression rigour is imposed on the meaning of what is expressed. It is not an end in itself at the expense of that meaning, torn from that thing-like state of externalization which itself forms an object of philosophical criticism. Speculative philosophy without an idealist substructure calls for fidelity to rigour in order to break with the latter's authoritarian mischief-making. Benjamin, whose first sketch of the *Arcades* combined an incomparable gift for speculation with

# LECTURE 11

(9) *The most subjective thing, expression, objectively mediated, viz. by suffering, in which the shape of the course of the world is contained.*

Therefore, presentation cannot be a superficial matter to phil[osophy], but [is] intrinsic to its idea. Phil[osophy] without presentation suppresses the element of expression essential to it.

Presentation alone does justice to the mimetic element, the opposite pole to the conceptual.

It lends unfreedom a voice. – Sonnemann:<sup>1</sup> no significant phil[osopher] who is not a significant writer. But expression must not be hypostasized.

As positive, as isolated element, expression degenerates into ideology. What has been consecrated. Or: the style that has been let off the leash, made autonomous.

Without expression qua presentation phil[osophy] downgraded to the level of science. The philistine. From this angle – critique of academic phil[osophy].

Expression + rigour not polar opposites.

Each needs the other; neither exists without the other.

Expression is relieved of its contingent nature by thinking; expression [is] bad as mere immediacy. Thinking [is] convincing only in its expression.

Hegel on this point. – To realize expression means making it rigorous, in it the rigour realizes itself. – Thinking amounts to searching for the right expression.

a micrological closeness to factual realities, observed in a letter about the initial, metaphysical phase of that work that its second phase (10) could be articulated only in an 'impermissibly poetic fashion' [Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, p. 117 (Letter of 16 August 1935 to Gretel Adorno)]. This capitulation marks both the difficulty of a philosophy unwilling to let things slide and also the point at which its conception should be taken further. Benjamin's remark should probably be linked [12] to his dogmatic and in that sense ideological adoption of a dialectical materialism that had come to a standstill. The fact that he could not bring himself to set down the definitive statement of his 'Arcades' theory reminds us that philosophy has a *raison d'être* only where it exposes itself to total failure, as a response to the absolute certainty it had traditionally pursued. Benjamin's defeatism about his own theory was the product of a remnant of undialectical positivism that he had transported, formally unchanged, from his theological phase to his materialist one. [In contrast,] Hegel's identification of negativity with the subject, the idea that is intended to preserve philosophy both from the positivism of science and from the contingent nature of the singular, has its basis in experience. In itself, and prior to every particular content, thought is negation, resistance to whatever imposes itself; thought has inherited this from its primary model, the relation of labour to its material. If nowadays ideology more than ever encourages thought towards the positive, it nevertheless astutely registers the fact that thought runs counter to positivity, and that to train it to go in that direction requires (11) friendly persuasion on the part of social authority. The effort implicit in the concept of thought, as the counterpart of passive contemplation, is itself this very negativity, a revolt against any demand that it should defer passively to every immediate given. Judgement and inference, the forms of thought that even the critique of thought cannot dispense with, contain the germs of criticism within themselves; the fact that they are determinate in nature always means excluding those things they have not touched, and the truth to which they aspire formally denies as untrue whatever does not bear the stamp of identity. The judgement that such-and-such is the case potentially rejects the claim that the relation of subject and predicate could be otherwise than is expressed in the judgement [13]. The forms of thought aspire to more than what merely exists, is merely 'given'. That inspired Hegel. Only, he went on to undo the good work by introducing the identity thesis with its equation of the pressure of what is with the human subject. The resistance to the material of thought contained in its form is not simply the mastery of nature given a spiritual inflection. While thought does violence to

Conversely, expression as a corrective to the reification of a rigour which makes itself independent of subjective presence.

Fidelity to rigour requires expression if its ideological disorder [Unwesen], the high-handed automatism of thought, is to be eliminated.

(10) Against contamination by the poetic. Benjamin's Arcades Project.<sup>2</sup>

The danger of capitulation in his failure: his taking over of a materialism that had come to a standstill and was for that reason undialectical.

Behind the philosophical defeatism, a remnant of undialectical positivism imported from B[enjamin]'s theological phase into his materialist one.

Hegel's identification of negativity with the subject – against the positivism of science and the contingent nature of the singular – has its basis in experience. Prior to every particular content, thought is negation, resistance (hence the element of effort that distinguishes thought from receptivity. In this respect, thinking resembles its model, work: this too has its negative side.)

Positivity in itself – that which has been postulated, that which happens to be the case, contrary to thought.

(11) All logical operations, judgements, inferences, contain the seeds of criticism; the determinate nature of logical forms implies the exclusion of what has not been achieved by them. The logic of 'excluded middle' as negation.

The truth that logical forms lay claim to eo ipso negates as untrue everything that does not bear the stamp of identity. Thinking is a priori critique.

'Implicit negativity': the judgement that something is the case potentially rejects the claim that the relation of subject and predicate could be otherwise than expressed in the judgement. The implicit negativity must be made explicit.

The forms of thought aspire to more than what merely exists, is merely 'given'. Synthesis is negation.

The resistance of thought to its material is not only the control of nature given a spiritual inflection.

While its syntheses do violence to the object, they simultaneously follow the lead of the potential contained in that material.

It [thought] aims unconsciously at a *restitutio ad integrum*,<sup>3</sup> of making whole once again the fragments it has itself

the material on which it practises its syntheses, it simultaneously follows the lead of the potential contained in that material, thus unconsciously complying with the idea of a *restitutio in integrum*, of making whole once again the pieces into which it has been smashed; in philosophy this unconscious process becomes conscious. An irreconcilable process of thought is thus joined by the hope of reconciliation because thought's resistance to what merely exists, the violent freedom of the human subject, targets even that aspect of the object that was sacrificed in the process of objectification.

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*created. Phil[osophy] is the consciousness of this unconscious process.*

*Motive force [? Nature? Utopia?] An irreconcilable process of thought is thus joined by the hope of reconciliation.*

*14 December 1965*



(11) If we may interpret the secret desire of the generation of philosophers from Husserl to Bergson as the attempt to break the spell of immanent consciousness and system, and if that attempt failed for lack of rigour, the task facing a philosophy mindful of the tradition which it wishes to renounce would be to complete that escape into what Hölderlin called 'the open' in a decisive manner.<sup>1</sup> If critical philosophy robbed *intentio recta* [everyday knowledge – Trans.] of its naïve dogmatism through the application of subjective reason, a second step would be to reclaim that *intentio recta* minus that naïvety. For every shape of subjectivity always presupposes an objectivity, however determined, which it is supposed uniquely to establish on the model of the *intentio obliqua* [reflexive knowledge – Trans.] or to guarantee for cognition. The task of philosophy would be to reflect about objects without shaping them from the outset in accordance with rules that have long since been set in stone and whose validity is mistakenly taken for granted. The concreteness which philosophers [14] programmatically proclaimed in the early decades of the twentieth century was ideology because it had always shaped the concrete details in advance by means of specific concepts, thus enabling them to glorify such details as meaningful. In contrast, a second stage of reflection would have the task of uncovering the abstractions hidden in the concrete details which for their part have been prescribed in a thoroughly concrete fashion, namely by the abstract laws governing society. On the other hand, it must also open itself up wholeheartedly to these concrete details, in the knowledge that whatever goes beyond

# LECTURE 12

(11) *The escape from immanent consciousness and system vainly attempted by Husserl and Bergson is to be completed in a decisive manner with Hölderlin's favourite expression, the (12) 'open'.<sup>2</sup>*

*Through a second reflection reclaim the intentio recta; for the subject always presupposes an objectivity, however determined, which it is supposed uniquely to establish more philosophorum. Here give the core argument. I being, abstraction.*

*Distinction between the concept of the concrete and the concrete itself (see insertion\*).<sup>3</sup> The second reflection, in contrast, would have the task of uncovering the abstractions hidden in the concrete details.*

*On the other hand, it must also open itself up wholeheartedly to these details.*

*The programme of 'Back to the things themselves' to be carried through, which in Husserl are never more than noetic-noematic structures; my material works are the attempt to redeem the pledge of a negative dialectics to replace one developed from above – and hence wrongly.*

(13) *Again: the idea of a neg[ative] dial[ectics]: to shed light on the non-conceptual through a constellation of concepts.*

their mere materiality must inhere in them and not be raised above them. The programme of 'Back to the things themselves' that Husserl had merely proclaimed should be carried through, but without replacing the objects with epistemological categories. In so doing the aim is not to chase after the mirage of a philosophy without concepts, as Benjamin was tempted to do in his late phase when he considered assembling the 'Arcades' text purely from quotations.<sup>4</sup> There can be no construction of details in the absence of the emphatic concept. The divergence from traditional philosophy is that of its tendential direction. Traditional philosophy regarded the elevation to a concept as an implicit ideal. Materials were selected and preformed in accordance with that ideal. The alternative would be to assemble concepts in such a way that their constellation might shed light on the non-conceptual.



(13) The goal, as unattainable as any that the intellect sets itself as long as it fails to mutate into practice, would be for philosophy to arise from the individual detail taken literally. The concepts that philosophy would have to employ, however, would have to derive from the current state of tradition if confusion between the arbitrary and the achieved is to be avoided. The same thing would apply to the questions it would pose. These concepts and questions would not be fixed *χωρίς*, in isolation from the objects, but would be thrown in with them, abandoning the delusion that in possessing the concepts that existed for themselves philosophy also takes hold of the underlying realities that exist in themselves. The state of tradition itself [15] would have to be confronted with the actual historical situation. This means that theory would cease to be a matter of subsumption; it would instead define the relations of the different conceptual elements among themselves. Its centre would be found in the unravelling of the insoluble or in the 'unrepeatable', to use the term favoured by Karl Heinz Haag.<sup>1</sup> Theory is presupposed and employed in order to dispense with it in its current form. The ideal of its changed form would mean its extinction. The intention to eliminate all supports leaves it more exposed than in the case of an open or unfinished dialectic. Once the logical and metaphysical principle of identity has been extirpated, the latter ceases to be able to state what actually motivates the dialectical motion of both concept and thing. Insufficient justice is done to the negative element of truth in idealist dialectics, that objective *machine infernale* from which consciousness

# LECTURE 13

(13) Farewell to moving from below to above, analysis. 'Salvaging empiricism'.

The problem emerges both from the current state of tradition and the actual historical stage of phil[osophy]. Not χωρίς from experience.

Theory presupposed and drawn upon so as to do away with its present form.

The ideal that it should be extinguished.

More than merely an 'open dialectic' that would contain the traditional dialectic minus its claim to conclusiveness. – Qualitative distinction. In a neg[ative] dialectics the categories undergo change. Model: synthesis. This no longer the higher. 'The whole is the false.'<sup>2</sup>

In it [i.e. an 'open dialectic'] the negative side of truth in idealist dialectics gets less than its fair share, the objective machine infernale<sup>3</sup> from which consciousness would like to escape.

The coercion should not be ignored, but understood.

'Strait-jacket of dialectics': strait-jacket of the world.

Openness to be conceived only as the undiminished consciousness of being thwarted.

(14) System. The idealist system turns the actual state of affairs on its head.

Telos of philosophy is its open and unshielded nature.

– and not consciousness alone – would like to escape. It cannot hope to escape by ignoring that dialectic, only by comprehending it. Hegel should be defended against the old slur on ‘the strait-jacket of dialectics’. It is the strait-jacket of the world. The ‘open’ can be conceived only as the undiminished consciousness of being thwarted, of the perversity of things.

(14) This tells us something about the relationship to system. Traditional speculative philosophy has striven to synthesize what, on Kantian grounds, it takes to be a chaotic multiplicity, and ultimately to forge into a unity. This turns the actual state of affairs on its head. The *telos* of philosophy, its open and unprotected nature, its freedom to interpret phenomena with which it engages unarmed, is anti-systematic. It must needs respect system, however, in so far as heterogeneous factors confront it in systematic form. The administered world is moving in the direction of rigid systematization. It is negative [16] objectivity that is the system, not the positive subject. After a historical phase in which systems that dealt seriously with significant issues were relegated to the ominous realm of intellectual poetry, leaving nothing behind but the pale shadow of their schematic organization, it is hard to imagine what once inspired the philosophical mind to construct systems. According to Nietzsche, it ended up documenting nothing more than the pedantry of scholars compensating themselves for their political impotence by constructing conceptual systems with which to demonstrate their absolute power over Being. The need for system, however, the unwillingness to put up with the *membra disiecta* of knowledge as opposed to reaching out to the absolute knowledge whose claims are involuntarily implied in the validity of every single individual judgement – that need was for once more than the pseudomorphosing of the spirit into the irresistibly successful methodology of mathematics and natural science.

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*The system that it imagines it produces as absolute subject, it derives from the object.*

*The rightness in the idea of system: the refusal to put up with the membra disiecta of knowledge, but instead to reach out for the whole – even if the whole consists in the fact that it is false.*

6.I.66



(14) In the philosophy of history, the systems of the seventeenth century in particular had a compensatory function. The same *ratio* that, in tune with the interests of the bourgeois class, had smashed the feudal order and its intellectual reflex, scholastic ontology, panicked at the sight of the subsequent ruins, (15) its own creation. It was terrified by the chaos that continued to lurk beneath the surface of its own power base, growing stronger in proportion to its own violence. These fears shaped the response of bourgeois thought in its formative stages in a way that became constitutive of its conduct for centuries to come: this was to revoke every step towards emancipation by reinforcing the existing order. Overshadowed by its incomplete emancipation, the bourgeois mind could not banish the fear that it might be overtaken by an even more advanced consciousness. It sensed that it had achieved not freedom in its entirety but only a caricature. Because of that it was forced to exaggerate its own autonomy at the level of theory, expanding it into a system that resembled its own coercive mechanisms. Bourgeois [17] *ratio* meant reproducing from within itself the order that it had negated in the outside world. As an order that had been produced, however, it ceased to be one, and hence became insatiable. Every system was just such a senseless, rational order – a postulated system posing as being-in-itself. Its origin must be sought in formal thought divorced from content; only through such a separation could it exercise control over its material. In the philosophical system such a strategy was intertwined with its own impossibility; in the early history of systems, especially, this

# LECTURE 14

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(14) The compensatory purpose of systems: ratio, which had smashed the feudal order and its intellectual reflex, panicked at the sight of the subsequent ruins as the bourgeoisie panicked politically – it was terrified by the chaos that continued to lurk beneath the surface of its own power base, growing stronger in proportion to its own violence. The incomplete emancipation fears the more complete one.

Where something proclaims freedom but refuses to go the whole way it produces only its caricature and discredits the genuine freedom. Because of that it is forced to exaggerate its own autonomy at the level of theory, expanding it into a system that resembled its own coercive mechanisms. Bourgeois ratio pretended to reproduce from within itself the order that externally it had negated as trans-subjective, largely following older models (Descartes and the scholastics). As an order that had been produced, however, it ceased to be one, and hence became insatiable. What has been postulated cannot be being-in-itself and only if it were would the system be anything more. As system, i.e. as connected thought, being-in-itself is precisely what it cannot be. Its origin must be sought in formal thought divorced from its content: only in this way can it exercise control over its material. In the system such a strategy was intertwined with its own impossibility; this is why the one thing devours the other. The dialectical history of philosophy is the history of its own negativity.

As system ratio must virtually eradicate all the qualitative features it relates to.

condemned each system to destruction at the hands of its successor. So as to prevail as a system, *ratio* virtually eradicated all the qualitative features it related to. It thus came into an irreconcilable conflict with the objectivity which it pretended to comprehend while in fact doing violence to it. It thus became divorced from objectivity, and the more completely, the more that objectivity was subjected to its axioms and, ultimately, to the single axiom of identity. The pedantries of all systems right down to the structural complexities of Kant and even Hegel, with whose programme they are so incompatible, are the marks of an a priori failure, one that is documented with scrupulous honesty in the fractures in the Kantian system. Whenever things that are to be comprehended resist identity with the concept, the latter are forced into grotesque exaggeration to prevent doubts arising about the coherence and rigour of the intellectual product. Great philosophy was taken possession of by the paranoid zeal that forbids the wicked queen in Snow White to tolerate anyone more beautiful than she – another person, in short – even at the uttermost ends of her realm, and that drives her to pursue that Other with all the wiles of (16) reason, while the Other constantly retreats in the face of that pursuit.

*It eliminates what it sets out to comprehend: that is the antinomy of the system. Pedantry is its scar. On this point, excursus on the qualities\* 12a*

[insertion 12a] *On the qualitative*

*The reduction of quality to quantity – the ability to master social and natural processes – is equated with the progress of knowledge qua the progress of the object.*

*But this very process, as a process of abstraction, is one that distances itself from the objects.*

*And it is false in itself because qualities do not simply disappear in the course of exchange but are also retained.*

*The qualities would simply fall into the lap of a social process freed from exchange.*

*Dual attitude to them today. Neither romantically take possession of them directly, 'life', nor sanction their disappearance.*

*It is also social semblance. [end of insertion]*

*Whenever things that are to be comprehended shrink from identity with the concept, the latter will be forced into grotesque exaggeration to prevent doubts arising about its coherence. NB Kant's architectonic elaborations.*

*Great phil[osophy] always possessed the paranoid zeal of the wicked queen in Snow White to ensure that there should be none more beautiful than she – another person, in short – even at the uttermost ends of her realm.*

*It pursues that Other with all the wiles of reason, while the Other constantly retreats in the face of that pursuit.*

11 January 1966

(16) The least remnant of non-identity would suffice to negate identity [18] as a whole. Ever since Descartes's pineal gland and Spinoza's axioms, which already contain the total rationalism he would go on to extract from them so productively through the process of deduction, the eccentricities of systems proclaim in their untruth the truth, the insanity of systems as such. The process, however, by which these systems were undermined by their own failings was counterpointed by a social process. In the form of the exchange principle, bourgeois *ratio* drew closer to the systems whatever it wanted to resemble itself, to identify with itself, leaving less and less outside. In this respect it had growing, albeit potentially murderous, success. What turned out to be vacuous in theory was by an irony vindicated in practice. This explains why, a generation after Nietzsche, all the ideological talk about 'the crisis of the system' became increasingly popular. This applied with particular force even among those who, in conformity with the already obsolete ideal of system, felt free to vent their spleen on the [fashion for the – Trans.] *aperçu*. Reality should no longer be construed because it is too easy to construe it to excess, and its irrationality provides pretexts for this that become intensified under the pressure of particular rationalities: disintegration through integration. If society could be exposed as a closed system, one which for that reason is unreconciled to the human subjects of which it is composed, it would scarcely be tolerated by them in so far as they continue to be human subjects. Its character as system, only recently still

# LECTURE 15

(16) *The eccentricities and pedantries of systems tell the truth about them: scars of non-resolution; resolution is artificially brought about by elaboration. It is as if whatever aspects of objects elude thought reappear in parodied form as thought's own thing-like nature.*

*The insanity of systems (reference to Freud). Already there in Plato in the idea of the mathematical treatment of morality.*

*The undermining of systems counterpoints a social development. Bourgeois ratio, as an exchange principle, brought reality closer and closer to the system, leaving less and less outside. Suffering caused by this: intellectual claustrophobia. This is why the anti-systematic becomes a complementary ideology.*

*What turned out to be futile in theory was vindicated by practice. The world has become as coercive and arid as the systems before it.*

*As previously with systems, the condemnation of systems has become increasingly ideological. It has become altogether too facile to be against systems.*

*Reality should no longer be construed because it is all too easy to construe it to excess. The more abstract the world, the more philosophy sets itself up as concrete.*

*This resistance can base itself on the disintegration that is twinned with integration.<sup>1</sup> The closed society no longer rational. Working through of the principle of equivalence.*

*If society could be seen to be the system that it is, it would no longer be tolerated by those forced to inhabit it.*

the shibboleth of school philosophy, must be assiduously denied by its adepts; in the process they may pose as the spokesmen of free, original and even non-academic thinking. Such abuses do not invalidate critiques of the system.

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*The belief that no system exists is designed to make us believe that life still exists. Anyone who denies the system appears as the spokesman of free, unacademic thinking.*

*Hence, a dual attitude to the system. (Its denial was a motif of Jugendstil, complementary to the reactionary late systems.)*

*[This is not enough] to invalidate critique of this.*

13.I.66



(16) The belief that philosophy is possible only as a system – a proposition common to every incisive philosophy, in contrast to sceptical thinking which resisted such incisiveness – is scarcely less damaging to philosophy than are empiricist tendencies. The matters on which philosophy has to pronounce judgements are essentially decided in advance by its own postulates. (17) [19] The system, the format for a totality to which nothing remains extraneous, assigns an absolute status to thought over against its contents, thus dissolving all contents into thoughts: it is idealist prior to any arguments for idealism.

A critique of this does not suffice to liquidate the system. Not only is its form adequate to the world, which in terms of content eludes the hegemony of thought. In addition, compared to the system all unsystematic thought up to Nietzsche always seemed feeble, if not impotent. Unity and harmony, however, are at the same time the skewed projection of a pacified, no longer antagonistic state of affairs onto the coordinates of a dominant, oppressive way of thinking. The dual meaning of philosophical systems allows for no alternative but to transpose the power of thought into the open definition of its individual elements, once it has been freed from the constraints of systematization. In essence Hegel's logic was already moving in this direction. Reflection on his individual categories was supposed to enable each concept to flow into the next, without regard to anything superimposed on them from above, and the totality of these movements was what he understood by system. Only, instead of becoming crystallized, this system remained implicit, and hence fraudulent,

# LECTURE 16

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(16) *The proposition that phil[osophy] is possible only as a system is scarcely more inimical to it than the most profoundly anti-philosophical empiricism.*

*System pre-empts the decision about matters of which phil[osophy] itself should be the valid judge; through the postulate of its own strategy.*

(17) *It postulates the thought in an absolute manner as opposed to any content, it tends to dissolve all content in the thought: [it is] idealist prior to every argument in favour of idealism.*

*But such criticism does not simply liquidate systems.*

*Not merely because of its adequateness to this world.*

*Unity and harmony are at the same time the skewed projection of a reconciled, no longer antagonistic state of affairs onto the coordinates of a dominant, self-glorifying way of thinking.*

*The dual meaning of philosophical systems allows for no alternative but to transpose the power of thought released from all systematization into the open definition of its individual elements. The individual thing stands for the whole that we do not possess.*

*Refer to the feeble and impotent nature of the non-systematic philosophies in comparison to the great systems. At bottom, empiricism [is] not possible as a philosophy; this can be shown by its own lack of cogency. More superficial, although truer in a certain sense; but the systems [have] more truth in distorted form. Where empiricism is phil[osophy] it leans towards the subject[ive] system.*

preconceived in every one of its components. Such illusory totalities must be dispelled; what Hegel merely promised should be carried out, namely the quasi-unconscious immersion of consciousness in the phenomena on which it takes a stand. And that means a qualitative dialectical change. Systematic harmony would crumble. The phenomenon would not remain what it remains in Hegel despite his best intentions, namely an instance of its concept. (18) Thinking would require more labour and effort than Hegel suspects [20] since in his discussion thought extracts from its objects only that which is already a thought. Notwithstanding his programme of exteriorization, he remains self-contained and goes bowling along, however much he protests the contrary. If the thought had truly exteriorized itself onto the object, then the latter would begin to speak for itself beneath the stubborn gaze of thought.

Incidentally, classical empiricism only appeared to be anti-systematic; in reality [it was] closely related to Kant's theory of categories (Kant).

How philosophy should comport itself in the aporia of empir[icism] + system is implicit in Hegel: reflection on the categories in themselves without regard to anything superimposed on them from above.

That is the meaning of the immanent movement of the concept.

At the same time, of course, instead of becoming crystallized, the system was already there behind the scenes.

Here, then, the challenge of Hegel would be to take him seriously, against his own practice.

What might be called an unconscious immersion of consciousness in the phenomena. This is what was meant by the statement: 'True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves.'<sup>1</sup> The thought that understands itself has already gone beyond itself and is in that sense untrue. And that means a qualitative dialectical change.

Systematic harmony would crumble.

The phenomenon would not remain what it remains in H[egel] despite his protests, namely, an instance of its concept. The first task of negative dialectics is to expound this qualitative change.

(18) This means that more labour and effort would be required of thought than in the system where despite everything it bowls along nicely. Not with a lighter, freer touch, as academic prejudice would have it.

If the thought had truly exteriorized itself, the object would start to speak for itself. Effort of the imagination – against this, the greatest – rationalized – resistance.

(18) In this sense, the philosophical ideal is interpretation, something that was traditionally taboo. Hegel's objection to epistemology was that you only become a smith through smithing, by the actual cognition of resistant, as it were, atheoretical phenomena. In this respect we must take him at his word; this alone would return to philosophy the freedom that, under the spell of the concept of freedom, it had surrendered the autonomy of the subject that alone created meaning. Philosophy had its substance in the individual and particular that the entire tradition had treated as a *quantité négligeable*. The speculative power with which to blast open the insoluble, however, is the power of negation. In it alone does the systematic impulse survive. The categories involved in a critique of system are the same ones needed to comprehend the particular. The elements that once legitimately transcended particularity in the system have their place outside the system [*im Ungedeckten*]. The gaze that apprehends more in the phenomenon than it actually is, and grasps what it is simply by this means, secularizes metaphysics. The fragments in which philosophy terminates are what assign a proper place to the monads that within idealism had been no more than illusory constructs. They provide ideas, in the realm of the particular, of the totality that is inconceivable as such. The thinking, meanwhile, that is banned from making positive hypostases outside actual dialectics overshoots the object with which it no longer pretends [21] to be identical; it becomes more independent than when it is conceived as being absolute, in reality a confusion of sovereign mastery and compliance, the one dependent upon

# LECTURE 17

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(18) *In this sense, the philosophical ideal is interpretation, something that was traditionally taboo. We can learn what phil[osophy] is from the interpretation of phenomena.*

*Hegel's critique of epistemology: the idea that this cannot be separated from the implementation of thought (you become a smith by smithing)<sup>1</sup> has to be taken literally.*

*Phi[osophy] has its substance in the individual and particular that it always treated as a *quantité négligeable* – notwithstanding Hegel's vote for the concrete.*

*The speculative power with which to blast open the insoluble, however, is the power of negation. Blasting open [is] negative, not, as in Hegel, the anti-dialectical, the negation of the negation.*

*In it [i.e. that power – Trans.] the speculative impulse lives on.*

*The categories involved in a critique of system are the same ones needed to comprehend the particular.*

*The elements that once legitimately transcended particularity in the system have their place beyond the system [im Ungedeckten]. The gaze that apprehends more in the phenomenon than it actually is, and grasps what it is simply by this means, secularizes metaphysics.*

*Only in fragments<sup>2</sup> would the conception of monads come into their own.*

*The thinking, meanwhile, that is banned from making positive hypostases outside actual dialectics overshoots the object with which it no longer pretends to be identical. In contrast to the overshooting of abstraction.*

the other. This was perhaps Kant's purpose in exempting the intelligible sphere from immanence of every kind. This overshooting of the intellect is not identical with dialectics at the micrological level. (19) Immersion in particularity, dialectical immanence intensified to an extreme, calls for the freedom to step outside the object that is abrogated by the claims of identity. Hegel would have been the last to approve of this: he relied on complete mediation by the objects. In cognitive practice, the resolution of the insoluble, the aspect of the transcendent nature of thought, can be seen in the fact that micro-analysis, the decoding of the insoluble, makes use exclusively of macrological methods. True enough, the classifying approach by means of which it is subsumed as an example does not shed light on what is opaque here. Greater success is achieved, however, by the constellation of concepts which the constructive mind brings to bear, much as the locksmith opens a safe not with a single key or a single numeral, but with a combination of numbers. Philosophy would once again fall victim to the pre-established harmony of Leibniz or Hegel, to consoling affirmation, if it were to deceive itself and others about the fact that, in addition to whatever methods it employs to move objects in themselves, it must also bring to bear on them from outside.

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*It becomes more independent than when it is conceived as being absolute, in reality a confusion of sovereign mastery and compliance, the one dependent upon the other.*

*This was perhaps Kant's deepest purpose in exempting the intelligible sphere from immanence of every kind.*

*(19) Immersion in a particular extreme calls for the freedom to step outside the object that is abrogated by the claims of identity. The micrological approach demanded makes use exclusively of macrological methods.*

*True enough, the idea of classification which subsumes the particular as an example does not open it up; this can be done only by the constellation of concepts that the constructive mind brings to bear on it.*

*Comparison with the number combination of a safe.*

*Philosophy would once again fall victim to the pre-established harmony of Leibniz or Hegel, if it were to deceive itself and others about the fact that, in addition to whatever methods it employs to move objects in themselves, it must also bring to bear on them from outside. – What is needed for the experiencing of objectivity is the subject, not its elimination. \*15 a*

20 January 1966





# LECTURE 18

[Insertion 15 a] Why the full subject is needed in order to experience objectivity.

The elimination of the subjective qualities always implies a reduction of the object. The more reactions are dismissed as 'merely subjective' the greater the loss of the qualitative determinants of the object.

Model: the fate of questionnaires in which the imaginative questions that lead deep into the subject matter are eliminated, leaving only those that reduce the results to what might have been expected to begin with.

The knowledge being sought in negative dialectics is qualitative.

Qualitative elements are what are filtered out by the usual objectivizing methods of science.

Elimination of the subject = quantification.

The single knowing subject, the individual, is itself qualitative. This is why it is needed.

Concept of affinity: that only like can know like.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the problem of randomness survives in the sense that an individual has something random about it as opposed to the universality of reason.

But this randomness is not as absolute as scientific superstition would have it; this is because particularity contains a universal social principle, the principle of progressive differentiation. – This differentiation is not merely subjective but is also the ability to perceive in the object whatever its preparation eliminates. It is itself constituted by the object. Its goal is the object's restitutio in integrum.

(19) Whatever abides within them [i.e. the objects of philosophy] needs an intervention for them to speak. The intention remains that the forces mobilized from outside, and ultimately every theory brought to bear upon phenomena from outside, should be consumed within them. Philosophical theory points to its own end.

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*In the process it is fallible – the qualitative is at the same time a mimetic residue, quasi archaic. This is why it requires a corrective. This is what is meant by the self-reflective nature of intellectual experience.*

*Hence, speaking figuratively: a vertical (temporal) process of objectification, not a horizontal (abstract, quantifying) one.*

[End of the insertion]

*(19) Whatever abides within them [i.e. the objects of philosophy] needs an intervention (ultimately: a practical one) for it to speak.*

*Rescue the element of truth in idealism.*

*The intention remains that the forces mobilized from without, and ultimately theory too, end up being consumed by its objects.*

*Philosophical theory points to its own end.*

25.I.66

(20) [22] Dialectics that is no longer ‘affixed’<sup>1</sup> to identity either provokes the criticism that it is baseless, and that we shall know it by its fascist fruits, or else that it is giddy-making. Behind the anxiety about where to take hold of a philosophy there lies for the most part nothing more than aggression, the desire to seize hold of it in the way in which historically schools used to devour one another. The equivalence of guilt and penance has been transposed to the sequence of thoughts. It is precisely this assimilation of mind to the ruling principle that philosophical reflection must see through. Traditional thought and the habits of common-sense thinking that it left behind it after its demise as philosophy call for a frame of reference<sup>2</sup> in which everything has its place. Not too much importance is attached to the intelligibility of the frame of reference – it can even be formulated in dogmatic axioms – as long as it gives shelter to every reflection while barring the way to every unframed thought. A dialectics that has discarded its fixation with Hegel can satisfy us only if it abandons itself heedlessly to the objects *à fonds perdu*; the vertigo that this induces is an *index veri*. What is so giddy-making is the shock of the open, the negativity as which it necessarily appears in the framed and never-changing realm: untruth for the untrue. The dismantling of systems and of the system as such is not a question of formal epistemology, but one that drastically affects their contents: details no longer fall into place. What formerly the system wished to procure for them is, as qualitatively other, to be found only in the details

# LECTURE 19

(20) *The objection of the giddy-making effect of negative dialectics (Kracauer).<sup>3</sup> It is not based on axioms. 'Nothing one can hold onto.'*

*Why it is more challenging than Hegel.*

- a) *because the latter retains the sticking point in the absolute subject.*
- b) *the unchanging nature of the framework.*

*Behind the question of how to seize hold of a phil[osophy] [lies] aggression, the desire to seize hold of it.*

*Equivalence of guilt and penance has been transferred to the sequence of thoughts. That is what has to be seen through.*

*Against the call for a frame of reference (NB emerging with Descartes's anal[ytic] geometry: system of coordinates!) in which everything would have its place. This already contains quantification (of what is spatially perceptible), abstraction (according to current ways of thinking this may even be based on arbitrary axioms) – the arbitrary and the axiomatic go hand in hand; only whatever does not claim to be the very first thing need not be arbitrary.*

*Through a frame of reference everything is captured, is contained. Importance of immanence.*

*Truth [to be found] only in whatever throws itself away without safety belt, à fonds perdu.*

themselves. Thought cannot guarantee in advance what that extra quality is or whether it is present. Only if it is present can the much misused saying [23] that ‘the truth is concrete’ properly come into its own. This saying compels philosophy to crack open the minutiae of thought. We must philosophize not *about* concrete details but from *within* them, by assembling concepts around them. Hegel’s assertion that the particular is the universal is the most scathing criticism of it; we should give this critique its due. However, if we surrender to the specific object, the bleating herd accuses us of failing to adopt an unambiguous standpoint. The herd regards as witchcraft anything that differs from the prevailing reality; whatever is under a spell has the advantage that all the things that mean familiarity, home and security in the false world are themselves aspects of the spell. People fear that, in escaping from the spell, they will lose everything because they know no happiness, not even the happiness of thought apart from the ability to hold onto something – unfreedom in perpetuity. (21) They want at least the prospect of something desirable; more palpably, a piece of ontology amidst their critique of it, just as if any unframed insight did not express what is desirable better than a declaration of intention<sup>6</sup> that is not taken further.

What is giddy-making is the experience of openness; surrounded by the spell it is the essentially modern (Baudelaire, Poe), *le goût du néant*:<sup>4</sup> it is the untruth only for what is untrue, i.e. for the spell. More precisely, that which ceaselessly forms itself. Fabric, not a train of thought. Against the usual books.

The vertigo brought about by the thought that fails to reconstruct is the *index veri*.

What formerly the system of coordinates wished to procure for the phenomena is to be sought solely *in them*.

Thought cannot guarantee in advance either whether something is present or not: that is the salvaging of empiricism.

Only if it were present could the much misused saying that 'the truth is concrete' properly come into its own.

We must philosophize not about concrete details, as in Simmel, but from within them, by assembling concepts around them.<sup>5</sup>

Anything that differs from the prevailing reality is regarded by it as witchcraft.

Whatever is under a spell exploits the fact that all the things that meant familiarity, home and security in the false world are themselves components of the spell.

People fear that, in escaping from the spell, they will lose everything because they know no happiness, not even the happiness of thought – unfreedom in perpetuity.

(21) The universal desire for at least a 'piece of ontology'. Impossible: either a doctrine of the unchanging or else the radical renunciation of such a thing.

People should say what they like: *thesis*. 'Declaration of intention'.

In this, a reified consciousness: the Coolidge story: Coolidge had been to church and his wife asked him what the preacher spoke about. 'About sin.' – 'What did he say?' – 'He was against it.'<sup>7</sup> – Against simplification. Brecht. If it is true that the decisive truths lie in the smallest detail, then simplification is the untruth. This should be demonstrated with reference to Marxism. Simplification is the same thing as pretending to be stupid. Patina[?] on stupidity.

This schema has worldwide currency today.



(21) Philosophy confirms an experience Schoenberg noted in the case of traditional music theory. Music theory really teaches only how a movement begins and ends, nothing about the movement itself or its development. By analogy, instead of reducing philosophy to categories, the task in a sense is to compose it. However, there is something scandalous about a mode of conduct that does not act as guardian to anything primary and certain, but which, if only by virtue of the forthrightness of its presentation, makes so few concessions to relativism, the twin of absolutism, that it borders on doctrine. It goes beyond Hegel, to the point of breaking with his dialectics, which aspired to be all things, even *prima philosophia*, and in fact turned it into that by his adoption of the identity principle, the absolute subject. However, dissociating thought [24] from the primary and the fundamental does not turn it into a free-floating absolute.

# LECTURE 20

(21) Coercion lurks in alternatives. Thus a civil servant has to choose between the possibilities he is presented with.

My old resistance to 'he who is not with me, is against me',<sup>1</sup> in which the authority about which we should reflect is already endorsed.

Structure: not to act as guardian to anything primary and certain, but to oppose both relativism and absolutism, if only by means of a forthright presentation (which amounts to the same thing as determinate negation).

That is the scandal and it belongs to phil[osophy].

The dissociation from whatever is fixed does not imply Mannheim's free-floating.<sup>2</sup> The knowledge yielded up by neg[ative] d[ialectics] is motivated; think as far as is possible according to the situation, but do not hypostasize this.\*17 a

[Insertion 17 a]: Relativism itself is based on the bourgeois model of individualism.

The idea that 'everything is relative' is abstract.

Behind this stands the idea: thinking is pointless; what matters is material reality, money, and thinking only disrupts business.

As soon as you immerse yourself in a particular subject matter relativism melts away in the discipline governing it.

It only ever appears from outside.

The invalidity of relativism consists in the fact that the arbitrary and accidental that it deems irreducible are themselves objectively caused.

(21) [24] The very act of dissociation binds it to what it is not and thus disposes of the illusion of self-sufficiency. If the ungrounded is to be condemned, this objection should likewise be levelled at the self-sustaining intellectual principle as the sphere of absolute origins. However, where ontology, Heidegger in the lead, hits out at the ungrounded, there is the site of truth. The truth is shifting and fragile, thanks to its temporal substance; Benjamin insistently criticized Gottfried Keller's statement that the truth cannot run away from us. Philosophy must abandon the consoling idea that the truth cannot be lost. A truth that is incapable of plunging into the abyss that the metaphysical fundamentalists (22) waffle about – it is the abyss not of nimble sophistry but of insanity – will be converted at the bidding of its certainty principle into an analytic proposition and potentially into a meaningless tautology. Only thoughts like these, that go to extremes, are able to challenge the omnipotent impotence of a certain complicity; only a cerebral acrobatics still retains a relation to the matter in hand that, according to the *fable convenue*, it scorns in favour of its own self-satisfaction. Today, every attempt to prohibit this is irrationalist. The function of the concept of certainty in philosophy has gone into reverse. Where formerly thinkers attempted to overcome dogma and tutelage through self-certainty, that same self-certainty has now degenerated into a mannerism of a socially insured knowledge, a knowledge to which nothing is supposed to happen. And, in fact, nothing does happen.

*Supposedly individual reactions are preconditioned: bleating.*

*Such an illusion of individual relativism has already been exposed by its sociological version: Pareto. (He was Mannheim's model)<sup>3</sup>*

*But the views that he regards as simply unavoidably specific to particular classes are for their part deducible from the totality of society.*

*Model: when a capitalist inserts variable capital  $v$  into his accounts he must assume, according to the rules of accounting, that like has been exchanged for like, for otherwise he will end up with an adverse balance and must conclude that he has lost out somewhere.*

*Thus the allegedly relative nature of opinions can be traced back to objective factors, the structural laws as a whole.*

*Likewise, relativism as a doctrine: bourgeois scepticism.*

*Hostility to the intellect = refusal to accept the consequences of one's own concept of reason.*

*Relativism, therefore, cannot be warded off by a dogmatic absolutism but must be dissolved by pursuing its own theses.*

*Its function changes; sometimes it is progressive in comparison with dogma; today it is ideological through and through. Nevertheless, a reactionary element always accompanied relativism: among the Sophists as a form of making oneself compliant with the most powerful interests, in Montaigne as a readiness to apologize for dogma. [End of the insertion]*

(21) *It [i.e. negative dialectics] binds thinking to what it is not, against the illusion of its own self-sufficiency.*

*If the ungrounded is to be condemned, the objection would be to the self-sustaining intellectual principle – pure mediation – as the sphere of absolute origins.<sup>4</sup>*

*Where ontology hits out at the ungrounded, here is the site of truth.*

*It is fragile thanks to its immanent temporal substance.*

*Benjamin rightly criticized as bourgeois Gottfried Keller's saying that the truth cannot run away from us.<sup>5</sup> It can.*

(22) *Anything that is incapable of collapsing is, at the bidding of the ideal of certainty, an analytical judgement, potentially a meaningless tautology.*

*The only thoughts to have a chance are those that go to extremes; capable of cerebral acrobatics.*

*Function of certainty in phil[osophy] has gone into reverse: what once attempted to overtake dogma and tutelage through self-certainty*

*has degenerated into a mannerism of socially insured knowledge, a knowledge to which nothing is supposed to happen.*

*And in fact nothing does happen.*

*1 February 1966*



(22) An unfettered dialectics no more dispenses with a solid basis than does Hegel. But dialectics no longer confers any primacy on it. Hegel did not so much emphasize the solid basis at the origin of his metaphysics: his intention was for it to emerge at its conclusion, in all its glory. This gives his logical categories a curious ambivalence. They are both structures that have emerged, that cancel [25] each other out and, at the same time, have an unchanging, a priori character. Their dynamic is mediated by the doctrine of immediacy that renews itself on every level of the dialectic. The theory of a second nature – which had already acquired a critical tinge – is preserved in a negative dialectics. It assumes *tel quel* the mediated immediacy, the formations that society and its (23) development throw at thought so that analysis may lay bare their mediations and expose the immanent difference between what things are and what they claim to be. The unchanging, self-sustaining solid reality, what the young Hegel termed ‘the positive’, is the negative for that analysis, as it was for him. The more the autonomy of subjectivity is restricted critically, and the more we become aware that it is itself a mediated thing, the more compelling the obligation to leave objects the primacy that endows thoughts with the solidity they do not possess in themselves, a solidity that they need and without which the dynamic energy required by dialectics to dissolve such solidity would not even exist. The possibility of a negative dialectics depends on the proof of the primacy of the object. This too cannot be an absolute principle for

# LECTURE 21

(22) *The concept of solidity in an unfettered dialectics must be defined more precisely.*

*However, it is only an aspect of dialectic (initially, the unavoidably conceptual aspect) and has no primacy in it.*

- a) *Concepts move only to the extent that they are held fast, as a yardstick. Hence: concepts to be very strictly heeded. Demand for precision: function of language.*
- b) *It has in essence the form of Hegel's 'second nature'.<sup>1</sup>*

*Negative dialectics takes the solid, the formations that history (23) throws at thought, telles quelles, so as to disclose their mediations through analysis.*

*The immanent self-sustaining solid reality, what the young Hegel termed 'the positive', is the negative for that analysis as it was for him.*

*The more the autonomy of subjectivity is restricted critically, the more compelling the obligation to leave objects the primacy that endows thoughts with the solidity that dialectics then dissolves. This explains why the proof of the primacy of the object<sup>2</sup> as an internal element of dialectic is the pivotal factor in a negative dialectics.*

*No resurrection of naïve realism: no absolute primal principle.*

*Primacy of the object] only in dialectics; it is at this point that [we see] the fragile nature of truth.*



dialectics or a reprise for naïve realism: it is valid exclusively in the interrelationship. If the primacy of the object were to break free of the dialectic and be positively postulated – accompanied by the triumphant howls of the complicit – then philosophy would regress to the fatuous dogma of the reproduction or reflection [of reality – Trans.] that we see in the late writings of Georg Lukács. Yet again, a principle, a ‘maxim’, would be hypostasized and thought would reduce everything that exists to a common denominator. But ideology does not always resemble the general thesis of idealism. In fact, it dwells in the substructures of the concept of a ‘first’ thing, regardless of its content. It implies [26] the identity of concept and thing, and with that the justification of the world, even when it summarily insists on the dependence of consciousness on being. The theodicy of history, together with its overtones of apologia, was not alien to Marx.

Thinking that is not based on any immutable fundamental principle soon has the concept of synthesis in its sights. The latter subjects method both as the telos of philosophy and as the model of its individual operations to what idealism called the identity of subject and object: it moulded the Hegelian dialectic in the shape (24) of a circle, the lethal return of the result of thought to its origins. In accordance with this, synthesis, as an instant panacea against subversion, acquired a calamitous quality; perhaps its most repulsive form has been the invention of a so-called psycho-synthesis, as opposed to Freudian psychoanalysis; the fastidious sensibility recoils from even uttering the word.

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*Otherwise, relapse into prima philosophia (and also dogmatic materialism!)*

*The general thesis of idealism dwells in the substructures of the concept of a 'first' thing, almost regardless of its content.*

*It implies the identity of concept and thing, and thus places itself on the side of the way of the world (something of this even in Marx, to whom the theodicy of history was not alien).*

*Criticism of synthesis: that as method its goal is the identity of s[ubject] and ob[ject]. The problem is not logical synthesis as the merging of separate elements in thought, but absolute synthesis as the supreme goal of philosophy.*

*(24) Circular movement in Hegel.*

*The ideological side of synthesis exposed: the one, the totality, held together against so-called subversion. Example, 'psychosynthesis' and Freud's reply.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the automatized progression from the necessary syntheses to the ideal of a supreme one is to be opposed.*

*3 February 1966*

(24) Hegel uses it [i.e. the term 'synthesis'] even more sparingly than might be supposed by the popularity of the triadic scheme whose mechanical nature had been exposed by none other than Hegel himself. This may well correspond to the texture of his philosophy as a whole. His intellectual operations involve almost always the determinate negation of concepts that are examined from close to and turned this way and that. What emerges formally as a synthesis in the course of such analyses itself possesses the form of negation because it involves the redemption of whatever fell victim to the preceding movement of the concept. The Hegelian synthesis is at its core an insight into the insufficiency of that movement; the so-called higher stage turns out also to be a lower one, a step back into the pluperfect. This detaches Hegel from the vulgar notion of synthesis as victorious positivity. Admittedly, there is more than a trace of this triumphalism in the constantly forming immediacies in his thought in which their own mediations [27] are supposed to be submerged. The consequence of this, visible as early as Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, was to forsake all the trust in naturally developing or postulated immediacies that Hegel's dialectic had placed in them in its later, systematic form. In contrast to Kant, Hegel had restricted the priority given to synthesis: he recognized unity and multiplicity as moments neither of which can exist without the other; the tension between them is resolved by negation. Nevertheless, the predilection for unity is something he shares with Kant and the entire tradition. (25) But thinking must not confine itself to abstract negation. The illusion that it is possible to take hold of the many directly

# LECTURE 22

(24) Hegel is relatively sparing with talk about synthesis.

In concrete terms his method consists essentially of negation.

Even syntheses, the third steps, are negative with him in so far as they set out to salvage what has fallen victim to the movement of thought; they convict thought of its betrayal of whatever lags behind it and now asserts itself against it (e.g. in 'nothing')

Admittedly, in H[egel] the affirmative element in the doctrine of constantly self-renewing immediacies in which mediation is supposed to disappear.

The truth in this: validity of a logic which has after all evolved.

But that which has evolved and has since disappeared is not eliminated.

Otherwise, the result is a fetish that is as much of an apologia as the doctrine of the institutions in H[egel]'s Philosophy of Right. 'Critique of logical absolutism'.<sup>1</sup>

Mistrust of all evolved and posited immediacy: Marx. Universality of the category of fetishism.<sup>2</sup>

As against Kant, Hegel restricted the priority given to synthesis by making unity and multiplicity mutually dependent on one another. This, incidentally, potentially implicit in Kant; dates back to Plato's Parmenides dialogue. In Kant, however, [there is] juxtaposition, no mutual emergence of one thing from the other. Difference between K[ant] + H[egel].

However, they all, H[egel] included, have a *parti pris* for unity. It is in that fact that we discover philosophy's uncritical complicity with civilization. Reference to Haag, Parmenides dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

would regress to mythology, to the horrors of the diffuse, just as much as, at the opposite pole, unity thinking would mean the imitation of blind nature by suppressing it, mythical domination. For enlightenment to reflect on itself is not to retract enlightenment: that retraction comes about from its being corrupted in the interests of the current system of rule. The self-critical turn of unity thinking depends on concepts, syntheses, and must not discredit them by administrative fiat. Unity, regarded abstractly, contains scope enough for both: for the repression of qualities that cannot be reduced to ideas, as well as for the ideal of conciliation, beyond all antagonism. It has perennially succeeded in rendering its violence palatable to human beings because it is illuminated by traces of the non-violent and the pacified. The moment of unity cannot be extirpated, as is virtually the case in an unreflective nominalism, notwithstanding all the talk about unified science.

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(25) *But thinking must not confine itself to the abstract negation of unity. Anyone under the illusion of being able to take hold of the many directly would regress to the horrors of the diffuse, to mythology. The mythical is the undifferentiated.*

*The self-reflection of enlightenment is not to retract enlightenment: admittedly, it is easily corrupted into that today (anti-Enlightenment<sup>A</sup> = apologia for ties and institutions for their own sake, in a pragmatic spirit, without inquiring into their objective justification and hence contradicting them).*

*Unity, taken abstractly, offers scope both for the repression of qualities and for reconciliation.*

*By this means it has constantly succeeded in rendering its violence palatable to human beings: through the trace of the non-violent and the pacified associated with it.*

*The moment of unity, that of the objectivity of the concept, is not to be extirpated in a dogged nominalism. Experience of the objectivity of ideas that have subjective origins: the musical forms.*

8.II.66

(25) The movement of the elements towards synthesis must be reversed by a process of reflection about their impact on the many. Unity alone transcends unity. Even in the moment of identity a thing has its right to life, the affinity which was pushed into the background by the advance of unity and which, secularized to the point of unrecognizability, nevertheless managed to survive in that unity. [28] An unframed [*ungedeckt*] knowledge does not eliminate the unifying subject. It is inextinguishable in the experience of the object. (26) Its own syntheses want, as Plato doubtless realized, indirectly, with the aid of concepts, to change, to imitate whatever aims at that synthesis.

Thought that is receptive to the objects acquires philosophical substance. Philosophy has yearned for this in vain ever since the generation of Bergson and Simmel, Husserl and Scheler. What tradition dismissed was what tradition needed. If the constraints of method are relaxed in response to self-criticism, the corollary is that philosophical effort will be increasingly determined by its contents. The fact that the non-conceptual is not identical with its concept is honoured in cognitive practice by an increased emphasis on contents. A social dialectic, what is known in philosophical terminology as 'ontic' dialectic, in other words a dialectic of perennial antagonism, is reflected in the philosophical dialectic of subject and object. If there were such a thing as an ontology, an immutable doctrine, it would be the negative ontology of a perpetual antagonism. (27) Nevertheless, content-based thinking cannot simply cast off methodical reasoning if it is to avoid falling victim to either dogmatism or

## LECTURE 23

(23) Reflection on the part of the synthesis about what it does to the many.

Unity alone transcends unity. For the self-criticism of synthesis is at the same time a higher synthesis, opposed to the enduring antagonism of the One and τὰ πολλὰ.

The right of life to the identity principle: element of affinity that forces identity back and that survives in it.

(26) Thought that abandons itself to the objects acquires substance.

This is to be noted in the case of Bergson, Simmel, Scheler. What tradition dismissed was what tradition needed. Philosophical effort is increasingly determined by its content if not by the subject as the formal principle over against all content.

The fact that the non-conceptual is not identical with its concept turns in cognitive practice into an increase in content.

A perennial content-based antagonism becomes philosophical in the antagonism of subject and object.

The only meaning of ontology would be a negative one, that of a perpetual antagonism.

(27) Criticism of the stipulated supremacy of method does not absolve us from reflecting about it. That precisely is immanent criticism; otherwise, dogmatism or arbitrariness. Admittedly, the much-denigrated intuition, if it hits home, frequently comes closer to the truth than methodical progression.



arbitrary notions, even though the latter may come closer to the truth than the methodical progression whose reliability is purchased at the price of reducing its yield in insight. The question of the relation of individual content analyses to the theory of dialectics cannot be resolved by the idealist insistence that the one fits neatly into the other. Such an assurance would merely smuggle in a false identity of concept and thing once again. The blindness with which a thought abandons itself to its object without hypostasis, so to speak, without method, is itself a methodological principle. 'True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves.'<sup>1</sup> The less [29] a thought lets itself be influenced by reflections external to its objects, the more profoundly it becomes aware of the universal in the particular; the invectives of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche against the role of examples in philosophy point to this, against philosophy's own tradition. In terms of content, as the universal mediation of every phenomenon by the social totality which is converted in philosophy to pure subjectivity, something universal is contained in every particular. Philosophical experience, however, does not possess this universal, or does so abstractly at best. It is therefore constrained to start off from the particular, though without forgetting what it does not have, but does know. While philosophical experience is assured<sup>2</sup> of the actual determination of phenomena by their concepts, it cannot present these concepts (28) ontologically as true in themselves. They are fused with the untrue, the repressive principle, and that diminishes their epistemological dignity. They do not constitute the positive *telos* in which cognition can come to rest. For its part, the negativity of the universal fixes cognition to the particular since this is what has to be redeemed. The redemption of the particular, however, could not even begin without the universality it has set free. (29) All philosophy, even philosophy that intends freedom, drags unfreedom along in its wake, an unfreedom in which society prolongs itself. The neo-ontological projects have all resisted this, but their thrust was that of a regression to true or fictitious ἀρχαί, origins, which are nothing but the principle of coercion. Thought would like to rise above the alternatives of licence or coercion by assuring itself of mediation between its antithetical moments. Thought contains coercion within itself; [30] this coercion protects it against regression into licence. Nevertheless, criticism enables it to recognize the intrinsic element of coercion in itself; its own coercive character is the medium of its deliverance. Hegel's 'freedom to the object', which in his thought was purely repressive, the disempowering of the subject, has yet to be accomplished. Until that time, dialectics as method will continue to diverge from a dialectics of substance; they cannot simply be equated by dictatorial fiat.

It is not enough to insist that individual content analyses and the theory of dialectics fit neatly together. This is in effect idealist doctrine. The possibility of substantive knowledge is the problem epistemology has to resolve today.

(28) Reference to the distinction between an individual piece of knowledge and an example; the inadequacy of the latter in principle, criticized by Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. One of the chief factors distinguishing phil[osophy] from established science. The unity of theory and a 'blind' individual piece of knowledge consists in the first place in the fact that, thanks to the mediation of every phenomenon by the social totality, the universal is contained in every particular.

This mediation has distorted itself in the direction of idealism by moving towards the preponderance of the concept qua subject. In the strictest sense of the word, however, it is objective.

But phil[osophical] experience does not possess this universal directly, or does so only abstractly, *anticipando*, and it is therefore constrained to start out from the particular.

I.e. it cannot present the universal of whose actual, factual preponderance it is aware, as a principle of being, in other words as ontological. Anxiety is a social universal, but it is not a 'state of mind' [Befindlichkeit]<sup>3</sup>

Precisely this universal is fused with the repressive principle and cannot be the  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$  in which philosophical need comes to rest, but is the negative in which it has its target. Dialectics is negative by virtue of the negativity of its object.

Such negativity of the universal at the same time turns cognition towards the particular as what has to be redeemed both literally and conceptually.

Redemption of the particular, however, could not even begin without the universality it has set free.

(29) All philosophy, even philosophy that intends freedom, drags unfreedom along in its wake.

Thought might raise itself above this by becoming conscious of the dialectics of coercion and licence.

[30]<sup>4</sup> Thinking contains coercion, rigour within itself, as defence against regression into licence.

However, with the aid of rigour, it is able to recognize its own coercive character.

Hegel's freedom to the object,<sup>5</sup> which in him is purely repressive towards the subject, is something that has yet to be produced.

*Until that time, there will be an inevitable divergence between dialectics as method and as substance. (All method qua method is 'false')*

*I.e. the principle of a dialectical construction of the totality qua social totality, and the blind surrender to substance cannot be reconciled.*

10.II.66



[30] Of course, the fact that both concepts and reality are contradictory by nature has not come out of the blue. The distinction between the concept and whatever is subordinated to it is a sublimated version of the antagonisms that tear society apart and in particular the principle of domination. The logical form of contradiction, however, adopts that distinction because whatever refuses to abide by the unity imposed by the principle of domination manifests itself not as something indifferent to that principle, but as an infringement of logic: as a contradiction. The vestige of a divergence between philosophical conception and execution, on the other hand, also contains a truth, an element of non-identity. This non-identity neither permits the method to coincide completely with the philosophical contents in which it should subsist, nor does it allow these contents to be sublimated to the degree that would perhaps be appropriate if they were reconciled among themselves. The primacy of content expresses itself as the necessary insufficiency of the method. What must be said by way of general reflection and so as not to have to surrender abjectly to the philosophy of the philosophers can be legitimated solely in its execution, and this then negates it as method. Confronted with the philosophical substance, its surplus as method becomes abstract, false. Even Hegel had to come to terms with the discrepancy between his preface to the *Phenomenology* and the *Phenomenology* itself. The philosophical ideal would be for the performance of an act to render superfluous an accounting for what one had done.

# LECTURE 24

[30] *Substantiate my twofold technique as a writer.*

*Of course, there is an element of objective agreement in the dialectical nature of both, the whole and the parts.*

*The conflicts that tear society apart resemble the distinction between the concept and the particular facts subordinated to it. The logical form of contradiction adopts that distinction because whatever refuses to abide by the unity imposed by the principle of dominion manifests itself not as something indifferent to that principle, but as an infringement of logic: as a contradiction.*

*On the other hand, the vestige of a divergence between philosophical conception and execution also contains a truth, an element of the non-identity that prohibits collapsing method + contents into one thing.*

*The primacy of content expresses itself necessarily as the insufficiency of the method. It never has its legitimation in itself, but only in its execution. Every surplus of method is virtually false. (Hegel, preface to the Phenomenology!)*

*The philosophical ideal would be for accounting for what one does to be rendered superfluous by actually doing it.*

[31] *The most recent attempt to break out of the prison of conceptual fetishism went by the name of Existentialism.*

*Merit: contentism (this has recently been used as a reproach to Sartre, often in the most philistine manner: Heinemann)<sup>1</sup>*

*Critical intention.*

[31] (30) The most recent attempt to break out of the prison of conceptual fetishism – out of academic philosophy without relinquishing the claims of rigour – went by the name of Existentialism. Like the fundamental ontology with which it had parted company, it remained trapped in idealism despite its political commitment. Moreover, as regards philosophical structure it retained something arbitrary and could be replaced by a contrary [politics – Trans.] so long as these satisfied the formal characteristics of Existentialism. There is no theoretical dividing line between Existentialism and decisionism. At the same time, the idealist component of Existentialism is a function of politics. As social critics, Sartre and his friends were unwilling to restrict themselves to a theoretical critique, and it did not escape their attention that, wherever communism had seized power, it set itself up as a bureaucracy. The institution of a centralized state party makes a mockery of everything that has ever been thought about man's relation to the state. This explains why Sartre emphasized the feature no longer tolerated by dominant practice – what the language of philosophy terms spontaneity. The more the societal distribution of power has restricted the objective opportunities for spontaneity, the more Sartre has placed his hopes in Kierkegaard's category of the 'decision', a concept that had acquired its meaning in the latter's philosophy from its *terminus ad quem*, namely, from Christology.

A theory *formally* influenced by Heidegger's doctrine of the existential has turned against him *materially*.

The element of the arbitrary in the choice of the existential in Heidegger (develop further) explains something analogous in Sartre.

But the fundamental philosophical problem (latently present in the early Heidegger): the relation between a radically nominalist nominalism, driven to the point of moral solipsism and the claims of an ontology to which S[artre] clings, since he is after all striving for a kind of *prima philosophia*.

It is an open question how far he has reconciled these in his book on dialectics;<sup>2</sup> in *l'Être et le néant* the two are far apart.

The element of chance is involved in the fact that the absolute individual decision, Sartre's central category, remains undefined.

In principle this could go in any direction politically. There are partisans on every side.

In this sense, S[artre] remains a formalist, something he would relish least of all.

No theoretical dividing-line between existentialism and decisionism à la Carl Schmitt<sup>3</sup> . . . Abstract nature of decision as a concept. Every decision incorporates objective elements. – Decision as a minimum. Impossible to base the whole of phil[osophy] on it.

At the same time, S[artre]'s decisionism is itself the function of the socio-political situation.

As a social critic, Sartre could not ignore the fact that, wherever communism exists today, it was introduced, an administrative measure; and therefore perpetuates itself as a mechanism of rule. Or rather: that is the negative determinant of decision theory.

In the course of a lengthy process focusing on the question of organization, integration was twinned with the stifling of spontaneity. No essential distinction between countries on either side of the Iron Curtain: an administered world.

The centralizing and endlessly self-perpetuating ruling party is a mockery of everything that has ever been thought about people's relation to the state.<sup>4</sup>

As a corrective, S[artre] emphasized the feature no longer tolerated by dominant practice – namely the irreducible element of spontaneity.

The less it is possible in the real world, the more it obtrudes thematically (the example of the Central Committee).



[31] Despite Sartre's extreme nominalism, his philosophy is structured in accordance with the old idealist notion of the free act of the subject. All objectivity is a matter of indifference to Existentialism, as it was for Fichte. In the same way, in Sartre's plays social conditions are nebulous, demoted to the status of mere pretexts for action. Because of this lack of objectivity, his plots are condemned to an irrationality that must have been the last thing intended by such a steadfast [32] champion of enlightenment. The idea of absolute freedom of choice is as illusory as that of the absolute Self as the origin of the world. Sartre's plays disavow the very philosophy whose propositions they treat in such a thesis-like manner. (31) The most modest political experience would suffice to see through the artificiality of scenes that have been constructed as a foil to the decisions of the heroic protagonists. Not even in works of art is it conceivable that such masterful decisions could be arrived at in concrete historical situations. A general who decides to forgo the perpetrating of atrocities for the same irrational reasons as he had previously revelled in them; who breaks off the siege of a town already given over to him by traitors in order to set up a utopian community instead – even in the barbaric period of a romanticized German baroque such a general would have been at the very least recalled by his superiors, if not put to death by mutinous soldiers. What fits with this only too well is the fact that the swashbuckling Götz puts his spontaneity at the service of an organized popular uprising, once the massacre of his City of Light has taught him the truth of his own free act. This organized uprising

# LECTURE 25

[31] *Decision comes from Kierkegaard;<sup>1</sup> it relates in his case to faith; without that it would be suspended in empty space.*

*Regression to Fichtean idealism: free action for free action's sake. Only, in this case, tied to the individual and, thanks to that, it is contingent, without reference to a universal law. Difference from individual + society.*

*Indifference to objectivity = naïvety in the judgement of political situations. They are the mere occasion for action.*

*This condemned to irrationality.<sup>2</sup>*

[32] *The Devil and the Good Lord.<sup>3</sup> A general who decides to forgo the perpetrating of atrocities for the same irrational reasons as he had previously revelled in them and who establishes a utopian community, not possible even as an aesthetic fiction. He turns into a bogeyman. Nestroy's Holofernes parody.<sup>4</sup>*

*He [viz. the general Götz], after the inevitable catastrophe of his City of Light, becomes the condottiere of an organized popular uprising that can easily be decoded as the cover for a totalitarian one. (Administration!)*

*Sartre's Götz now repeats his atrocities – without any protest from the logic of the play. It amounts to the justification of the means for the sake of the ends, without paying heed to their dialectic.*

*S[artre] gets to the point where the absolute subject is unable to escape from the entanglements he has been ensnared by. Incidentally, bourgeois consciousness raised itself to the same plane: Ibsen.*

can easily be decoded as the likeness of the ones Sartre uses as a foil to his own insistence on absolute spontaneity. And in fact the bogeyman now repeats the atrocities that he had freely forsworn – but this time he evidently has the blessing of philosophy. The absolute subject is unable to escape from the entanglements by which he has been ensnared; the fetters he wishes to destroy, the fetters of tyranny, are at one with the principle of absolute subjectivity. There are good philosophical reasons for the follies of political Existentialism, as also for the phrase-making of depoliticized Germans. Existentialism promotes what exists anyway, the bare existence of mankind, to the level of a mentality that the individual must choose, as if he had any other choice. If [33] Existentialism teaches more than such tautologies, it regresses to the reinstatement of a subjectivity existing for itself as the only substantial reality. The philosophical schools that take derivatives of the Latin word *existere* as their watchword wish to restore the reality of bodily experience in opposition to the alienated sciences. This explains why they fail to incorporate anything of substance, and what they include under the head of ἐπιχρή, the age, takes its revenge by imposing itself behind the back of philosophy, in decisions that philosophy regards as irrational. (32) A mode of thinking purged of contents is not a whit superior to a special science denuded of concepts; it lapses, for a second time, into the same formalism it had attacked in defence of the essential interests of philosophy. It is then replenished with a ragbag of borrowings, taken chiefly from psychology. The aim of Existentialism, at least in its radical French form, is to be realized not at a distance from philosophical contents, but in menacing proximity to them. The dichotomy of subject and object cannot be annulled by a mere act of thought, least of all by reduction to the human being. Under that title, i.e. that of existence, philosophers just set out and steer an abstract and irrelevant course. Their procedure is the reverse of the special sciences that stifle philosophical reflection. The schools of thought grouped around the concept of existence are incapable of the act of exteriorization for which they yearn in their recourse to the existence of the individual human being as against the transcendental subject. They confess their incapacity, when even those who tend towards nominalism of different shades attempt to absorb whatever does not go into the concept or is contrary to it, by following the Hegelian pattern and conceptualizing it. The concept of the non-conceptual should enable thinking to appropriate it. Compliant with tradition in this respect, they shrink from their own project [34] of pursuing with concepts whatever phenomena refuse conceptualization, instead of subsuming them beneath its own concepts and allowing them to evaporate.

The process [of thinking] has its remote, indistinct archetype in names, which do not envelop objects in categories, albeit at the expense of their function as knowledge. (33) What we want of knowledge unconfined is what we have been drilled to resign ourselves to and what names obscure by possessing it. Resignation and delusion complement each other ideologically. Idiosyncratic precision in the choice of words, as if they were supposed to designate the thing, is not the least of the reasons why presentation is essential to philosophy, and no mere superficial medium. (34) The cognitive reason for insisting on the τὸδε τι, the individual thing, is its own dialectic, its conceptual mediation in itself; it is the point of entry for comprehending its non-conceptual side. By becoming critically aware of the latent conceptual dimension of existing reality, cognition virtually makes contact with the opaque and does so solely within this relation. For mediation in the non-conceptual is not the remainder left over after the process of subtraction, nor something pointing to a bad infinity of such procedures. On the contrary, the mediation of ὕλη, matter, is its implicit history. Philosophy derives whatever legitimacy it retains from a negative factor: from the fact that, in their insistence upon being so and not otherwise, the indissoluble elements to which philosophy capitulated and which repel the onslaught of idealism are essentially a fetish – the fetish of the irrevocable nature of being. What dispels the fetish is the knowledge that things are not simply so and not otherwise, but that they have come to be what they are under certain conditions. This process of becoming is inherent in the object; it can no more be stabilized in the concept than it can be divorced from its [35] results and (35) forgotten. On this point idealist and materialist dialectics converge. In idealism immediacy is vindicated as a stage of the concept by its internal history, while for materialism that same history becomes the measure not merely of the untruth of concepts, but even more of immediacy in being. Common to both is the emphasis on the history that has congealed in the objects.

*The true reason for this does not become apparent in him. It is: the fetters the absolute subject wishes to destroy, the fetters of dominion, are at one with the principle of absolute subjectivity. Its abstract freedom = dominion.*

*Existentialism, as the name already indicates, duplicates the bare existence of mankind.*

*It becomes its mentality as if there were any option other than existence – meaning, by virtue of its absence, becomes a tautology.*

[33] *Any way of thinking that takes the derivative forms of existere as their watchword would like to restore the reality of bodily experience and self-experience, of self-being as opposed to the role, to the alienated individual science. Out of fear of reification existentialist thinkers recoil from matters of substance that are nevertheless intended by the antithesis of existence and essence. The existent being is not taken seriously. By a sleight of hand every bit of content is turned into an example. Hence the thesis character of Sartre's plays and even of some of Camus' novels, in glaring contrast to Beckett. – Similar phenomena in Brecht. Reference to 'Commitment'.<sup>5</sup>*

*A philosophy that wished to escape from formalism ends up in a second formalism, most drastically in the case of indeterminate being, and is then filled up subsequently, with psychology for the most part.*

*The intention, at least of French radical – 'committed' – Existentialism, cannot be made good at a distance from concrete realities (the problem is similar, incidentally, in Brechtian abstractions).*

*Separation of s[ubject] + ob[ject] cannot be eliminated by the mere act of thought, least of all by an appeal to human beings.*

*The mere concept of the non-conceptual does not suffice to appropriate it for thought.*

*The task should be to pursue with concepts whatever refuses conceptualization, instead of subsuming it beneath its own concept and letting it evaporate.*

[34] *The process I have in mind has its distant model in names, which do not cover things up with concepts – admittedly at the expense of their cognitive function.*

*What we want of knowledge unconfined is what we have been drilled to resign ourselves to and what names obscure by possessing it. Resignation and delusion complement each other ideologically. – 'To say it' – le dire sans savoir quoi<sup>6</sup>*

*Hence the constitutive function of presentation.*

*Relevance of presentation means: idiosyncratic precision in the choice of words, as if they were supposed to name the thing, as if*

*they were their name. If 'this thing there' is conceptually mediated, then language can find a point of attack.*

*It approaches the opaque.*

*Mediation in ύλη [matter] is its implicit history. Phil[osophy] derives its positive side from a negative factor: from the fact that, in their insistence upon being so and not otherwise, the indissoluble elements to which philosophy capitulated and on which idealism could not gain a purchase are essentially a fetish – the fetish of the irrevocable nature of being.*

*What dispels it is the demonstration that things are not simply so and not otherwise, but that they have come to be what they are under certain conditions.*

*This process of becoming is inherent in the object; it can no more be stabilized in the concept than it can be divorced from its [35] results and forgotten.*

*In this respect, there is an analogy between idealist and materialist dialectics.*

*For idealism the internal history of immediacy vindicates each stage reached by immediacy. For materialism that history becomes the measure of the untruth*

- a) of concepts, e.g. the theory of liberalism (ideology critique)*
- b) of reality which does not live up to what is promised by its concept (social criticism)*

*Common to both is the emphasis upon congealed history (on the model of congealed labour)*

17.II.66<sup>7</sup>

# Additional Notes

[35] *The power of negative dialectics is the power of whatever is not realized in the thing itself.*

*Back to language: words, however, remain concepts, the names are not the things themselves, as the idea suggests.*

*A gap opens up between them and the things themselves.*

*Corresponding to that is a residue of relativity and arbitrariness, both in the choice of words and in presentation as a whole. The most exact word, alone, not identical with itself.*

*Therefore critical reflection upon concepts as opposed to their linguistic authority, something which even Benjamin accepted.*

*Only concepts can achieve what the concept prevents, the τρόσας ἰόσεται [cure for the wound].<sup>1</sup>*

*As something more universal, no concept is identical with the thing it refers to and with which, by virtue of the copula, it wishes to be identical.*

*The concept has definable flaws.*

*That leads to corrections through other concepts.*

*The hope of naming lies in the constellation of concepts that each gathers around itself for the purpose of that correction.*

*The language of phil[osophy] approaches that goal by way of determinate negation.*

[36] *Serving notice on swimming with the mainstream. Against the current + main stream,<sup>2</sup> a poor argument against my critique of Heidegger.*

*Counter-argument: in many situations attempt what seems hopeless. Even polemic is no novel driving force [Wirkungszusammenhang] but a form.*

*It is in this that the surplus of a justified spontaneity is to be found.*

*Moreover, the impossibility of intervention must not be overstated.*

*One of the dominant tendencies of all modern phil[osophy]: all traditional elements are to be eradicated from phil[osophy] (that is the modern tradition), history as fact-based science to be set up as a special discipline.*

*Supposed immediacy of subjectivity. The ideal of pure presence corresponds, with regard to time, to that of feeling with regard to space.*

*Affinity between Descartes and Bacon.*

[37] *Whatever is historical, that does not submit to the timelessness of pure logic, becomes an idol, superstition.*

*But tradition is immanent for cognition as the transmission of its objects. In terms of categories, it participates in cognition qua memory: no cognition, not even the cognition of formal logic, without holding fast to the past. See Kant's deduction<sup>3</sup>*

*(prevailing dumbing down = loss of memory)*

*The shape of thought as a motivated, progressive motion in time resembles in microcosm the macrocosmic, historical development.*

*Thought is the interiorization of history.*

*However, because there is no time without temporal events, existing things, the inner historicity of thought cannot be purely formal.*

*It is interwoven with its content and that in fact is what tradition is.*

*The pure, absolutely sublimated subject would be a point, i.e. absolutely traditionless.*

*Timelessness is the highpoint of the blinding of consciousness.*

*That is the true limit of the motif of autonomy.*

[38] *Naturally, tradition is not to be dragooned from outside, arbitrarily – heteronomy is the abstract antithesis of autonomy.*

*Thought must mobilize the immanent tradition; and that is what is meant by intellectual experience.*

*The element of tradition as constituents, as 'the hidden art in the depths of the human soul'.<sup>4</sup>*

*Bergson as the attempt to resist the de-temporalization of time.*

*Here is the core of a concept of intellectual experience.*



*But: the involvement of phil[osophy] in tradition is its determinate negation of it. Tradition qua criticism of the texts. (NB relation to intellectually preformed material).*

*By testing itself on them, phil[osophy] becomes commensurable with tradition.*

*This is the basis of its interpretative aspect.*

*It should hypostasize neither symbol nor symbolized.*

*Truth is discovery [das Aufgehen]: secularization of the relation to sacred texts.*

*In that relation it confesses what it vainly denies in the context of its ideal method: its linguistic nature.*

*In its more recent history this has been outlawed as rhetoric.<sup>5</sup>*

[39] *Detached, reified into the means but without the truth of the ends, rhetoric was the means of mendacity in phil[osophy].*

*The contempt it aroused was the reward for its guilt.*

*But making it taboo led to the eradication of whatever cannot be thought except in language, the mimetic aspect of thought.*

*It survives in the postulate of presentation, in contrast to the communication of fixed contents that are indifferent to their form.*

*At the same time, it is constantly exposed to corruption by its wish to persuade.*

*Allergy towards expression extends back in phil[osophy] to Plato, together with the entire trajectory of the Enlightenment, which punishes every violation of discipline: the canon of the taboo on mimesis in thought is formal logic.*

*A reified consciousness is full of rancour towards whatever it lacks.*

*What resists the expulsion of language from phil[osophy] (= its mathematicization) is the linguistic efforts it makes. – Refer to the fact that most people lack linguistic experience.*

*The important thing is not to follow where language leads, but to resist it with the aid of reflection.*

*Linguistic slovenliness + the gestures of science go together.*

[40] *The abolition of language in phil[osophy] is not the demythologization of thought.*

*With language phil[osophy] sacrifices every relation to its object other than the merely signifying one.*

*Only as language can like recognize like.*

*At the same time, we cannot ignore the nominalist critique of rhetoric.*

*Incidentally, that critique is more ancient than nominalism itself: Plato.<sup>6</sup> In the *Cratylus* there is a dialectical relation to language: it is a tool, convention, but not arbitrary since it contains the element of likeness.*

*Brief discussion of the *Cratylus*. \*30a*

[Insertion 30 a] *Cratylus*<sup>7</sup>

*Theme: is language nature or convention?*

*Admittedly, correctness does exist.*

*But language belongs among the πράξεις [actions] (i.e. is essentially a tool)*

*Convention, but not arbitrary.*

*Criterion the expert, the διαλεκτικός [dialectician].*

*What predominates is the nominalist view, but also the opposite, realist idea that is tied to the concept of the mimesis of things by the prime words.*

*Plato's linguistic ideal is anti-Heraclitean, i.e. an ideal of meanings firmly adhered to. [End of insertion]*

*Dialectics must salvage the element of language in a critical manner, i.e. through the precision of expression. Language is something that separates thought and object just as much as it is capable of being mobilized against that separation.*

*That is the element of truth in phenomenology as an analysis of language (and meaning).*

*Precision of expression appropriates for itself something that had appeared to be a defect of thought, namely the con[nection] with language.*

*Culture, society, the entire tradition, is precipitated in the rhetorical quality of the thought that it transmits; the utter hostility to rhetoric is in league with the barbarism in which bourgeois thinking terminates.*

*(Proof: the barbaric language of the humanities; 'in the seventeenth century subjectivity had not yet taken off in German literature' (Trunz)<sup>8</sup> – Link between form and content here.*

*Rancour in the vilification of Cicero, in Hegel's resentment of the would-be literati of the Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> The trials of life have robbed them of the freedom of thought. The index of pedantry is slovenliness of language.*

*Dialectics attempts to master the difficult choice between arbitrary opinion and empty correctness.*

*It leans towards content since this is open-ended, not pre-determined by any framework: [it is a] protest against myth.*

*Knowledge, which desires content, is really in search of utopia.*

[41] *It [utopia], the consciousness of possibility, clings to whatever has not been disfigured. The way to utopia is barred by the possible, never the immediate reality; this is why it always appears abstract in the midst of existing reality.*

*It is served by thought, a piece of existence that, negative as always, reaches out to that which is not.*

*Phil[osophy] converges to this point: at the uttermost distance, which alone would be proximity.*

*It is the prism in which its colour is captured.*

# Appendix

## *Towards a theory of intellectual experience*<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy, which seemed to have become obsolete at a certain point in history, has now been thrown back on itself because the moment when it might have been realized was missed.<sup>2</sup> Philosophy cannot remain indifferent to this. The summary judgement that philosophy had only interpreted the world,<sup>3</sup> tailoring it into a reality of sorts and reacting to it as if crippled, has lost some of its force now that the world has failed to change and to provide the vantage point that would reveal the inadequacy of theory as such. Perhaps the interpretation that had promised a transition into practice was not up to the task. The moment that the critique of theory depended on cannot in theory be prolonged for ever. A practice deferred to the Greek Calends can no longer serve as the forum for appeals against philosophy. On the contrary, having broken its promise to achieve an identity with reality, it finds itself compelled to criticize itself without restraint. Such criticism may not stop short out of respect for the exalted heights reached by philosophy before the expected revolution. It must reflect whether and how philosophy can continue to survive the fall of Hegelianism, much as Kant inquired into the possibility of metaphysics following the critique [2] of rationalism. If Hegel's doctrine of dialectics represents the unsurpassed attempt to prove that philosophical concepts are able to do justice to everything that is heterogeneous to them, we must nevertheless account for our ability to think dialectically now that that attempt has failed. The demise of

idealist dialectics must be irrevocable. But idealism was no special variant of dialectics: rather, it was dialectics conjoined with the primacy of the absolute subject as the force which by negation brings about every single movement of the concept and the course of dialectics as a whole. The primacy of the subject, however, is doomed by history, even in its Hegelian variant, which eclipsed not only the consciousness of individuals but also Kant's and Fichte's transcendental consciousness. It is not only the primacy of the subject that is undermined by the negative effects of an enfeebled philosophy daunted by<sup>4</sup> the overwhelming power of the course of the world and its own consequent inability to construe it. Absolute idealism – and every other idealism proved to be inconsistent – is manifestly unsustainable. This can be demonstrated right from the very first step taken by Hegel in his *Logic*. So as (2) to equate Being with Nothing, the former, as something absolutely indeterminate, is elided to indeterminacy, i.e. something already conceptualized. By such mischievous means, which are by no means unknown in his writings, Hegel secures for himself the priority of the concept that then emerges at the other end as the conclusion of the entire work. Since then, the idealist form of dialectics has sunk to the level of a cultural fetish, while its non-idealist form has degenerated into dogma. However, by reopening the case of dialectics, we are not just passing judgement on the topical relevance of a traditional mode of philosophizing or of the philosophical structure of the objects of cognition. The enduring power of Hegel's thought lay in the fact that he restored to philosophy the right and the ability to think in terms of contents, instead of letting itself be fobbed off with the analysis of empty and trivial forms of cognition. [3] Thought that rules out the notion of dialectics lapses into random talk about world-views, where indeed it entertains substantive discussion at all, or else it regresses to the very formalism and indifference against which Hegel had originally rebelled. This is confirmed historically by the development of phenomenology, which was once animated by the need for substantive content but has now degenerated into the invocation of Being in which all content is rejected as a form of contamination. Hegel's content-based philosophy had as its foundation and result the primacy of the subject or, in the words of the celebrated phrase from the Introduction to the *Logic*, the 'identity of identity and non-identity'.<sup>5</sup> The determinate particular should therefore let itself be defined by spirit because its definition is nothing but spirit. Without this supposition philosophy would in his view no longer be capable of recognizing essential matters of substance unless the concept (3) of dialectics that was derived from idealism harboured experiences that, contrary to Hegel's own insistence, were not

described by the idealist apparatus itself. Otherwise, philosophy would inevitably have to resign itself to accepting that it had no insight into substantive matters. It would, in consequence, be thrown back onto the methodology of the sciences; it would declare that methodology to be the be-all and end-all of philosophy and hence virtually cancel itself out.

Methodologically, the starting point dictated by history would differ from Hegel's in that philosophy would locate its true interest at the point where Hegel, in agreement with tradition, displays his own lack of interest. This starting point would be in the non-conceptual, something which has been dismissed as ephemeral and insignificant ever since Plato and which Hegel himself labelled 'worthless existence'.<sup>6</sup> A matter of urgency for the concept [4] would be the realm beyond its reach, the space eliminated by the mechanism of abstraction, of everything that is not already the exemplar of a concept. Bergson and Husserl, the representatives of philosophical modernity, gave a stimulus to this idea but then recoiled from its implications. Bergson, by a sort of tour de force, invented a different type of cognition to embrace the non-conceptual. In so doing, he washed away the salt of dialectics in the undifferentiated flow of life. Moreover, thanks to a dualism that was scarcely less stark than the dualisms of Descartes and Kant that he attacked, he denied philosophy the crucial element needed for an authoritative form of cognition. He showed no concern that, if what he aspired to were not to remain chimerical, it could be attained only with the instruments of knowledge, through reflection on its own means, and not through a procedure that is utterly unconnected with those of cognition. Husserl, in contrast, a logician, had a method for penetrating to essences that was completely at odds with that of a generalizing abstraction. What he envisaged was a specific intellectual experience that should be able to intuit the essence gazing out from the particular. The essence it sought, however, (4) did not differ in any respect from the current universals. It lapsed into undialectical contradiction to the operations of Husserl's eidetic intuition, the perception of essence [*Wesensschau*], and its *terminus ad quem*. The failings of both these attempts to break out arise from the fact that neither man could transcend the limits of idealism: Bergson based his ideas on the immediate givens of consciousness, Husserl on the phenomena of the stream of consciousness. The accent on the universal as the substantive concept is none other than the subject which both have declared sacrosanct; the primacy of the concept is that of the transcendental ego. What should be insisted on, against both, is the goal they pursued in vain.<sup>7</sup> The task of philosophy, *pace* Wittgenstein, would be to say [5] what

cannot be said.<sup>8</sup> The contradictory nature of this challenge is that of philosophy as such; it qualifies philosophy as dialectics even before it becomes ensnared in specific contradictions. The work of philosophical reflection on itself is to disentangle this paradox. Everything else is signification, *post hoc* rationalization, pre-philosophical activity, now as it was in Hegel's day. A vestige of confidence in the belief, however dubious, that philosophy can succeed after all, that the concept can transcend itself, can go beyond mere preliminaries and arbitrary conclusions, and can thus comprehend the non-conceptual – this confidence is indispensable to philosophy. Otherwise, it would be forced to capitulate and the human mind with it. We should be incapable of thought, there would be no such thing as truth, everything would be reduced to nought. But whatever truth concepts identify over and above their abstract scope can be found only in a theatre that the concepts disparage, suppress and repudiate. The utopia of cognition would be to use concepts to unlock the non-conceptual, without reducing it to them. That would spell the transformation of an idea bequeathed to us by idealism, and corrupted by it more than any other. This is the idea of the infinite.

Unlike science, philosophy does not set out to explore its object exhaustively; it does not aim to reduce phenomena to a (5) minimum number of propositions. This is foreshadowed by Hegel's polemics against Fichte, whom he accused of starting out from a 'maxim'.<sup>9</sup> Instead philosophy aims to immerse itself, not simply in appearance, but literally, in what is different from itself, without reducing it to preconceived categories. It would like to mould itself as closely to the heterogeneous as the programmes of Simmel and the phenomenologists desired without their having proved capable of unrestricted [self-]abandonment. Philosophical content can be captured only where it is not imposed by philosophy. The illusion that it can corral essence within its finite definitions must be jettisoned. The disastrous ease with which the word 'infinite' rolled from the tongues of idealist philosophers [6] may have resulted from their desire to placate their gnawing doubts about the meagre limitations of their conceptual apparatus – including that of Hegel, whose intentions had been the very opposite. Traditional philosophy imagines that it can capture its subject in all its infinitude, and that very conviction turns it into something finite, over-definitive. A modified philosophy would have to abandon that claim and give up persuading itself and others that it could master the infinite. Instead, by scorning the attempt to establish a finite number of theorems, it would assume an infinite aspect itself. It would seek its contents in the diversity of objects that urge themselves on its attention or that it chooses for itself without having

any scheme artificially imposed on it. It would abandon itself to these objects in all seriousness, instead of using them as a mirror in which to contemplate itself, mistaking its own image for concrete reality. Such a philosophy would be nothing but full, unadulterated experience in the medium of conceptual reflection, whereas even the 'science of empirical consciousness'<sup>10</sup> degraded the contents of experience to examples of the categories. What compels philosophy to undertake the Sisyphean labour of its own infinity is the unwarranted expectation that every individual and particular discovery that it makes will resemble Leibniz's monad – a totality that as such is no sooner found than it slips away once again, admittedly in accordance with a pre-established disharmony rather than a pre-established harmony. (6) The meta-critical turn against a first philosophy is at the same time a repudiation of the finiteness of a philosophy that blathers on about infinity while disregarding it. Knowledge does not wholly possess any of its objects. Its aim should be not to produce the phantasm of totality, but to allow truth to crystallize in it. Thus it cannot be the task of the philosophical interpretation [7] of art to establish the identity of work and concept, for the former to devour the latter; instead the work should unfold in the course of philosophical interpretation. Whatever else becomes visible, whether as the plausible development of abstract thought or as the application of a concept to its subject matter, may well prove useful as technology in the broadest sense: but for philosophy, which does not fit in, it is irrelevant. This implies that philosophy, which aims to gain possession of its object, has no guarantee that it can do so. For otherwise it would be mere tautology. In principle, philosophy can always go astray, and for that reason alone it can also make advances. This has been acknowledged by both scepticism and pragmatism, most recently in John Dewey's supremely humane version of the latter; but we should add it as a ferment to an explicit philosophy instead of renouncing it from the outset in the form of an abstract antithesis between absolute and relative knowledge. As opposed to the total domination of method, it contains the element of play as a corrective that the traditional conception of it as a science would like to expunge. It is the most serious thing of all, but is not as serious as all that.

Whatever takes aim at something it is not already and over which it has no influence belongs in terms of its own concept to an untamed sphere that has been placed under a taboo by the world of concepts. To represent the thing it has repressed, namely mimesis, the concept has no alternative but to incorporate some of it into its own behaviour. In accordance with the criteria of the concept, this procedure introduces an element of playfulness. This means that the aesthetic



aspect is not a contingent component of philosophy, although for quite different reasons than those that influenced Schelling. [7a] Because the non-naïve, self-reflecting thought knows full well that it is not in complete control but that it must constantly speak as if it were, it acquires playful qualities that it may not abjure but which at the same time open up the very perspectives that allow it to hope for what is denied it. [7, cont.] It is no less its [philosophy's] duty to sublimate thought into the (7) authoritative nature of its insights into the real. These, together with the element of play, are the poles between which it is suspended. (7a) The affinity between philosophy and art does not entitle philosophy to borrow from art, [8] least of all by virtue of the intuitions that barbarians regard as the prerogative of art. Intuitions hardly ever intrude into artistic endeavours in isolation, like ominous bolts of lightning from above. They are inextricably interwoven with the laws of form governing the work of art; if one wished to separate them out they would yield no more than a marginal value. Thought possesses no privileged sources whose freshness liberates us from thinking; we have no mode of cognition at our disposal that differs absolutely from the controlling type, a fact which intuitionism is desperate to escape from, but in vain. Philosophy that sets out to imitate art, that aspires to become a work of art itself, is doomed from the outset. It would have to postulate a claim to identity: the idea that its object would be absorbed into it because it would endow its own procedure with a supremacy that entitles it to organize the heterogeneous as its material, whereas the relation of philosophy to the heterogeneous is thematic. What art and philosophy have in common is not the form or the shaping process, but in an attitude that prohibits pseudomorphisms. The philosophical concept does not relax its hold on the yearning that animates the non-conceptual side of art and whose satisfaction shuns the immediate, non-conceptual side of art as mere appearance. The concept, which is both the organ of thought and the wall erected between thinking and the thought, negates that yearning. Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it. The philosopher's task is to make the effort required to transcend the concept through the concept itself, without yielding to the delusion that he already has possession of the matter to which the concept refers.

(7, cont.) [9] Even after breaking with idealism, philosophy cannot escape from the habit of speculation to which idealism had given a place of honour and which was proscribed along with it. Positivists do not find it hard to accuse Marxist materialism of speculation, given that Marxism proceeds from objective laws as opposed to immediate data or protocol statements. In order to fend off the

suspicion of ideological bias, it is more convenient to refer to Marx as a metaphysician than to call him the class enemy. But solid ground is a figment where the claims of truth demand that we raise ourselves above the supposedly firm foundation. Philosophy becomes a force of resistance since it does not allow itself to be cheated out of its essential concern instead of satisfying that concern, albeit with a No. That is what is justifiable in the opposition to Kant from the nineteenth century on, even though these counter-movements were constantly compromised by obscurantism. The resistance of philosophy calls for development. Even in music, and doubtless every art, the impulse that animates its opening bar is not fulfilled immediately, but only through its further articulation. To that extent, however much it is mere appearance manifesting itself as a totality, it provides a critique of appearance. Such a mediating role is no less appropriate to philosophy. If it presumes to dispense with mediation and speak directly, it invites Hegel's verdict of 'empty depth'.<sup>11</sup> Uttering profundities, such as the Tibetan repetition of the word 'being', does nothing to make a person more profound, any more than a novel becomes metaphysical by reporting the metaphysical views of its characters. For philosophy to be deep, a deep breath is called for. (8) The model for this in modern times is Kant's deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding, an inquiry which the author defended with the ironical understatement that [10] 'it goes rather deep'.<sup>12</sup>

Depth itself, as Hegel was well aware, is an aspect of dialectic, not an isolated trait. The appearance of depth is frequently the product of a complicity with suffering. A monstrous German tradition associates profound thoughts with the theodicy of evil and death. A theological *terminus ad quem* is tacitly assumed, as if what determined the dignity of an idea were its result, the confirmation of transcendence, or its immersion in inwardness, mere being-for-itself, as if a retreat from the world were simply to be equated with a knowledge of the ultimate foundations of the universe. As for the phantasms of depth, throughout the history of the spirit they have always looked benignly on the existing state of affairs even though they found it superficial; resistance to them would be their true measure. The sheer power of existing circumstances erects the façades that resist the incursions of our minds; we must strive to smash through them, since this alone would endow the postulate of depth with a non-ideological meaning. The element of speculation survives in such resistance. Whatever refuses to have its law prescribed for it by the given facts, transcends them in even in the most intimate contact with the objects. (9) Where speculation goes beyond what it can legitimately cover – there its freedom is to be found. It is grounded in the human subject's

desire to express itself, a precondition of all truth; in the need to lend a voice to suffering. For suffering is the weight of objective realities bearing down on the individual. Whatever he experiences as his innermost subjectivity, its expression, is mediated objectively.

This may help to explain why presentation is not a superficial aspect of philosophy, [11] a matter of indifference to it, but intrinsic to its idea. The element of expression integral to it, something both non-conceptual and mimetic, can be objectified only through its presentation in language. Philosophy's freedom is nothing but the ability to help its unfreedom to express itself. If the element of expression makes claims to be more than this, it degenerates into ideology; where philosophy relinquishes the element of expression and the duty of presentation, it is degraded to the level of science on which it should reflect and which its reflections should surpass. Expression and rigour are not polar opposites. Each stands in need of the other, neither exists without the other; expression is relieved of its contingent nature by thinking, at which it labours, just as thought labours at expression. Thought becomes convincing only through its expression, its presentation in language; whatever is loosely expressed is always poorly thought out. Through expression rigour is imposed on the meaning of what is expressed. It is not an end in itself at the expense of that meaning, torn from that thing-like state of externalization which itself forms an object of philosophical criticism. Speculative philosophy without an idealist substructure calls for fidelity to rigour in order to break with the latter's authoritarian mischief-making. Benjamin, whose first sketch of the Arcades combined an incomparable gift for speculation with a micrological closeness to factual realities, observed in a letter about the initial, metaphysical phase of that work that its second phase (10) could be articulated only in an 'impermissibly poetic fashion'.<sup>13</sup> This capitulation marks both the difficulty of a philosophy unwilling to let things slide and also the point at which its conception should be taken further. Benjamin's remark should probably be linked [12] to his dogmatic and in that sense ideological adoption of a dialectical materialism that had come to a standstill. The fact that he could not bring himself to set down the definitive statement of his 'Arcades' theory reminds us that philosophy has a *raison d'être* only where it exposes itself to total failure, as a response to the absolute certainty it had traditionally pursued. Benjamin's defeatism about his own theory was the product of a remnant of undialectical positivism that he had transported, formally unchanged, from his theological phase to his materialist one. [In contrast,] Hegel's identification of negativity with the subject, the idea that is intended to preserve philosophy both from the positivism of science and from

the contingent nature of the singular, has its basis in experience. In itself, and prior to every particular content, thought is negation, resistance to whatever imposes itself; thought has inherited this from its primary model, the relation of labour to its material. If nowadays ideology more than ever encourages thought towards the positive, it nevertheless astutely registers the fact that thought runs counter to positivity, and that to train it to go in that direction requires (11) friendly persuasion on the part of social authority. The effort implicit in the concept of thought, as the counterpart of passive contemplation, is itself this very negativity, a revolt against any demand that it should defer passively to every immediate given. Judgement and inference, the forms of thought that even the critique of thought cannot dispense with, contain the germs of criticism within themselves; the fact that they are determinate in nature always means excluding those things they have not touched, and the truth to which they aspire formally denies as untrue whatever does not bear the stamp of identity. The judgement that such-and-such is the case potentially rejects the claim that the relation of subject and predicate could be otherwise than expressed in the judgement [13]. The forms of thought aspire to more than what merely exists, is merely 'given'. That inspired Hegel. Only, he went on to undo the good work by introducing the identity thesis with its equation of the pressure of what is with the human subject. The resistance to the material of thought contained in its form is not simply the mastery of nature given a spiritual inflection. While thought does violence to the material on which it practises its syntheses, it simultaneously follows the lead of the potential contained in that material, thus unconsciously complying with the idea of a *restitutio in integrum*, of making whole once again the pieces into which it has been smashed; in philosophy this unconscious process becomes conscious. An irreconcilable process of thought is thus joined by the hope of reconciliation because thought's resistance to what merely exists, the violent freedom of the human subject, targets even that aspect of the object that was sacrificed in the process of objectification.

If we may interpret the secret desire of the generation of philosophers from Husserl to Bergson as the attempt to break the spell of immanent consciousness and system, and if that attempt failed for lack of rigour, the task facing a philosophy mindful of the tradition which it wishes to renounce would be to complete that escape into what Hölderlin called 'the open' (12) in a decisive manner.<sup>14</sup> If critical philosophy robbed *intentio recta* [everyday knowledge – Trans.] of its naïve dogmatism through the application of subjective reason, a second step would be to reclaim that *intentio recta* minus that naïvety.

For every shape of subjectivity always presupposes an objectivity, however determined, which it is supposed uniquely to establish on the model of the *intentio obliqua* [reflexive knowledge – Trans.] or to guarantee for cognition. The task of philosophy would be to reflect about objects without shaping them from the outset in accordance with rules that have long since been set in stone and whose validity is mistakenly taken for granted. The concreteness which philosophers [14] programmatically proclaimed in the early decades of the twentieth century was ideology because it had always shaped the concrete details in advance by means of specific concepts, thus enabling them to glorify such details as meaningful. In contrast, a second stage of reflection would have the task of uncovering the abstractions hidden in the concrete details, which for their part have been prescribed in a thoroughly concrete fashion, namely by the abstract laws governing society. On the other hand, it must also open itself up wholeheartedly to these concrete details, in the knowledge that whatever goes beyond their mere materiality must inhere in them and not be raised above them. The programme of ‘Back to the things themselves’ that Husserl had merely proclaimed should be carried through, but without replacing the objects with epistemological categories. In so doing the aim is not to chase after the mirage of a philosophy without concepts, as Benjamin was tempted to do in his late phase when he considered assembling the ‘Arcades’ text purely from quotations.<sup>15</sup> There can be no construction of details in the absence of the emphatic concept. The divergence from traditional philosophy is that of its tendential direction. Traditional philosophy regarded the elevation to a concept as an implicit ideal. Materials were selected and preformed in accordance with that ideal. The alternative would be to assemble concepts in such a way that their constellation might (13) shed light on the non-conceptual. The goal, as unattainable as any that the intellect sets itself as long as it fails to mutate into practice, would be for philosophy to arise from the individual detail taken literally. The concepts that philosophy would have to employ, however, would have to derive from the current state of tradition if confusion between the arbitrary and the achieved is to be avoided. The same thing would apply to the questions it would pose. These concepts and questions would not be fixed  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ , in isolation from the objects, but thrown in with them, abandoning the delusion that concepts that had been created for themselves also existed intrinsically in themselves. The state of tradition itself [15] would have to be confronted with the actual state of history. This means that theory would cease to be a matter of subsumption; it would instead define the relations of the different conceptual elements among themselves. Its centre would be

found in the unravelling of the insoluble or in the ‘unrepeatable’, to use the term favoured by Karl Heinz Haag.<sup>16</sup> Theory is presupposed and employed in order to dispense with it in its current form. The ideal of its changed form would mean its extinction. The intention to remove all supports is more exposed than in the case of an open or unfinished dialectic. Once the logical and metaphysical principle of identity has been extirpated, the latter ceases to be able to state what actually motivates the dialectical motion of both concept and thing. Insufficient justice is done to the negative truth element of idealist dialectics, that objective *machine infernale* from which consciousness – and not consciousness alone – would like to escape. It cannot hope to escape by ignoring that dialectic, only by comprehending it. Hegel should be defended against the old slur on ‘the strait-jacket of dialectics’. It is the strait-jacket of the world. The ‘open’ can be conceived only as the undiminished awareness of being thwarted, of the perversity of things.

(14) This tells us something about the relationship to system. Traditional speculative philosophy has striven to synthesize what, on Kantian grounds, it takes to be a chaotic multiplicity, and ultimately to forge into a unity. This turns the actual state of affairs on its head. The *telos* of philosophy, its open and unprotected nature, its freedom to interpret phenomena with which it engages unarmed, is anti-systematic. It must needs respect system, however, in so far as heterogeneous factors confront it in systematic form. The administered world is moving in the direction of rigid systematization. It is negative [16] objectivity that is the system, not the positive subject. After a historical phase in which systems that dealt seriously with significant issues were relegated to the ominous realm of intellectual poetry, leaving behind but the pale shadow of their schematic organization, it is hard to imagine what once inspired the philosophical mind to construct systems. According to Nietzsche, it ended up documenting nothing more than the pedantry of scholars compensating themselves for their political impotence by constructing conceptual systems with which to demonstrate their absolute power over Being. The need for system, however, the unwillingness to put up with the *membra disiecta* of knowledge as opposed to reaching out to the absolute whose claims are involuntarily implied in the validity of every single individual judgement – that need was for once more than the pseudo-morphosing of the spirit into the irresistibly successful methodology of mathematics and natural science. In the philosophy of history, the systems of the seventeenth century in particular had a compensatory function. The same *ratio* that, in tune with the bourgeois class, had smashed the feudal order and its intellectual reflex, scholastic

ontology, panicked at the sight of the subsequent ruins (15) its own creation. It was terrified by the chaos that continued to lurk beneath the surface of its own power base, growing stronger in proportion to its own violence. These fears shaped the response of bourgeois thought in its formative stages in a way that became constitutive of its conduct for centuries to come: this was to revoke every step towards emancipation by reinforcing the existing order. Overshadowed by its incomplete emancipation, the bourgeois mind could not banish the fear that it might be overtaken by an even more advanced consciousness. It sensed that it had achieved not perfect freedom but only a caricature. Because of that it felt driven to exaggerate its own autonomy at the level of theory, expanding it into a system that resembled its own coercive mechanisms. Bourgeois [17] *ratio* meant reproducing from within itself the order that it had negated in the outside world. As an order that had been produced, however, it ceased to be one, and hence became insatiable. Every system was just such a senseless, rational order – a postulated system posing as being-in-itself. Its origin must be sought in formal thought divorced from content; only through such a separation could it exercise control over its material. In the philosophical system such a strategy is intertwined with its own impossibility; precisely in the early history of systems this condemned each system to destruction at the hands of its successor. So as to prevail as a system, *ratio* virtually eradicated all the qualitative features it referred to. It thus came into an irreconcilable conflict with the objectivity which it pretended to comprehend while in fact doing violence to it. It thus became divorced from that objectivity, and the more completely, the more that objectivity was subjected to its axioms and, ultimately, to the single axiom of identity. The pedantries of all systems right down to the structural complexities of Kant and even Hegel, with whose programme they are so incompatible, are the marks of an a priori failure, one that is documented with scrupulous honesty in the fractures in the Kantian system. Whenever things that are to be comprehended resist identity with the concept, the latter are forced into grotesque exaggeration to prevent doubts arising about the coherence and rigour of the intellectual product. Great philosophy was taken possession of by the paranoid zeal that forbids the wicked queen in Snow White to tolerate anyone more beautiful than she – another person, in short – even at the uttermost ends of her realm, and that drives her to pursue that Other with all the wiles of (16) reason, while the Other constantly retreats in the face of that pursuit. The least remnant of non-identity would suffice to negate identity [18] as a whole. Ever since Descartes's pineal gland and Spinoza's axioms, which already contain the total rationalism he

would go on to extract from them so productively through the process of deduction, the eccentricities of systems proclaim in their untruth the truth, the insanity of systems as such. The process, however, in which these systems were undermined by their own failings was counterpointed by a social process. In the form of the exchange principle, bourgeois *ratio* drew closer to the systems whatever it wanted to resemble itself, to identify with itself, leaving out as little as at all possible. In this respect it had growing, albeit potentially murderous, success. What turned out to be vacuous in theory was ironically vindicated in practice. This explains why, a generation after Nietzsche, all the talk about a crisis of the system became increasingly ideological. This applied with particular force even among those who, in conformity with the already obsolete ideal of system, felt free to vent their spleen on the [fashion for the – Trans.] ‘aperçu’. Reality should no longer be construed because it is too easy to construe it to excess, and its irrationality provides pretexts for this that become intensified under the pressure of particular rationalities: disintegration through integration.<sup>17</sup> If society could be exposed as a closed system, one which for that reason is unreconciled to the human subjects of which it is composed, it would scarcely be tolerated by them in so far as they continue to be human subjects. Its character as system, only recently still the shibboleth of school philosophy, must be assiduously denied by its adepts; in the process they may pose as the spokesmen of free, original and even non-academic thinking. Such abuses do not invalidate the critique of the system. The belief that philosophy is possible only as a system – a proposition common to every incisive philosophy, in contrast to sceptical thinking which resisted such incisiveness – is scarcely less damaging to philosophy than are empiricist tendencies. The matters on which philosophy has to pronounce judgements are essentially decided in advance by its own postulates. (17) [19] The system, the format for a totality to which nothing remains extraneous, assigns an absolute status to thought over against its contents, thus dissolving all contents into thoughts: it is idealist prior to any arguments for idealism.

A critique of this does not suffice to liquidate the system. Not only is its form adequate to the world, which in terms of content eludes the hegemony of thought. In addition, compared to the system all unsystematic thought up to Nietzsche always seemed feeble, if not impotent. Unity and harmony, however, are at the same time the skewed projection of a reconciled, no longer antagonistic state of affairs onto the coordinates of a dominant, oppressive way of thinking. The ambiguity of philosophical systems allows for no alternative but to transpose the power of thought into the open definition of its



individual elements, once it has been freed from the constraints of systematization. In essence Hegel's logic was already moving in this direction. Reflection on his individual categories was supposed to effect the movement of each concept into the next, without regard to anything superimposed on them from above, and the totality of these movements was what he understood by system. Only, instead of becoming crystallized, this system remained implicit, and hence fraudulent, preconceived in every one of its components. Such illusory totalities must be dispelled; what Hegel merely promised should be carried out, namely the quasi-unconscious immersion of consciousness in the phenomena on which it takes a stand. And that would mean a qualitative dialectical change. Systematic uniformity would crumble. The phenomenon would not remain what it remains in Hegel despite his best intentions, namely an instance of its concept. (18) Thinking would require more labour and effort than Hegel suspects, [20] since in his discussion thought extracts from its objects only that which is already a thought. Notwithstanding his programme of exteriorization, he remains self-contained and goes bowling along, however much he protests the contrary. If the thought had truly exteriorized itself onto the object, then the latter would begin to speak for itself beneath the stubborn gaze of thought. In this sense, the philosophical ideal is interpretation, something that was traditionally taboo. Hegel's objection to epistemology was that you only become a smith through smithing, by the actual cognition of resistant, as it were, atheoretical phenomena. In this respect we must take him at his word; this alone would return to philosophy the freedom that it had surrendered under the spell of the concept of freedom, the autonomy of the subject that alone created meaning. Philosophy had its substance in the individual and particular that its entire tradition had treated as a *quantité négligeable*. The speculative power with which to blast open the insoluble, however, is the power of negation. In it alone does the systematic impulse survive. The categories involved in a critique of system are the same ones needed to comprehend the particular. The elements that once legitimately transcended particularity in the system have their place outside the system [*im Ungedeckten*]. The gaze that apprehends more in the phenomenon than it actually is, and simply because of what it is, secularizes metaphysics. The fragments in which philosophy terminates are what assign a proper place to the monads that within idealism had been no more than illusory constructs. They provide ideas, in the realm of the particular, of the totality that is inconceivable as such. The thinking, meanwhile, that is banned from making positive hypostases outside actual dialectics overshoots the object with which it can no longer

claim [21] to be identical; it becomes more independent than when it is conceived as being absolute, in reality a confusion of sovereign mastery and compliance, the one dependent upon the other. This may have been Kant's purpose in exempting the intelligible sphere from immanence of every kind. This overshooting of the intellect is not identical with dialectics at the micrological level. (19) Immersion in particularity, dialectical immanence intensified to an extreme, calls for the freedom to step outside the object that is abrogated by the claims of identity. Hegel would have been the last to approve of this: he relied on complete mediation by the objects. In cognitive practice, the resolution of the insoluble, the aspect of the transcendent nature of thought, can be seen in the fact that microanalysis, the decoding of the insoluble, makes use exclusively of macrological methods. True enough, the classifying approach of which it forms part does not shed light on what is opaque here. Greater success is achieved, however, by the constellation of concepts which the constructive mind brings to bear, much as the locksmith opens a safe not with a single key or a single numeral, but with a combination of numbers. Philosophy would once again fall victim to the pre-established harmony of Leibniz or Hegel, to consoling affirmation, if it were to deceive itself and others about the fact that, in addition to whatever methods it employs to move objects in themselves, it must also bring to bear on them from outside. Whatever abides within them needs an intervention for them to speak. The intention remains that the forces mobilized from outside, and ultimately every theory brought to bear upon phenomena from outside, should be consumed within them. Philosophical theory points to its own end.

(20) [22] Dialectics that is no longer 'affixed'<sup>18</sup> to identity either provokes the criticism that it is baseless, and that we shall know it by its fascist fruits, or else that it is giddy-making. Behind the anxiety about where to take hold of a philosophy there lies for the most part pure aggression, the desire to seize hold of it in the way in which historically schools used to devour one another. The equivalence of guilt and penance has been transposed to the sequence of thoughts. It is precisely this assimilation of mind to the ruling principle that philosophical reflection must see through. Traditional thought and the habits of common-sense thinking that it left behind after its demise as philosophy call for a frame of reference<sup>19</sup> in which everything has its place. Not too much importance is attached to the intelligibility of the frame of reference – it can even be formulated in dogmatic axioms – as long as it gives shelter to every reflection while barring the way to every unframed thought. A dialectics that has

discarded its fixation with Hegel can satisfy us only if it abandons itself heedlessly to the objects *à fonds perdu*; the vertigo that this induces is an *index veri*. What is so giddy-making is the shock of the open, the negativity as which it necessarily appears in the framed and never-changing realm: untruth for the untrue. The dismantling of systems and of the system as such is not a question of formal epistemology, but one that drastically affects their contents: details no longer fall into place. What formerly the system wished to procure for them is, as qualitatively other, to be found only in the details themselves. Thought cannot guarantee in advance what that additional quality is or whether it is present. Only if it is present can the much misused saying [23] that ‘the truth is concrete’ properly come into its own. This saying compels philosophy to crack open the minutiae of thought. We must philosophize not *about* concrete details but from *within* them, by assembling concepts around them. Hegel’s assertion that the particular is the universal is the most scathing criticism of it; we should give this critique its due. However, if we surrender to the specific object, the bleating herd accuses us of failing to adopt an unambiguous standpoint. The herd regards as witchcraft anything that differs from the prevailing reality; whatever is under a spell has the advantage that all the things that mean familiarity, home and security in the false world are themselves aspects of the spell. People fear that, in escaping from the spell, they will lose everything because they know no happiness, not even the happiness of thought apart from the ability to hold onto something – unfreedom in perpetuity. (21) They want at least the prospect of something desirable; more palpably, a piece of ontology amidst their critique of it, just as if any unframed insight did not express what is desirable better than a declaration of intention<sup>20</sup> that is not taken further.

Philosophy confirms an experience Schoenberg noted in the case of traditional music theory. Music theory really teaches only how a movement begins and ends, nothing about the movement itself or its development. By analogy, instead of reducing philosophy to categories, the task in a sense is to compose it. However, there is something scandalous about a mode of conduct that does not act as guardian to anything primary and certain, but which, if only by virtue of the forthrightness of its presentation, makes so few concessions to relativism, the twin of absolutism, that it borders on doctrine. It goes beyond Hegel, to the point of breaking with his dialectics, which aspired to be all things, even *prima philosophia*, and in fact turned it into that by his adoption of the identity principle, the absolute subject. However, dissociating thought [24] from the primary and the fundamental does not turn it into a free-floating absolute. The

very act of dissociation binds it to what it is not and thus disposes of the illusion of self-sufficiency. If the ungrounded is to be condemned, this objection should likewise be levelled at the self-sustaining intellectual principle as the sphere of absolute origins. However, where ontology, Heidegger in the lead, hits out at the ungrounded, there is the site of truth. The truth is shifting and fragile, thanks to its temporal substance; Benjamin insistently criticized Gottfried Keller's dictum that the truth cannot run away from us. Philosophy must abandon the consoling belief that the truth cannot be lost. A philosophy that is incapable of plunging into the abyss that the metaphysical fundamentalists (22) waffle about – it is the abyss not of nimble sophistry but of insanity – will be converted at the bidding of its certainty principle into an analytic proposition and potentially into a meaningless tautology. Only thoughts like these, that go to extremes, are able to challenge the omnipotent impotence of a certain complicity; only a cerebral acrobatics still retains a relation to the matter in hand that, according to the *fable convenue*, it scorns in favour of its own self-satisfaction. Today, every attempt to prohibit this is irrationalist. The function of the concept of certainty in philosophy has gone into reverse. Where formerly thinkers attempted to overcome dogma and tutelage through self-certainty, that same self-certainty has now degenerated into a mannerism of a socially insured knowledge, a knowledge to which nothing is supposed to happen. And, in fact, nothing does happen.

An unfettered dialectics no more dispenses with a solid basis than does Hegel. But dialectics no longer confers any primacy on it. Hegel did not so much emphasize the solid basis at the origin of his metaphysics: his intention was for it to emerge at its conclusion, in all its glory. This gives his logical categories a curious ambivalence. They are both structures that have emerged, that cancel [25] each other out and, at the same time, have an unchanging, a priori character. Their dynamic is mediated by the doctrine of immediacy that renews itself on every level of the dialectic. The theory of a second nature – which had already acquired a critical tinge – is preserved in a negative dialectics. It assumes *tel quel* the mediated immediacy, the formations that society and its (23) development throw at thought so that analysis may lay bare their mediations and expose the immanent difference between what things are and what they claim to be. The unchanging, self-sustaining solid reality, what the young Hegel termed 'the positive', is the negative for that analysis, as it was for him. The more the autonomy of subjectivity is restricted critically, and the more we become aware that it is itself a mediated thing, the more compelling the obligation to leave objects the primacy that endows thoughts with

the solidity they do not possess in themselves, a solidity that they need and without which the dynamic energy required by dialectics to dissolve such solidity would not even exist. The possibility of a negative dialectics depends on the proof of the primacy of the object. This too cannot be an absolute principle for dialectics or a reprise for naïve realism: it is valid exclusively in the interrelationship. If the primacy of the object were to break free of the dialectic and be positively postulated – accompanied by the triumphant howls of the complicit – then philosophy would regress to the fatuous dogma of the reproduction or reflection [of reality – Trans.] that we see in the late writings of Georg Lukács. Yet again, a principle, a ‘maxim’, would be hypostasized and thought would reduce everything that exists to a common denominator. But ideology does not always resemble the general thesis of idealism. In fact, it dwells in the substructures of the concept of a ‘first’ thing, regardless of its content. It implies [26] the identity of concept and thing, and with that the justification of the world, even when it summarily insists on the dependence of consciousness on being. The theodicy of history, together with its overtones of apologia, was not alien to Marx.

Thinking that is not based on any immutable fundamental principle soon has the concept of synthesis in its sights. The latter subjects method both as the telos of philosophy and as the model of its individual operations to what idealism called the identity of subject and object: it moulded the Hegelian dialectic in the shape (24) of a circle, the lethal return of the result of thought to its origins. In accordance with this, synthesis, as an instant panacea against subversion, acquired a calamitous quality; perhaps its most repulsive form has been the invention of a so-called psycho-synthesis, as opposed to Freudian psychoanalysis; the fastidious sensibility recoils from even uttering the word. Hegel uses it even more sparingly than might be supposed by the popularity of the triadic scheme whose mechanical nature had been exposed by none other than Hegel himself. This may well correspond to the texture of his philosophy as a whole. His intellectual operations involve almost always the determinate negation of concepts that are examined from close to and turned this way and that. What emerges formally as a synthesis in the course of such analyses itself possesses the form of negation because it involves the redemption of whatever fell victim to the preceding movement of the concept. The Hegelian synthesis is at its core an insight into the insufficiency of that movement; the so-called higher stage turns out also to be a lower one, a step back into the pluperfect. This separates Hegel from the vulgar notion of synthesis as victorious positivity. Admittedly, there is more than a trace of this triumphalism in the constantly

forming immediacies in his thought in which their own mediations [27] are supposed to be submerged. The consequence of this, visible as early as Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, was to forsake all the trust in naturally developing or postulated immediacies that Hegel's dialectic had placed in them in its later, systematic form. Compared to Kant, Hegel had restricted the priority given to synthesis: he recognized unity and multiplicity as moments neither of which can exist without the other; the tension between them is resolved by negation. Nevertheless, the predilection for unity is something he shares with Kant and the entire tradition. (25) But thinking must not confine itself to abstract negation. The illusion that it is possible to take hold of the many directly would regress to mythology, to a diffuse greyness just as much as, at the opposite pole, unity thinking would mean the imitation of blind nature by suppressing it, mythical domination. For enlightenment to reflect on itself is not to retract enlightenment: that retraction comes about from its being corrupted in the interests of the current system of domination. The self-critical turn of unity thinking depends on concepts, syntheses, and must not discredit them by administrative fiat. Unity, regarded abstractly, contains space enough for both: for the repression of qualities that cannot be reduced to ideas, as well as for the ideal of conciliation, beyond all antagonism. It has perennially succeeded in rendering its violence palatable to human beings because it is illuminated by traces of the non-violent and the pacified. The moment of unity cannot be extirpated, as is virtually the case in an unreflective nominalism, notwithstanding all the talk about unified science. The movement of the elements towards synthesis must be reversed by a process of reflection about their impact on the many. Unity alone transcends unity. Even in the moment of identity a thing has its right to life, the affinity which was pushed into the background by the advance of unity and which, secularized to the point of unrecognizability, nevertheless managed to survive in that unity. [28] An unframed [ungedeckt] knowledge does not eliminate the unifying subject. It is inextinguishable in the experience of the object. (26) Its own syntheses want, as Plato doubtless realized, indirectly, with the aid of concepts, to change, to imitate whatever aims at that synthesis.

Thought that is receptive to the objects has philosophical substance. Philosophy has yearned for this in vain ever since the generation of Bergson and Simmel, Husserl and Scheler. What tradition dismissed was what tradition needed. If the constraints of method are relaxed in response to self-criticism, philosophical effort will be increasingly determined by its content. The fact that the non-conceptual is not identical with its concept is honoured by cognitive

practice in the shape of its growing preoccupation with content. A social dialectic, what is known in philosophy as ‘ontic’ dialectic, in other words a dialectic of perennial antagonism, is reflected in the philosophical dialectic of subject and object. If there were such a thing as an unchanging ontology, it would be the negative ontology of a perpetual antagonism. (27) Nevertheless, content-based thinking cannot simply cast off methodical reasoning if it is to avoid falling victim to either dogmatism or arbitrary notions, even though the latter may come closer to the truth than the methodical progression whose reliability is purchased at the cost of reducing its yield in insight. The question of the relation of individual content analyses to the theory of dialectics cannot be resolved by the idealist assurance that the one fits neatly into the other. Such an assurance would merely smuggle in a false identity of concept and thing once again. The blindness with which a thought abandons itself to its object, without hypostasis, so to speak, without method, is itself a methodological principle. ‘True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves.’<sup>21</sup> The less [29] a thought lets itself be influenced by reflections external to its objects, the more profoundly it becomes aware of the universal in the particular; the invectives of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche against the role of examples in philosophy point to this, against philosophy’s own tradition. In terms of content, as the universal mediation of every phenomenon through the social totality which is converted in philosophy to pure subjectivity, something universal lurks in every particular. However, philosophical experience does not possess this universal, or does so abstractly at best. It is therefore constrained to start off from the particular, though without forgetting what it does not have, but does know. While philosophical experience is assured<sup>22</sup> of the actual determination of phenomena by their concepts, it cannot fix these concepts (28) ontologically in advance as true in themselves. They are fused with the untrue, the repressive principle, and that diminishes their epistemological dignity. They do not constitute the positive *telos* in which cognition can come to rest. For its part, the negativity of the universal fixes cognition to the particular since this is what has to be redeemed. The redemption of the particular, however, could not even begin without the universality it has set free. (29) All philosophy, even philosophy that intends freedom, drags unfreedom along in its wake, an unfreedom in which society prolongs itself. The neo-ontological projects have all resisted this, but their thrust was that of a regression to true or fictitious ἀρχαί, origins, which are nothing but the principle of coercion. Thought would like to rise above the alternatives of licence or compulsion by assuring itself of mediation between its

antithetical moments. Thought contains coercion within itself; [30] this coercion protects it against regression into licence. Nevertheless, criticism enables it to recognize the intrinsic element of coercion in itself; its own coercive character is the medium of its deliverance. Hegel's 'freedom to the object', which in his thought was purely repressive, the disempowering of the subject, has yet to be accomplished. Until then, dialectics as method will continue to diverge from a dialectics of substance; they cannot simply be equated by dictatorial fiat.

Of course, the fact that both concepts and reality are contradictory by nature has not come out of the blue. The distinction between the concept and whatever is subordinated to it is a sublimated version of the antagonisms that tear society apart and in particular the principle of domination. The logical form of contradiction, however, acquires its distinction because whatever refuses to abide by the unity imposed by the principle of domination manifests itself not as something indifferent to that principle, but as an infringement of logic: as a contradiction. The vestige of a divergence between philosophical conception and execution, on the other hand, also contains a truth, an element of non-identity. This non-identity neither permits the method to coincide completely with the philosophical contents in which it should subsist, nor does it allow these contents to be sublimated to the degree that would perhaps be appropriate if they were reconciled among themselves. The primacy of content expresses itself as the necessary insufficiency of the method. What must be said by way of general reflection and so as not to have to surrender abjectly to the philosophy of the philosophers can be legitimated solely in the execution, and this then negates it as method. Confronted with the philosophical substance, its surplus as method becomes abstract, false. Even Hegel had to come to terms with the discrepancy between his preface to the *Phenomenology* and the *Phenomenology* itself. The philosophical ideal would be for the performance of an act to render superfluous an accounting for what one had done.

(30) [31] The most recent attempt to break out of the prison of conceptual fetishism – out of academic philosophy without relinquishing the claims of rigour – went by the name of Existentialism. Like the fundamental ontology with which it had parted company, it remained trapped in idealism despite its political commitment. Moreover, as regards philosophical structure, it retained something arbitrary and could be replaced by a contrary [politics] so long as these satisfied the formal characteristics of Existentialism. There is no theoretical dividing line between Existentialism and decisionism. At the same time, the idealist component of Existentialism is a



function of politics. As social critics, Sartre and his friends were unwilling to restrict themselves to a theoretical critique, and it did not escape their attention that, wherever communism had seized power, it set itself up as a bureaucracy. The institution of a centralized state party makes a mockery of everything that has ever been thought about man's relation to the state. This explains why Sartre emphasized the feature no longer tolerated by dominant practice – what the language of philosophy terms spontaneity. The more the societal distribution of power has restricted the objective opportunities for spontaneity, the more Sartre has placed his hopes in Kierkegaard's category of the 'decision', a concept that had acquired its meaning in the latter's philosophy from its *terminus ad quem*, namely, from Christology. Despite Sartre's extreme nominalism, his philosophy is structured in accordance with the old idealist notion of the free act of the subject. All objectivity is a matter of indifference to Existentialism, as it was for Fichte. In the same way, in Sartre's plays social conditions are nebulous, demoted to the status of mere pretexts for action. Because of this lack of objectivity, his plots are condemned to an irrationality that must have been the last thing intended by such a steadfast [32] champion of enlightenment. The idea of absolute freedom of choice is as illusory as that of the absolute Self as the origin of the world. Sartre's plays disavow the very philosophy whose propositions they treat in such a thesis-like manner. (31) The most modest political experience would suffice to see through the artificiality of scenes constructed as a foil to the decisions of the heroic protagonists. Not even in works of art is it conceivable that such masterful decisions could be arrived at in concrete historical situations. A general who decides to forgo the perpetrating of atrocities for the same irrational reasons as he had previously revelled in them; who breaks off the siege of a town already given over to him by traitors in order to set up a utopian community instead – even in the barbaric period of a romanticized German baroque such a general would have been at the very least recalled by his superiors, if not put to death by mutinous soldiers. What fits with this only too well is the fact that the swashbuckling Götz puts his spontaneity at the service of an organized popular uprising, once the massacre of his City of Light has taught him the truth of his own free act. This organized uprising can easily be decoded as the likeness of the ones Sartre uses as a foil to his own insistence on absolute spontaneity. And in fact the bogeyman now repeats the atrocities that he had freely forsworn – but this time he evidently has the blessing of philosophy. The absolute subject is unable to escape from the entanglements by which he has been ensnared; the fetters he wishes to destroy, the fetters of tyranny, are

at one with the principle of absolute subjectivity. There are good philosophical reasons for the follies of political Existentialism, as also for the phrase-making of depoliticized Germans. Existentialism promotes what exists anyway, the bare existence of mankind, to the level of a mentality that the individual must choose, as if he had any other choice. If [33] Existentialism teaches more than such tautologies, it regresses to the reinstatement of a subjectivity existing for itself as the only substantial reality. The philosophical schools that take derivatives of the Latin word *existere* as their watchword wish to restore the reality of bodily experience in opposition to the alienated sciences. This explains why they fail to incorporate anything of substance, and what they include under the head of ἐπιποχὴ, the age, takes its revenge by imposing itself behind the back of philosophy, in decisions that philosophy regards as irrational. (32) A mode of thinking purged of contents is not a whit superior to a special science denuded of concepts; it lapses, for a second time, into the same formalism it had attacked in defence of the essential interests of philosophy. It is then replenished with a ragbag of borrowings, taken chiefly from psychology. The aim of Existentialism, at least in its radical French form, is to be realized not at a distance from philosophical contents, but in menacing proximity to them. The dichotomy of subject and object cannot be annulled by a mere act of thought, least of all by reduction to the human being. Under that title, i.e. that of existence, philosophers just set out and steer an abstract and irrelevant course. The procedure is the reverse of the special sciences that stifle philosophical reflection. The schools of thought grouped around the concept of existence are incapable of the act of exteriorization for which they yearn in their recourse to the existence of the individual human being as against the transcendental subject. They confess their incapacity, when even those who tend towards nominalism of different shades attempt to absorb whatever does not go into the concept or is contrary to it by following the Hegelian pattern and conceptualizing it. The concept of the non-conceptual should enable thinking to appropriate it. Compliant with tradition in this respect, they shrink from their own project [34] of pursuing with concepts whatever phenomena refuse conceptualization, instead of subsuming them beneath its own concept and allowing them to evaporate.

The process [of thinking] has its remote, indistinct archetype in names, which do not completely envelop things in categories, albeit at the expense of their function as knowledge. (33) What we want of knowledge unconfined is what we have been drilled to resign ourselves to and what names obscure by possessing it. Resignation and delusion complement each other ideologically. Idiosyncratic precision

in the choice of words, as if they were supposed to designate the thing, is not least of the reasons why presentation is essential to philosophy, and no mere superficial medium. (34) The cognitive reason for insisting on expression when confronted by the  $\tau\acute{o}\delta\epsilon\ \tau\iota$ , the individual thing, is the latter's own dialectic, its conceptual mediation in itself; it is the point of entry for comprehending its non-conceptual side. By becoming critically aware of the latent conceptual dimension of existing reality, cognition virtually reaches the opaque and does so solely within this relation. For mediation in the non-conceptual is not what remains after the process of subtraction, nor something pointing to a bad infinity of such procedures.

On the contrary, the mediation of  $\ddot{\upsilon}\lambda\eta$ , matter, is its implicit history. Philosophy derives whatever legitimacy it retains from a negative factor: from the fact that, in their insistence upon being so and not otherwise, the indissoluble elements to which philosophy capitulated and which repel the onslaught of idealism are essentially a fetish – the fetish of the irrevocable nature of being. What dispels the fetish is the knowledge that things are not simply so and not otherwise, but that they have come to be what they are under certain conditions. This process of becoming dwells in the object; it can no more be stabilized in the concept than it can be divorced from its [35] results and (35) forgotten. On this point idealist and materialist dialectics converge. In idealism immediacy is vindicated as a stage of the concept by its internal history, while for materialism that history becomes the measure not merely of the untruth of concepts, but even more of immediacy in being. Common to both is the emphasis on the history that has congealed in the objects. What enables negative dialectics to penetrate its seemingly impervious objects is the possibility they have been cheated of by their reality but to which each of them testifies. (33, cont.) But even where every effort is made to express the non-conceptual in language, the words remain concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing itself, without quite grasping their selfhood; a gap opens up between them and the here and now. This corresponds to a residue of arbitrariness and relativity, both in the choice of words and in presentation as a whole. The only remedy for this is a critical reflection upon concepts, especially concrete ones. Even in Benjamin they have a propensity to conceal their conceptuality in an authoritarian manner. Only concepts can achieve what the concept prevents, namely, the  $\tau\rho\acute{\omega}\sigma\alpha\varsigma\ \acute{\iota}\acute{\alpha}\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$  [cure for the wound].<sup>23</sup> In their judgement on the content they claim to represent all concepts enter a protest. As universals they are never identical with what they refer to and with which they wish to be identical. This becomes their definable flaw. This flaw leads to their correction by other concepts;

this is the source of the constellation in which alone something of the hope of the name is perpetuated. The language of philosophy approaches this name by negating it. What it criticizes in the words, in particular their claim that they possess the immediate truth, is almost always the ideology of a positive, existing identity of word and thing, the secret superstition of every idealism. The latter trivializes the Absolute about whose infinitude it rhapsodizes or which [36] it undertakes to define; the (34, cont.) irreversible secularization of the infinite into the immanent simultaneously falsifies it. Insistence upon a single word or concept as the iron gate to be unlocked if the key fits is likewise no more than an aspect, albeit an indispensable one. To be known, the inwardness to which cognition moulds itself in expression always stands in need of outwardness as a key. When Leibniz and Hegel demanded that things should be understood from inside, this requirement should be met, despite Kant, but without lapsing once again into identity philosophy.

(35, cont.) We can no longer swim with the so-called mainstream of modern philosophy. Once, during the first half of the twentieth century, the most prominent oppositional periodical bore the title 'Against the Stream'.<sup>24</sup> The Western periodical of the same party called itself the *Mainstream* after it became established in the East.<sup>25</sup> In philosophy such a 'mainstream' aimed to sweep away the traditional elements of thought, dehistoricize their contents and relegate history to a special branch of learning – one concerned exclusively with assembling facts. Ever since men began to seek the foundation of all knowledge in the supposed immediacy of subjectivity, they have endeavoured to expel the historical dimension of thought, as if under the spell of the belief that immediacy existed only in the present. There is a meeting of minds here between the two progenitors of modernity who are often regarded as polar opposites: Descartes's autobiographical observations on the origins of his method and Bacon's doctrine of idols.<sup>26</sup> Any aspect of thought that is historical instead of fitting into the timeless framework of an objectified logic [37] was dismissed as superstition – and, of course, this is exactly what the appeal to ecclesiastical tradition was, as against the autonomy of thought. However, the justifiable critique of tradition as authority ignored (36) the truth that tradition is an intrinsic part of knowledge, since it mediates between its objects. Knowledge deforms its objects as soon as it creates a *tabula rasa* by objectifying them in a single moment of time. Knowledge as such, even in a form divorced from substance, takes part in tradition as unconscious remembrance. There is no question that we could ask which does not contain knowledge of the past in stored-up form and which does not spur us

on to further questioning. And from the outset, the shape of thought, a movement advancing within time, resembles on the microcosmic plane the macrocosmic, historical dimension that is internalized in the structure of thought. Among the achievements of the Kantian deduction of the categories, one that ranks foremost is that, even in the pure form of cognition, the unity of the 'I think' at the stage of reproduction in the imagination, he perceived remembrance, the vanishing and erasable trace of the historical. However, because there is no such thing as time without its content, what Husserl in his late phase termed 'inner historicity'<sup>27</sup> cannot exist as a pure form. Such inner historicity of thought is inseparable from its content and hence from tradition. In contrast, the pure, perfectly sublimated subject would be absolutely devoid of tradition. A knowledge that conformed utterly to the idol of purity, the idol of pure timelessness, would coincide with formal logic; it would literally be a tautology. It would not have space even for a transcendental logic. Timelessness, a goal aspired to by the bourgeois mind, perhaps in compensation for its own mortality, is the apogee of its delusion. This motivated Benjamin when – perhaps too bluntly – he forswore [38] the ideal of autonomy and submitted his thought to a tradition, a tradition admittedly which, as it was freely chosen, lacked authority. Paradoxically, this was the same lack of authority of which traditionalists had complained in autarkic thought. Quasi-transcendental, a reflection of the transcendental, the element of tradition (37) and not subjectivity is the truly constitutive factor, the factor Kant had called a 'hidden art in the depths of the human soul'.<sup>28</sup> The various questions posed by Kant at the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and which impose such a narrowness of approach on the book, include the question of how a form of thinking that must relinquish tradition might at the same time preserve it in a completely different form.<sup>29</sup> Bergson's philosophy and, even more powerfully, Proust's novel were in thrall to tradition although, at the same time, under the spell of immediacy, both men abstractly opposed the bourgeois cult of timelessness which makes use of the mechanical nature of concepts to anticipate the abolition of life. Philosophy participates in tradition solely through its determinate negation of it. Its existence depends upon the texts that it criticizes. These texts are brought to philosophy by the tradition they embody, and it is in dealing with them that philosophy becomes commensurable with tradition. This justifies the transition from philosophy to exegesis, since this elevates neither the interpretation nor the symbol into an absolute, but seeks the truth where thought consumes its underlying material and secularizes the irretrievable archetype of sacred texts.

Through its overt or latent dependence on texts, however, philosophy admits to its own linguistic nature, something its own methodological ideal vainly strove to deny. In its more recent history, and in very much the same vein as tradition, this aspect of its nature has been dismissed as rhetoric. [39] Jettisoned and degraded into a means with which to achieve effects, it became the vehicle of lies in philosophy. With its contempt for rhetoric, philosophy atoned for the guilt incurred by its divorce from things ever since Antiquity, a separation of which it had already been accused by Plato. But the persecution of rhetoric that led expression to find refuge in thought contributed just as much to the technification of thinking, and hence its potential abolition, as had those who cultivated rhetoric while neglecting thought. The role of rhetoric in philosophy is to represent whatever cannot be thought except in language. It asserts itself (38) in the postulates of representation through which philosophy is to be distinguished from the communication of matter already known and established. Like every substitute, it is jeopardized by the risk that it will usurp whatever the form of presentation cannot obtain directly from the thought. It is unceasingly corrupted by the intention to persuade – although without it the indispensable relation to practice that is implicit in the act of thinking would no longer exist. The entire philosophical tradition, from [Plato's] *Phaedrus* to the semanticists, has been allergic to expression and would fain have expelled it from language. In this respect it is in harmony with the entire thrust of the Enlightenment, which strove to pursue undisciplined gestures right into the heart of logic. At the same time, however, it is a testimony to the rancour felt by the reified consciousness towards the elements of consciousness that the reified consciousness lacks. If the alliance of philosophy and science aims at the virtual abolition of language, philosophy must depend for its survival on linguistic effort: not by blindly following the flow of language, but by reflecting on it. There is a good reason why linguistic slovenliness – in scientific terms: imprecision – is so frequently associated with the scientific gesture of linguistic incorruptibility. For to do away with language in thought [40] is not the same thing as to demythologize thought. Along with language, philosophy would blindly sacrifice everything that might link it to its object apart from the element of signification. It is in language alone that like knows like. However, we cannot just ignore the constant denunciation of rhetoric by a nominalism whose basic thesis is that names are mere sound and fury, devoid of any resemblance to their object. But nor can we simply proclaim the unbroken validity of rhetoric. (39) Dialectics, whose literal meaning reminds us of language as the organ of thought, should be the attempt to rescue

rhetoric by matching words to things. Dialectics appropriates for the power of thought what had appeared historically as a defect: the link with language which can never be entirely broken. This link inspired phenomenology when, naïvely as always, it sought the key to truth in the analysis of words. It is through the quality of their rhetoric that culture, society and the entire tradition are able to become embodied in the thought that they transmit; the sheer hostility to rhetoric is allied to the barbarism in which bourgeois thought terminates. The vilification of Cicero and even Hegel's diatribe against Diderot echo the resentment of those whose straitened circumstances deny them the freedom to assert themselves and who regard the breath of language as sinful. In dialectics rhetoric sides with content, while logic is obedient to form. Mediating between the two, dialectics seeks to resolve the dilemma of choosing between random opinion and vacuous correctness. It inclines towards content, however, because content is more open-ended, not predetermined by the scaffolding of thought: it is a protest against myth. Myth is never-changing sameness, a tendency ultimately diluted into the formal laws of thought. A knowledge focused on content sets its sights on utopia. Utopia, as the consciousness of possibility [41], adheres to the concrete, the unspoilt. Its path is blocked by possibility, never by immediate reality; this explains why it always seems abstract when surrounded by the world as it is. Its inextinguishable colour comes from non-being. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence that extends, however, negatively, into that which does not exist. (40) All philosophy converges in this idea with what is utterly remote but which alone could be proximity; it is the prism in which its colour is captured.

# Notes

## Editor's Foreword

- 1 Adorno announced his lectures with the title 'Negative Dialectics'. In order to avoid bibliographical confusion with the book with the same title, the editor decided to give it the title 'Lectures on Negative Dialectics'. Adorno normally based his lectures on brief notes which he then improvised on freely. From 1958 on his lectures were recorded on to tapes which the secretarial staff in the Institute for Social Research then used as the basis for fair copies. With the exception of his last lecture course in the summer semester 1968, the tapes were wiped, while the transcripts – which Adorno had not vetted – were preserved. Unfortunately, this procedure was followed in the present lecture series only for the first ten lectures, while for lectures 11 to 25 we have only Adorno's notes. It can no longer be established whether the transcripts were mislaid or whether there was some technical fault and the tapes failed to record in the first place. The academic assistants and other staff who were involved either are no longer around or else cannot remember what happened. Since the significance of the lecture course is as a preliminary to Adorno's magnum opus it seemed inappropriate to include it in the posthumous writings (*Nachgelassene Schriften*). It was decided, therefore, to print the transcripts of the tapes of the first ten lectures. For lectures 11 to 25 the edition had to make do with Adorno's own notes. In order to make available to the reader at least in this one instance a complete set of Adorno's own notes, it was decided to print his notes even in the first ten lectures where the transcripts are to hand. Obviously if at some time in the future the missing transcripts, or even a reliable set of notes from among those attending the lectures, were to come to light, it would become necessary to replace the current edition.

## Lecture 1

- 1 The date on which Adorno started to make notes for the lecture. In general, he inserted the date in the notes to indicate the point he had reached on that day.
- 2 Adorno's page numbers refer to Georg Lasson's edition of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 2nd edn, Leipzig, 1921 (Philosophische Bibliothek, 114). For the quote itself, see note 16 below.
- 3 Paul Tillich (1886–1965) was a theologian and philosopher of religion and the leading advocate of a religious socialism in the 1920s. It was



he who approved Adorno's dissertation, his book on Kierkegaard, for the Habilitation. See Adorno's 'Erinnerungen an Paul Tillich, ein Gespräch mit Wolf-Dieter Marsch', in *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs: Ein Gedenkbuch*, Stuttgart, 1967, p. 24ff. The most illuminating statement of Adorno's view of Tillich is his 'Entwurf contra Paulum'; see 'Theodor W. Adorno contra Paul Tillich: Eine bisher unveröffentlichte Tillich-Kritik Adornos aus dem Jahre 1944', ed. Erdmann Sturm, in *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte*, vol. 3, 1996, p. 251ff. See also T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, p. 182, note 4.

- 4 Wolfgang Philipp (1915–1969) had been professor of Protestant theology in the University of Frankfurt since 1964. On 16 February 1966, he gave a lecture entitled 'Die epizyklische und ostkirchliche Theologie Paul Tillichs' [The epicyclical and eastern orthodox theology of Paul Tillich], published in *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs*, p. 135ff.
- 5 During the winter semester 1965/6 the senior seminar in philosophy that Adorno conducted jointly with Max Horkheimer was devoted to the topic of 'Negation in Hegel'.
- 6 According to the information contained in the lecture lists of Frankfurt University, Tillich and Adorno held joint seminars on Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* [The Education of Mankind] in the summer semester of 1932, and on Simmel's *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie* [Principal Problems of Philosophy] in the winter semester 1932/3. A seminar on Locke's *Essays* was announced for the summer semester of 1933, but nothing came of it. Tillich was suspended from his professorship in April 1933 on account of his book *Sozialistische Entscheidung* [Socialist Decision], Potsdam, 1933, while Adorno ceased to teach in the spring of 1933 and his licence to teach was withdrawn on 8 September 1933.
- 7 Adorno had in mind a discussion on 'Theology in contemporary society' which was held on 25 May 1961 in the Institute for Social Research and subsequently continued in the 'Schultheiss' in Westend. The contributors were Tillich, Horkheimer and Adorno himself. See also Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, vol. 18, p. 511.
- 8 The actual quote has not been found. Adorno probably had in mind the following passage in the Preface: 'For the real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about. The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 2f.).
- 9 See, e.g., 'Kant rediscovered this triadic form by instinct, but in his work it was still lifeless and uncomprehended; since then it has, however, been raised to absolute significance, and with it the true form in its true content has been presented, so that the Notion of Science has emerged. But of course, the triadic form must not be regarded as scientific when it is reduced to a lifeless schema, a mere shadow, and when scientific

- organization is degraded into a table of terms' (Ibid., p. 29 [translation slightly modified]).
- 10 See T. W. Adorno, 'Anmerkungen zum philosophischen Denken', *Neue Deutsche Hefte* 12 (1965), No. 107, p. 5ff. Now in *GS*, vol. 10.2, p. 599ff.
  - 11 Speaking of negative dialectics in the book of that name, Adorno states: 'Its logic is one of disintegration: of a disintegration of the prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces, primarily and directly. Their identity with the subject is untruth. With this untruth the subjective pre-formation of the phenomenon moves in front of the non-identical in the phenomenon, in front of the *individuum ineffabile*' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 144). In the *Note* at the end of *Negative Dialectics*, we find the statement: 'The idea of a logic of disintegration is his [the author's] oldest philosophical idea, one dating from his student years' (*Negative Dialektik*, p. 409). [This note was not included in the English edition.]
  - 12 In the winter semester of 1965/6 Adorno had devoted his senior seminar in sociology to the topic 'The Concept of Society'. The introductory lecture he refers to here is probably identical with the article 'Society' that he wrote for the *Evangelisches Staatslexikon* in 1965 and which has been reprinted in *GS*, vol. 8, p. 9ff.
  - 13 For Adorno's philosophy the programme outlined in his book on Kierkegaard was of decisive importance almost from the outset: 'The motif of the critique of the domination of nature and of a nature-dominating rationality, as well as that of the reconciliation with nature, of the spirit's awareness that it is an aspect of nature, is already explicit in this text' (*Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen*, *GS*, vol. 2, p. 262). The domination of nature was the primary phenomenon underlying *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The mature subject who is no longer at the mercy of fate is halfway along the road to becoming Max Weber's instrumentally rational subject. Like Odysseus as interpreted by Adorno, he overcomes the nature that dominates him by making himself the master of nature. Only by mastering nature does it seem possible to break with nature's own domination, yet 'any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion. That has been the trajectory of European civilization' (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 9). The critique of domination is the driving force behind every thought of Adorno's. If domination was based originally on the model of the domination of nature, the concept nevertheless refers primarily to the human being's own nature. The principle of the domination of nature is inseparable from that of self-preservation. Spinoza's principle of 'suum esse conservare' is the essence of more than a dominating rationality; Spinoza himself grounds virtue in it and, according to Adorno, it appears 'in sublimated form' even in what seems to be the 'purely logical principle of identity' (*Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, p. 94; see also *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 68f.). All attempts to turn ideas into absolutes can be achieved only at the cost of a relapse into nature. To this day history knows mind only as

the domination of nature and the rule of nature: the dominion over nature, natural domination remains imprisoned in the merely natural. The spirit of idealism, for example, is the spirit of mastery over nature 'that does not merely destroy natural life: spirit itself is annihilated natural life and bound to mythology' (*Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 109). In Adorno's *Kierkegaard* spirit as myth reflects upon its natural substance; the mythic forms in which it manifests itself are memories of its involvement in nature. Myth also means, as Adorno himself states in his late essay *Kierkegaard noch einmal*, 'the protest of the many in nature' (*GS*, vol. 2, p. 252) against the oneness of the logos, against logical unity; it means the protest against the autocratic principle of spirit that knows itself to be One and to create unity. But nature, to which spirit as something mythical seeks to return, has little about it that is conciliatory; it is, as Adorno puts it, the 'natural domain of domination' (*Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 81), it is pure domination. Even nature's protest serves the principle of domination. Thus the rule of nature is no more conciliatory than the rule of spirit; it is, on the contrary, the archetype that supplies the model for the rule of spirit. This explains why Adorno's philosophy constantly reiterates his protest against domination as such in endless variations. Only in art do we find something else: successful works of art

come to form a contrast with the world of the nature-dominating *ratio*, in which the aesthetic *ratio* originates, and become a work for themselves. The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. They must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively distinct from the world of domination. Even the immanently polemical attitude of artworks towards the status quo internalizes the principle that underlies the status quo, and that reduces it to the status of what merely exists; aesthetic rationality wants to make good the damage done by nature-dominating rationality. (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 289 [translation slightly modified])

- 14 On this point, see Adorno's essay 'Aspects', in *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 1: 'All appreciations are subject to the judgement passed in Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on those who are above something only because they are not in it. Appreciations fail from the start to capture the seriousness and cogency of Hegel's philosophy by practicing on him what he called, with appropriate disdain, a philosophy of perspectives [*Standpunktphilosophie*].' The concept 'Standpunktphilosophie' [standpoint philosophy, or 'philosophy of perspectives', as translated here] has not been identified in Hegel himself.
- 15 The reference is to a standard German history of philosophy, Friedrich Ueberweg's *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, whose first volume appeared in 1862 and which was revised and published by Max Heinze for its 5th to 9th editions (1876–1906). Helmut Holzhey has been responsible for a 'completely revised edition' which appeared first in 1993.

## 16 Adorno has the following passage in mind:

Further, the living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself. This Substance is, as Subject, pure, *simple negativity*, and is for this very reason, the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis [the immediate simplicity]. Only this *self-restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such – is the True. (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 10)

## Lecture 2

- 1 I.e. to the objection raised at the end of the previous lecture to the effect that the term ‘negative dialectics’ is a tautology.
- 2 It has not been possible to identify this reference.
- 3 An allusion to the much quoted verse by Erich Kästner, ‘Herr Kästner, where’s the positive side?’ See also p. 17 and note 10 below.
- 4 Hegel’s notorious sentence from the *Philosophy of Right*, see p. 14 and Note 14 below.
- 5 On the institutions as a critique of absolute subjectivity, see also Adorno’s essay ‘Aspects’, in *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 45f.
- 6 See *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. Herman Nohl, Tübingen, 1907.
- 7 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie in Beziehung auf Reinhold’s Beyträge zur leichteren Übersicht des Zustands der Philosophie zu Anfang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Jena, 1801, now in Hegel, vol. 2, *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807*, pp. 9ff. [See *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf, Albany, 1977, pp. 79ff.]
- 8 A term Adorno borrowed from Durkheim’s sociology, where it defines a specific class of ‘sociological facts’. These ‘consist in the specific modes of acting, thinking and feeling that stand outside individuals and are furnished with coercive power by virtue of which they can impose themselves upon them’ (Emile Durkheim, *Die Regeln der soziologischen Methode/Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, ed. René König, Neuwied, 1961, p. 107). In his introduction to ‘Emile Durkheim: Soziologie und Philosophie’, Adorno defines *contrainte sociale* as follows:

In his eyes the social fact par excellence is the *contrainte sociale*, an overwhelming social coercion drained of subjective empathy of whatever kind. This coercion does not enter subjective consciousness and no subject can easily identify with it. It is aided in this respect by the ostensible irreducibility of what is specifically social. This irreducibility assists in making it appear as something that exists in itself, in other words, in enabling it to become absolutely independent not only of the knowing subject but of all individuals integrated into the collective. (GS, vol. 8, p. 250)

- 9 Adorno is referring here to his first meeting with Lukács in Vienna in June 1925, which he described to Siegfried Kracauer. See *Ontologie und Dialektik*, NaS IV, vol. 7, p. 383f., note 194.
- 10 This is the title of a poem in Kästner's volume *Ein Mann gibt Auskunft* (*Gesammelte Schriften für Erwachsene*, vol. 1, Munich and Zurich, 1969, p. 218): 'Again and again you send me letters / in which you write, heavily underlined: / "Herr Kästner, where's the positive side?" / Yes, indeed, the devil knows where it is.' See note 3 above. See also Adorno's late essay 'Critique':

Essentially German, although once again not so completely as one who has not had the opportunity to observe similar phenomena in other countries might easily suppose, is an anti-critical schema from philosophy – precisely the philosophy that besmirched the *raisonneur* – that has sunk into blather: the appeal to the positive. One continually finds the word criticism, if it is tolerated at all, accompanied by the word *constructive*. The insinuation is that the only person who can practice criticism is one who can propose something better than what is being criticized; Lessing derided this two hundred years ago in aesthetics. By making the positive a precondition for it, criticism is tamed from the very beginning and robbed of its vehemence. In Gottfried Keller there is a passage where he calls the demand for something edifying a 'gingerbread word'. ('Critique', in *Critical Models*, p. 287 [translation slightly adapted])

- 11 According to Adorno, the 'identification with the aggressor' that Anna Freud describes so persuasively (Anna Freud, *Das Ich und die Abwehrmechanismen*, London, 1946, p. 125ff.) is a 'special case' of a 'mechanism of repression and regression' (GS, vol. 8, p. 76). He frequently makes reference to it in connection with a theory of contemporary society (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 119, 168 and 251).
- 12 In *The Jargon of Authenticity*, which has the subtitle 'A contribution to the German Ideology', Adorno names names: 'All experts in the jargon, from Jaspers on down, unite in praise of positivity. Only the careful Heidegger avoids a too open-hearted affirmation for its own sake, and pays his dues indirectly, through the assiduous sincerity of his tone. But Jaspers writes unashamedly: "A man can live truthfully in the world only if he lives from something positive which in every case he possesses only through commitment"' (*The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 17 [translation modified; the subtitle referred to above has been omitted from the English translation]).
- 13 For example in *Ecce Homo*:

I was the first to see the real antithesis – the *degenerated* instinct which turns against life with subterranean vengefulness (Christianity, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in a certain sense already the philosophy of Plato, the whole of idealism as typical forms) and a formula of *supreme affirmation* born out of fullness, of superfluity, an affirmation without reservation even of suffering, even of guilt, even of all that is strange and questionable in existence. . . . This ultimate, joyfullest, boundlessly exuberant Yes to life is not only the highest insight, it is also the *profoundest*, the insight most strictly confirmed and maintained by truth and knowledge. Nothing that

is can be subtracted, nothing is dispensable – the sides of existence rejected by Christians and other nihilists are even of endlessly higher rank in the order of rank of values than that which the *décadence* instinct may approve of and *call good*. To grasp this requires *courage* and, as a condition of this, a superfluity of *strength*: for precisely as far as courage *may* dare to go forward, precisely by this measure of strength does one approach truth. Recognition, affirmation of reality is for the strong man as great a necessity as for the weak man, under the inspiration of weakness, cowardice and *flight* in the face of reality – the “ideal” . . . (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 2004, p. 50)

- 14 G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 20.
- 15 We should recall here the lectures on ‘Hegel and his Age’ of Rudolf Haym (*Hegel und seine Zeit*, Berlin, 1857), in which Hegel’s assertion about ‘the rationality of the actual’ was condemned as ‘the classical expression of the spirit of restoration, the absolute formula of political conservatism, quietism and optimism’ (*ibid.*, p. 365). For his part, Adorno always defended Hegel against simplifications of this sort, for example, in ‘Aspects’:

The most questionable, and therefore the also the best known of Hegel’s teachings, that what is real is rational, was not merely apologetic. Rather, in Hegel reason finds itself in a constellation with freedom. Freedom and reason are nonsense without one another. The real can be considered rational only insofar as the idea of freedom, that is, human beings’ genuine self-determination, shines through it. Anyone who tries to conjure away this legacy of the Enlightenment in Hegel and campaign for the idea that his *Logic* has nothing to do with a rational ordering of the world falsifies him. (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 44)

- 16 Adorno is referring here to perhaps his best-known statement, admittedly his most misunderstood one as well. ‘Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today’ (‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, in *Prisms*, p. 34). For an interpretation of what Adorno meant by this dictum, see Rolf Tiedemann, ‘Not the First Philosophy, but a Last One’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Can one live after Auschwitz?*, Stanford, CA, 2003, p. xv f.
- 17 Hegel did refer to the Socratic method of discussion in the Platonic dialogues as ‘negative dialectics’ (cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. II, in *Werke*, vol. 19, p. 69). However, the concept as we now have it was coined in essence by Adorno and was used first in the book to which he gave that title and which appeared in 1966. ‘Critical Theory’, on the other hand, had been used since Max Horkheimer’s essay ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’ to describe the thinking of the circle around the Institute for Social Research, where for political reasons (according to Gershom Scholem) it functioned as a euphemism for Marxism. According to Adorno, ‘Horkheimer’s phrase “critical theory” seeks not to make materialism acceptable, but to use

it to make men theoretically conscious of what it is that distinguishes materialism from amateurish explications of the world, as much as from the “traditional theory” of science. A dialectical theory is bound – like Marx’s, largely – to be immanent even if in the end it negates the whole sphere it moves in’ (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 197).

- 18 See V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy* (1909). See also Horkheimer’s essay ‘Über Lenins “Materialismus und Empiriokritizismus”’, which admittedly judges Lenin’s chief work of philosophy very differently from Adorno (in Max Horkheimer, *GS*, vol.11, *Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, p. 171ff.).
- 19 This central idea of Adorno’s philosophy is one he had already recorded in one of his notebooks in May 1965:

By virtue of its mode of operation all philosophy has a prejudice in favour of idealism. For it must operate with concepts and is unable to stick contents, non-concepts into its texts (the principle of collage in art may perhaps be the unconscious protest against this very fact; the same may be said of Thomas Mann’s collage technique). However, this ensures that a priority is given to concepts as the materials of philosophy. Matter itself is of course an abstraction. But philosophy is able to become cognizant of and to name this necessarily postulated  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$  [untruth]; and when it goes on thinking from that point it is further able if not to eliminate it, at least to restructure it so that all its statements are immersed in the consciousness of that untruth. It is precisely this that constitutes the idea of a negative dialectics. (*GS*, vol. 6, p. 531)

Even though Adorno’s intention of expanding this idea and incorporating it in the introduction to *Negative Dialectics* remained unfulfilled, similar observations are to be found in *Aesthetic Theory*; see, for example, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 258f.

- 20 A note at the end of the draft on which this is based advises us: ‘From here on loud noise and the voice fades away, almost nothing can be understood; about 10–12 lines are missed out.’

### Lecture 3

- 1 This continues the numbering begun in the Notes to Lecture 2.
- 2 The first insertion in the following lecture. See p. 33.
- 3 On the title of the lecture series, see p. 211 above.
- 4 Adorno made numerous notes for his planned study of reified consciousness, but was unable to carry it out.
- 5 In the winter semester 1965/6, Adorno held his senior sociology seminar on the topic of ‘The Concept of Society’; see Lecture 1, n. 12 above. However, his ‘introduction’ does not seem to be identical with the text entitled ‘Society’ that he presented there (see *GS*, vol. 8, p. 9ff.).
- 6 The MS added here: ‘and of what Herr Schelsky, quoting Malinowski, referred to yesterday as . . .’ Since it has not been possible to discover what Schelsky’s Malinowski quotation was, this clause has been omitted.

- 7 'This concern with aim or results, with differentiating and passing judgement on various thinkers is therefore an easier task than it might seem. For instead of getting involved in the real issue, this kind of activity is always away beyond it; instead of tarrying with it, and losing itself in it, this kind of knowing is forever grasping at something new; it remains essentially preoccupied with itself instead of being preoccupied with the real issue and surrendering to it' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 3).
- 8 This reads 'philology' in the typescript (Vo 10837).
- 9 Of the many passages where this is done, we may refer to the following passage from §15 of the *Encyclopaedia* of 1830:

Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle complete in itself, but the philosophical idea is within it in a particular determination or element. The individual circle, because it is a totality in itself, breaks through the boundary of its element and establishes a further sphere; the totality presents itself therefore as a circle of circles, each of which is a necessary moment, so that the system of the elements peculiar to it constitutes the entire idea, which manifests itself in each individual one. (Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 8, Frankfurt am Main, 2003, p. 60)

- 10 The source of this reference has not been found. Henri Poincaré (1854–1912) was a leading mathematician in his day, as well as a physicist and philosopher. He was the author of such popular works as *La Science et l'hypothèse* (1902) and *Science et méthode* (1908).
- 11 In his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno uses this expression for what we might call Kant's critique of Hegel *avant la lettre*:

So we may say that what Kant has been doing is a formal analysis, but he has also realized that if all knowledge were nothing but form, and if all knowledge were totally submerged in the subject – then it would be nothing but a gigantic tautology. For in that event the knowing subject would really know nothing but itself, and this act of merely knowing itself would be nothing more than a regression to the identical mythological thinking that Kant, as a champion of the Enlightenment, had striven to overcome. (*Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 67)

- 12 For example, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 'But while enlightenment is right in opposing any hypostatization of utopia and in dispassionately denouncing power as division, the split between subject and object, which it will not allow to be bridged, becomes the index of the untruth both of itself and of truth' (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 31). Or in the Hegel study 'Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel': 'Language, which is not an index of truth is nevertheless an index of falsehood' (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 105).
- 13 'As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and the false' (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Proposition 43, scholium, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, Harmondsworth, 1994, p. 58).
- 14 See T. W. Adorno, 'Anmerkungen zum philosophischen Denken', *Neue Deutsche Hefte* 12 (1965), no. 107, p. 5ff. Now in *GS*, vol. 10.2,



- p. 599ff. [See ‘Notes on Philosophical Thinking’, *Critical Models*, p. 127ff.].
- 15 Arnold Schoenberg wrote his *Three Satires*, Opus 28, in 1925, when he ‘was very much angered by the attacks of some of my younger contemporaries . . . , and I wanted to give them a warning that it is not a good idea to attack me.’ In the preface to the *Satires*, he writes: ‘In the first place, I wanted to hit all those who seek their personal salvation along a middle way. For the middle way is the only one that does not lead to Rome. But it is used by those who nibble at dissonances – they want to count as modern, then – but are too cautious to draw the correct conclusions’ (Willi Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, trans. Leo Black, London, 1971, p. 153).
  - 16 Hegel, *Logic*, p. 76ff.
  - 17 See the authoritative formulation of this idea in *Negative Dialectics*: ‘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’ (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 19).
  - 18 ‘I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity’ (*Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 1990, p. 35).
  - 19 See, e.g.:

Cannot breadth of vision and impartiality be combined with a will to a system? In other words, must a system always be so closed that no place remains for what is new? There is no reason to prevent philosophy from proceeding systematically as long as it aspires to what might be called an *open* system. But what does that mean? Is a complex of thought supposed to be systematic and open at the same time? That would be contradictory. However, that is not what is meant. The openness refers simply to the need to do justice to the inconclusive nature of the historical life of culture, and the actual system can be based on factors that transcend all history without therefore coming into conflict with it. (Heinrich Rickert, ‘Vom System der Werte’, *Logos* 4 [1913], p. 297)

- 20 See Walter Benjamin, ‘Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie’, in *Zeugnisse: Theodor W. Adorno zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Max Horkheimer, Frankfurt am Main, 1963, p. 33ff. See also Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, p. 100ff.

#### Lecture 4

- 1 This refers to the question raised at the end of the Notes to Lecture 3: ‘Is there . . . a dialectics without system?’ See p. 23 above.
- 2 From this point on, Adorno based his lecture on the Introduction to *Negative Dialectics*, whose first version he had probably dictated in October 1965. At all events, between 26 October and 13 November he

corrected in his own hand the typed version of what he had dictated. On 22 November, Adorno's secretary started to type up this second version. The typescript of the first version with Adorno's written corrections (Theodor W. Adorno Archive Vo 13394–13436) contains forty pages, that of the second version, the so-called First Intermediate Version (Vo 13352–13393), contains one page more. Adorno's Notes up to 10 February 1966 are based on pages 1 to 28 of the typescript of the first version; from then on he followed the text of the *First Intermediate Version*. Even though the differences between the two versions are minor – both contain the identical text of the second version, while the first version can only be identified from looking at the typed portion of the manually corrected typescript Vo 13394ff. – we have included in the Appendix the page numbers of both sources, using round brackets for the first version and square brackets for the later one.

- 3 'Une barque sur l'océan', a piano piece by Ravel, in fact the third of the *Miroirs* of 1905; there is also an orchestral version. Adorno's extraordinary sensitivity registered the 'anxiety . . . stated literally in the title of one of Ravel's tradition-bound piano works, *Une barque sur l'océan*' (*Philosophy of New Music*, p. 82).
- 4 'Cottage' seems to be a later insertion. The following sentence, 'To be revised . . .', seems to link up with 'Feuerbach theses' or, alternatively, 'Philosophy appeared obsolete'. For the meaning of 'cottage', see p. 42.
- 5 In the introduction to *Against Epistemology*, the concept of system plays something more than a peripheral role. See, e.g., pp. 3f., 10, 26, 28f. passim. Alongside the relevant passages from the introduction to *Negative Dialectics* running parallel to this text (see *Negative Dialectics*, p. 22f.), the reader may also wish to consult Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie: Zur Einleitung*, ed. Rudolf zur Lippe, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p. 263ff.
- 6 Adorno's most extensive comment on Talcott Parsons is probably to be found in his preface to Joachim E. Bergmann's dissertation (*GS*, vol. 20.2, p. 668ff.); but also in the *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 6 passim, as well as in note 18 on p. 185, together with the further references there to other passages in Adorno's writings.
- 7 Adorno may have a passage from the *Encyclopaedia* in mind:

We moderns, too, by our whole upbringing, have been initiated into ideas which it is extremely difficult to overstep, on account of their far-reaching significance. But the ancient philosophers were in a different position. They were men who lived wholly in the perceptions of the senses, and who, after their rejection of mythology and its fancies, presupposed nothing but the heavens above and the earth around. In these material, non-metaphysical surroundings thought is free and enjoys its own privacy, cleared of everything material, and thoroughly at home. This feeling that we are all on our own is characteristic of free thought – of that voyage into the open, where nothing is below us or above us, and we stand in solitude with ourselves alone. (*The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford, 1892, vol. 1, *The Logic*, p. 66)

- However, he may be thinking more of Hamlet's words that 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (Hamlet, Act I, scene v, ll. 166f.).
- 8 See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Fritz Medicus, Darmstadt, 1962, vol. 3, p. 1ff., especially pp. 18 and 61ff. The English reader can find the first introduction, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs, in Rüdiger Bubner, *German Idealist Philosophy*, Harmondsworth, 1997, p. 80ff. Trans.] In the summer semester of 1966 Adorno held a senior philosophy seminar together with Max Horkheimer on Fichte's introductions to the *Science of Knowledge* 'to our own great profit, and hopefully also with some profit to the students' (letter of 17 September 1956 to Dieter Henrich).
  - 9 The regression of phenomenology to the 'fundamental position of transcendental subjectivity or the εἶδος ego' was analysed by Adorno at the start of the final chapter of *Against Epistemology*; see p. 190ff.
  - 10 Karl Heinz Haag (born in 1924) had originally studied at the St George's Jesuit School and had been awarded his PhD by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1951 for his dissertation on Hegel. In 1956 he had obtained the second doctorate at Frankfurt University; he taught there as professor of philosophy until 1972, when he resigned, disgusted by the state of affairs in the university. Since that time he has devoted himself to his own private research in philosophy. Haag's most important publications are: *Kritik der neueren Ontologie*, Stuttgart 1960; *Philosophischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Hegelschen Dialektik mit Beispielen aus der Wissenschaft der Logik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967; 'Zur Dialektik von Glauben und Wissen', in *Philosophie als Beziehungswissenschaft: Festschrift für Julius Schaaf*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, p. VI/3ff.; and *Der Fortschritt in der Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1983.
  - 11 He writes similarly in *Negative Dialectics*: 'The motivations and results of Heidegger's thought movements can be construed even where they are not uttered; there is hardly a sentence of his without its positional value in the functional context of the whole. In that sense he is a successor to the deductive systems' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 97).
  - 12 See p. 32 above and note.
  - 13 Adorno uses the metaphor of 'putting one's cards on the table' in the Preface to *Negative Dialectics*, p. xix, to point to its function within his oeuvre as a whole.
  - 14 'To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy, for *what is* is reason. As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a *child of his time*; thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time' (Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 21).
  - 15 See Adorno, 'The Logic of the Social Sciences', in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (with others), pp. 105–22.

- 16 See Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*, New York, 1909, p. 23f.:

By primary groups I mean those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual. The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying that it is a 'we'; it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which 'we' is the natural expression. One lives in the feeling of the whole and finds the chief aims of his will in that feeling. . . . The most important spheres of this intimate association and cooperation – though by no means the only ones – are the family, the play-group of children, and the neighbourhood or community group of elders. These are practically universal, belonging to all times and all stages of development; and are accordingly a chief basis of what is universal in human nature and human ideals.

- 17 See *The Jargon of Authenticity*, pp. 40 and 43.
- 18 A reference to Hans Erich Bollnow's *Die neue Geborgenheit* [The New Shelteredness], Stuttgart, 1956. See also *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 7f. and passim.
- 19 See Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, London, 1976, p. 5.
- 20 This central insight was one Marx had formulated as early as his doctoral dissertation, where he has this to say about the philosophical system: 'Inspired by the urge to realize itself, it enters into tension against the other. The inner self-contentment and completeness has been broken. What was inner light has become consuming flame turning outwards. The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly, that its realization is also its loss, that what it struggles against on the outside is its own inner deficiency' (Marx, *Doctoral Dissertation*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 85). In the Introduction to his 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' of 1844, Marx relates this idea concretely to the historical context: 'In Germany no kind of bondage can be broken without breaking every kind of bondage. The thorough Germany cannot make a revolution without making a thoroughgoing revolution. The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of the human being. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality' (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 187).
- 21 'The Actuality of Philosophy' was the title of the inaugural lecture, which Adorno gave in Frankfurt University in 1931. See *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor, p. 23ff.

## Lecture 5

- 1 The date at the beginning of the Notes for Lecture 5 refers to the day they were written down, the date at the end indicates when Adorno broke off writing. Since in this case the two dates are identical, this means that the Notes were written down on the morning of the day that Adorno delivered the lecture in the afternoon.
- 2 ‘Why Still Philosophy’, in *Interventions*; see *Critical Models*, p. 5ff.
- 3 A term of Benjamin’s adopted by Adorno. This expression has been taken from one of the notes in *The Arcades Project*: ‘Nevertheless, truth is not – as Marxism would have it – a merely contingent function of knowing, but is bound to a nucleus of time lying hidden within the knower and the known alike’ (*The Arcades Project*, p. 463).
- 4 That is to say, the emphatically understood ‘moment’ is the freezing of time or history. For Kierkegaard the moment is ‘the category of transition (μεταβολή)’; see *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson, Princeton, NJ, 1980, p. 83. In the final analysis, it is the moment of transition between time and eternity, finitude and infinity. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, he writes: ‘The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time’ (*ibid.*, p. 89). Paul Tillich wrote of *χαρμός*, the right, favourable moment of a ‘new fulfilled time’, in which ‘the struggle between the divine and the demonic may be decided for a moment in favour of the divine, although there is no guarantee that things must turn out in that way’ (Paul Tillich, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Renate Albrecht, *Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände*, vol. 4: *Die Antworten der Religion auf Fragen der Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1975, p. 131).
- 5 See also in the debates with the student protest movement in 1969: ‘The pseudo-revolutionary posture is complementary to that military-technical impossibility of spontaneous revolution that Jürgen Kempfski identified years ago’ (‘Marginalia to Theory and Praxis’, *Critical Models*, p. 269). It has not been possible to identify Kempfski’s essay in *Merkur*. It was perhaps a vague recollection of Jürgen Kempfski, ‘Das kommunistische Palimpsest’, in *Merkur* 7, 1948, no. 1, p. 53ff.
- 6 Together with and following the Erfurt Programme of 1891, the view that socialism had no need of a revolution and that it could be brought about through reforms, by parliamentary methods, began to gain ground in the workers’ movement. By 1910 reformist theory and politics had gained the upper hand in German social democracy; its chief representative was Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932). On reformism and revision, see Predrag Vranicki, *Geschichte des Marxismus*, trans. Stanislava Rummel and Vjeskoslava Wiedmann, Frankfurt am Main, 1972, vol. 1, p. 277ff. Adorno’s view of reformism, unimpressed by its changing function historically, remained unaltered; in 1942, in his ‘Reflections on Class Theory’, he adopted the rejectionist view of Marxist

orthodoxy: ‘Only the revisionists entered into the discussion of the class question, and they did so only in order to cloak the initial stages of their betrayal with the denial of class war, their statistical appreciation of the middle strata, and their praise of a generalized progress’ (‘Reflections on Class Theory’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, p. 100). As late as 1969, in the ‘Marginalia to Theory and Practice’, his view remains consistently radical, although at the same time critical of the pseudo-activists among the student rebels: ‘Whoever does not make the transition to irrational and brutal violence sees himself forced into the vicinity of the reformism that for its part shares the guilt for perpetuating the deplorable totality. But no shortcut helps, and what does help is deeply obscured. Dialectic is perverted into sophistry as soon as it focuses pragmatically on the next step, beyond which the knowledge of the totality has long since moved’ (‘Marginalia to Theory and Praxis’, *Critical Models*, p. 268).

- 7 Adorno’s concern with a dialectical anthropology can be seen not least in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, particularly in the ‘Notes and Sketches’ (see *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. xix and 173ff. See also Adorno’s *Notizen zur neuen Anthropologie* in vol. 8 of the *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*).
- 8 The famous passage on this idea is to be found in volume 3 of *Capital*:

The realm of freedom only begins, in fact, where that labour which is determined by need and external purposes ceases; it is therefore, by its very nature, outside the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature in order to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce his life, so also must civilized man, and he must do it in all forms of society and under any possible mode of production. With his development the realm of natural necessity expands, because his wants increase; but at the same time the forces of production, by which these wants are satisfied, also increase. Freedom in this field cannot consist of anything else but the fact that socialized mankind, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power, and accomplish their task with the least expenditure of energy and under such conditions as are proper and worthy for human beings. Nevertheless, this always remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that other development of human potentiality for its own sake, the true realm of freedom, which however can only flourish upon that realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its fundamental prerequisite. (*Capital*, vol. 3, p. 873f.)

- 9 With his discussion of theory and practice in his lectures during 1965/6, Adorno anticipated the problems that would subsequently lead to serious conflicts between the teacher and his students in connection with the students’ movement of 1968. On this point, see the documentation ‘Kritik der Pseudo-Aktivität: Adornos Verhältnis zur Studentenbewegung im Spiegel seiner Korrespondenz’, in *Frankfurter Adorno-Blätter*

- 6, Munich, 2000, p. 42ff. Adorno's theory of the relation between theory and practice was given its final formulation in an essay of early 1969, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis', *Critical Models*, p. 259ff.
- 10 In his lectures on metaphysics of 1965, Adorno defines Aristotle's ethics as 'giving preference to the so-called dianoetic virtues – the virtues residing in pure contemplation and self-reflection without regard to action – over all other virtues. Thinking, unlike praxis, is sufficient unto itself' (*Metaphysics*, p. 92).
- 11 The stenographer had misheard the name as Franz Tempert, when presumably Franz Pfemfert was intended. Even so, it has not been possible to discover such a statement in Franz Pfemfert's writings. Pfemfert (1879–1954) was the editor of the expressionist magazine *Die Aktion* and a friend of Leon Trotsky.
- 12 See also p. 21 above.
- 13 Adorno is alluding here, as he frequently does, to passages in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See, for example, 'What, therefore, is important in the *study of Science*, is that one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of the Notion' (p. 35). And 'True thoughts and scientific insight are only to be won through the labour of the Notion' (p. 43).
- 14 See the beginning of *The German Ideology*:

Since, according to their [i.e. the Young Hegelians'] fantasy, the relations of men, all their doings, their fetters and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret the existing world in a different way, i.e. to recognize it by means of a different interpretation. The Young-Hegelian ideologists, in spite of their allegedly 'world-shattering' phrases, are the staunchest conservatives. (*The German Ideology*, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 30)

- 15 See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, preface to Alfred Schmidt, *Der Begriff der Natur in der Lehre von Marx*, Frankfurt am Main, 1962, p. 8: 'Marx spoke contemptuously about scholars who sell their knowledge cheaply for the sake of some practical thema probandum, for the sake of some effect or other: he called them scoundrels.' The passage in Marx has been neither quoted nor documented. Nor has it been possible to identify it.
- 16 Karl Korsch (1889–1961) was a politician, lawyer and philosopher; he also worked with Horkheimer on the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. For a time Horkheimer even seems to have thought of collaborating with Korsch on dialectics (see Korsch's letters in Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18). His criticism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has not survived; it probably took the form of statements in the course of conversation.
- 17 Adorno is thinking here inter alia, if not indeed mainly, of Helms's study of Stirner; see Hans G. Helms, *Die Ideologie der anonymen*

*Gesellschaft: Max Stirners 'Einzigiger' und der Fortschritt des demokratischen Selbstbewußtseins vom Vormärz bis zur Bundesrepublik*, Cologne, 1966. A study of Left Hegelianism that retains its value is Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green, London, 1965, p. 65ff. That aside, the accusation of a regression to Left Hegelianism is the charge most commonly levelled at Adorno and Critical Theory as a whole – primarily by neo-Marxist critics, but not by them alone. Adorno himself never quite endorsed unreservedly. Marx's remorseless demolition of the historical Left Hegelians in *The German Ideology*. He might have said of himself, as he said of Kierkegaard, that 'he did not take a dim view of the Left Hegelians' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 129). Whereas Marx, 'preserving the heritage of classical German philosophy', argued 'against Feuerbach and the Left Hegelians' (GS, vol. 8, p. 231), Adorno discovered Left Hegelian motifs in the depths of Hegel's own arguments, thus conferring legitimacy on Left Hegelianism:

If, as in Hegel, in the totality everything ultimately collapses into the subject as absolute spirit, idealism thereby cancels itself out, because no difference remains through which the subject would be identified as something distinct, as subject. Once the object has become subject in the absolute, the object is no longer inferior vis-à-vis the subject. At its extreme, identity becomes the agent of the non-identical. While the limits that prevented this step from being taken explicitly were firmly established in Hegel's philosophy, the step nevertheless remains crucial for the content of his philosophy. Left-Hegelianism was not a development in intellectual history that went beyond Hegel and distorted him through misunderstanding; true to the dialectic, it was a piece of the self-reflection that his philosophy had to deny itself in order to remain philosophy. (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 68f.)

The immanent philosophical salvaging of Left Hegelianism was matched by one wrested from a historical development which had long since made every idea of the 'realization' of philosophy seem futile, and with it all hope of anything like revolutionary practice. It was in this spirit that Adorno explained his position in the discussion that followed the papers given by Karl Popper and himself on the logic of the social sciences at the internal conference of the German Sociological Association in 1961:

Societal reality has changed in a manner such that one is forced back almost inevitably to the standpoint of Left Hegelianism, so scornfully criticized by Marx and Engels, and this simply because, in the first place, the theory developed by Marx and Engels has itself, in the meantime, taken on a completely dogmatic form. Secondly, because in this dogmatized and fossilized form of the theory, the notion of the transformation of the world has itself become an atrocious ideology which serves to justify the most wretched practice of the oppression of mankind. Thirdly, however – and this is perhaps the most serious – because the notion that through the theory, and through the enunciation of the theory, one can immediately stir people and arouse them to action has become doubly impossible. This results from the



disposition of men who, as is well known, can no longer be aroused by theory in any way, and results from the form of reality which excludes the possibility of such actions which for Marx seemed to be just around the corner. If today one behaved as if one could change the world tomorrow, then one would be a liar. (Quoted by Ralf Dahrendorf in 'Remarks on the Discussion of the Papers by Karl R. Popper and Theodor W. Adorno', in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 128f.)

- 18 A central idea of Adorno's in his later years, one that is to be found repeatedly, particularly at the time of the clashes with the student protest movement. See, e.g., the 'Notes on Philosophical Thinking': 'The act of thinking can no more be reduced to a psychological process than to a timelessly pure, formal logic. Thinking is a mode of comportment, and its relation to the subject matter with which it comports itself is indispensable' (*Critical Models*, p. 130). Or in the 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis': 'Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis; already the ideology of the purity of thinking deceives about this. Thinking has a double character: it is immanently determined and rigorous, and yet an inalienably real mode of behaviour in the midst of reality' (*ibid.*, p. 261).
- 19 Adorno later used the concept of pseudo-activity to criticize the student movement. See 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis', *Critical Models*, p. 269f., and also note 9 above.

## Lecture 6

- 1 See p. 46 and note 18, p. 223, above.
- 2 This refers to Hermann Glockner's Jubiläumsausgabe, vol. 4 (Stuttgart, 1928). See also note 7 below. [See p. 98f. of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.]
- 3 From here on, the figures in parentheses and brackets, together with those in the Notes in the subsequent lectures, refer to the text 'Towards a Theory of Intellectual Experience', printed as an Appendix to these lectures. See also note 2 to Lecture 4 above.
- 4 To this point, at the very least, this should be compared with the Notes employed in Lecture 5.
- 5 In many respects the non-identical is the key or core concept of Adorno's philosophy. The dichotomy of non-identical and identical corresponds more or less to the distinction in traditional terminology between the material and the ideal, between the one and the many: not the universal, but the particular, the 'individuum ineffabile'. Thus far Adorno's thinking follows Husserl's watchword: 'Back to the things themselves', which was supposed to replace being bogged down in the abstract world of concepts that predominated above all in neo-Kantianism. If the concern of *Negative Dialectics* is to provide a post factum 'methodology of the author's material works' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. xix), then the 'Introduction' to that book (and the present course of lectures that accompanied it) has the task of displaying the method with whose assistance Adorno hopes to do justice to the non-identical nature of his materials. In this process, he is able to draw on both Hegel and Kant,

the latter more than the former. The ‘principle of absolute identity’, as defended by Hegelian idealism,

perpetuates non-identity in suppressed and damaged form. A trace of this entered into Hegel’s effort to have non-identity absorbed by the philosophy of identity, indeed to define identity by non-identity. Yet Hegel is distorting the situation by affirming identity, by admitting non-identity as a negative – albeit a necessary one – and by misconceiving the negativity of the universal. He lacks sympathy with the utopian particular that has been buried underneath the universal – with that non-identity which would not come into being until realized reason has left the particular reason of the universal behind. (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 318)

Kant, in contrast, did the non-identical greater justice by keeping it out of the system. In one of his very last writings, the eighth thesis from ‘On Subject and Object’, Adorno undertook an interpretation and critique of Kant in which he focused on the relation of the thing-in-itself and the non-identical. (See *Critical Models*, p. 254f.) The fact that in Kant’s thing-in-itself we see the survival of ‘the memory of the element which balks at consequence logic: the memory of non-identity’ was something we had seen earlier, in *Negative Dialectics* (p. 290f.). In a sense, *Negative Dialectics* is the attempt, one already made in *Against Epistemology*, to enable logic to speak, instead of continuing to translate speech into logic (*Against Epistemology*, p. 40). The concept of ‘concept’, which is what is at issue here, would be ‘fulfilled’ at best through the name, if one were to be had; a name would make it possible to reap the reward that philosophy has vainly sought under the heading of ‘intellectual intuition’: namely, the non-identical determinate thing, the inextinguishable colour of the concrete. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin claimed for philosophy Adam’s action of naming things, ‘the word . . . reclaiming its name-giving rights’ (*Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 37). Adorno did not follow him down this road. Adorno suspected that the non-identical, namely, that which is not identical with the speculative concept, is ‘rather what Kant outlined with the concept of the idea’ (‘On Subject and Object’, *Critical Models*, p. 254). ‘The non-identical’, Jürgen Ritsert states correctly, ‘is no mysterious substance; it is an abbreviation for a plethora of problems with which Adorno’s critical theory engages and in part articulates’ (Jürgen Ritsert, ‘Das Nichtidentische bei Adorno – Substanz- oder Problembegriff?’, *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie* 3, no. 4, 1997, p. 48).

- 6 Not identified as such. Since Adorno elsewhere speaks about ‘the share of living labour from which alone surplus value is supposed to arise’ (‘Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?’, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, p. 115), and since he states in *Minima Moralia* that ‘Marx even begrudged the surplus value that they [animals] contribute as workers’ (*Minima Moralia*, p. 228), he may well have had in mind a passage on the labour process from chapter 5 of *Capital*, vol. 1, in which it is implied that animals do not create surplus value:

We pre-suppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. (*Capital*, vol. 1, p. 178)

- 7 See *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, p. 99.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 98f. Adorno summed up the argument following this quotation from Hegel in a handwritten marginal note in his own copy of the *Logic*: 'Being indeterminate. As indeterminate, determinate, as negation of the determinate. Hence = nothing.'
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 T. W. Adorno, 'Skoteinos', in *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 89ff.
- 11 On this point see also *GS*, vol. 6, p. 531, and *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 258.
- 12 See Lecture 2 in the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*: 'It is true that psychoanalysis cannot boast that it has never concerned itself with trivialities. On the contrary, the material for its observations is usually provided by the inconsiderable events which have been put aside by the other sciences as being too unimportant – the dregs, one might say, of the world of phenomena' (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, Pelican Freud Library, vol. 1, Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 52). This formula was one that Adorno frequently cited. See, e.g., *GS*, vol. 1, pp. 232 and 336; *Minima Moralia*, p. 240; *Negative Dialectics*, p. 170; *GS*, vol. 8, pp. 188 and 552; *Prisms*, pp. 76 and 251; *Mahler*, p. 38; and *Berg*, p. 74.
- 13 Adorno formulated his philosophical programme in similar terms in his inaugural lecture as early as 1931: 'Construction out of small and unintentional elements thus counts among the basic assumptions of philosophical interpretation; the turning to the "refuse of the phenomenal world", which Freud proclaimed, has validity beyond the realm of psychoanalysis, just as the turning of progressive social philosophy to economics has validity not merely due to the empirical superiority of economics, but just as much because of the immanent requirements of philosophical interpretation itself' ('The Actuality of Philosophy', *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor, p. 32f.).
- 14 See Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2: *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik: Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus*, Berne and Munich, 1980. The English-language version was translated by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 1973.
- 15 See p. 70f. above. Adorno's observations on Bergson in *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 8f and 333f., were preceded by a detailed discussion in *Against Epistemology*, pp. 45–7. Light has been shed on Critical Theory's relation to Bergson by the dissertation of a student of Adorno's; see Peter Gorsen, *Zur Phänomenologie des Bewußtseinsstroms: Bergson, Dilthey, Husserl, Simmel und die lebensphilosophischen Antinomien*, Bonn, 1966.

## Lecture 7

- 1 On *reconfiguring the idea of the infinite*, which is explored by Adorno in the following lecture, there are parallels with the ideas of Emmanuel Lévinas, although his thought moves in a very different direction. Lévinas denies ‘that the synthesis of knowledge, the totality of being comprehended by the transcendental I, is the ‘ultimate authority’ that can ‘guarantee the harmony of a world and hence represent *reason* to its very end. Reason to its very end or peace among human beings.’ Instead, Lévinas’s thinking turns to prophetic eschatology: ‘It is a relationship with a *surplus always exterior to the totality*, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as though another concept – the concept of *infinity* – were needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and is as primordial as totality’ (Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, n.d., p. 22f.). If this means translating philosophy back into a theology that Adorno would have eschewed as assiduously as he steered clear of Heidegger-like use of language, the Jewish philosopher of religion and the negative dialectician find common ground in the primacy both assign to morality and a ‘new categorical imperative’. (On Lévinas’s concept of the infinite, see also Lévinas, *Jenseits des Seins oder anders als Sein geschieht*, trans. Thomas Wiemer, 2nd edn, Munich, 1998, pp. 43ff., 209ff., and 316ff. *passim*, as well as *Ethik und Unendliches: Gespräche mit Philippe Nemo*, trans. Dorothea Schmidt, Vienna, 1996.)
- 2 See, e.g., *The Jargon of Authenticity*, pp. 44 and 47.
- 3 On the idea of the concrete, see Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 253 and note 8; see also Adorno’s ‘Afterword to Benjamin’s *Deutsche Menschen*’, in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, p. 330f.
- 4 Wilhelm Traugott Krug (1770–1842), a Kantian, taught in Königsberg [now Kaliningrad] and Leipzig.
- 5 Hegel’s rebuttal can be found in the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, where he remarks that Krug had observed – in connection with Schelling, incidentally

that [Schelling] had promised to deduce the entire system of our ideas; and although he had discovered a passage in [Schelling’s] transcendental idealism in which the meaning of this promise had been explained, he could not refrain from forgetting that the topic under discussion was philosophy. Herr Krug cannot refrain from comprehending the question like the common people and from demanding that every dog and cat, and even Herr Krug’s quill, should be deduced, and since that explanation is not forthcoming, he believes it incumbent upon him to remind his friend of the mountain giving birth and producing only a very, very small mouse; in short, the impression should not have been given that the entire system of ideas could be deduced. (Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 2, p. 194)

In one of the Additions to the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel returns to the question of Krug’s quill. ‘This is what Herr Krug did, in what was at

the same time a quite naïve request, when he set the philosophy of nature the modest task of deducing his quill. If it were possible that the time should come when science should be so advanced and perfected in all the more important matters of heaven and earth, the present and the past, that there should be nothing more important to be explained, then one might have been able to offer him hope with regard to the accomplishment of this undertaking and the proper glorification of his quill' (*Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, vol. 1, p. 304). See also *Negative Dialectics*, p. 39.

- 6 See, for example, Plato's *Sophist*, where the Stranger holds forth to Theaetetus, not so much with a 'pathetic' example of 'greatness' as with a small and unassuming one:

However, we ought always in every instance to come to agreement about the thing itself by argument rather than about the mere name *without* argument. But the tribe which we now intend to search for, the sophist, is not the easiest thing in the world to catch and define, and everyone has agreed long ago that if investigations of great matters are to be properly worked out we ought to practise them on small and easier matters before attacking the very greatest. So now, Theaetetus, this is my advice to ourselves, since we think the family of sophists is troublesome and hard to catch, that we first practise the method of hunting in something easier, unless you perhaps have some simpler way to suggest. *Theaetetus*: I have not. *Stranger*: Then shall we take some lesser thing and try to use it as a pattern for the greater? *Theaetetus*: Yes. (Plato, *The Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, London and New York, 1928, p. 271ff.)

- 7 For Adorno's view of Klages, see *Ontologie und Dialektik*, NaS IV, vol. 7, note 316.
- 8 See Henri Bergson, *Matières et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Paris, 1896; Eng. trans. as *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, New York, 1994.
- 9 See Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, 2 vols, Part I, *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*; now in Husserl, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Elisabeth Ströker, Hamburg, 1992, vol. 3, p. 113ff.
- 10 See *ibid.*, vol. 4: *Elemente einer phänomenologischen Aufklärung der Erkenntnis (Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, Part II).
- 11 See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, The Hague, Boston and London, 1982, Book I, Chapter 1: 'Matter of Fact and Essence', pp. 5–32.
- 12 See Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et la religion*, Paris, 1932; Eng. trans. as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudsley Breerton, with the assistance of W. Horsfall Carter, Notre Dame, IN, 1977 [1935].
- 13 In his 'Short Commentaries on Proust', Adorno writes about the writer's relationship to the philosopher:

In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Henri Bergson, Proust's kinsman in more than spirit, compares the classificatory concepts of causal mechanistic science to ready-made clothing that hangs loosely on the bodies of objects, while the intuitions he extols are as precisely tailored to the matter at hand as the creations of *haute couture*. While Proust was equally capable of expressing a scientific or metaphysical relationship in a simile drawn from the sphere of worldliness, it is also true that he himself followed Bergson's rule, whether he was acquainted with it or not. To be sure, he did not use intuition alone. In his work its powers are counterbalanced by those of French rationality, of a fitting quantity of sophisticated human understanding. It is the tension and conjunction of these two elements that make up the Proustian atmosphere. But Bergson's allergic reaction to ready-made thought, to the pre-given and established cliché, is certainly characteristic of Proust: his sense of tact cannot stomach the things that everyone says; this sensitivity is his organ for untruth and hence for truth. (*Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, p. 175f.)

- 14 See Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik: Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*, Halle, 1929.
- 15 He is referring to Fichte.
- 16 The final proposition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, London, 1974, p. 74. See also *GS*, vol. 8, p. 336f., and *Negative Dialectics*, p. 9: 'Against both [i.e. Husserl and Bergson] we must insist on the goal they pursue in vain; against Wittgenstein, on saying what cannot be said. The simple contradictoriness of this challenge is that of philosophy itself; it qualifies philosophy as dialectics before becoming embroiled in its individual contradictions' [my trans.].
- 17 See the definitive formulation of this idea in *Negative Dialectics*, p. 10: 'The utopia of cognition would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual, without reducing the latter to the former' [translation adjusted].
- 18 Infinitesimal calculus, discovered by Leibniz and, independently, by Newton, comprises differential and integral calculus. It makes use of infinitely small numbers and leads from them to the whole which is seen as their infinite sum. (On the problems of squaring and tangents for which the infinitesimal calculus provided a solution, see, e.g., Reinhard Finster and Gerd van de Heuvel, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2000, p. 108ff.; on the importance of infinitesimal calculus for philosophy, see Kurt Huber, *Leibniz*, Munich, 1951, p. 79ff.) Just as Leibniz himself liked to use mathematical problems to illustrate his metaphysics, Adorno too makes use of the monadology and infinitesimal calculus as analogies. For example, he writes: 'To have all thoughts converge upon the concept of something that would differ from the unspeakable world that is – this is not the same as the infinitesimal principle whereby Leibniz and Kant meant to make the idea of transcendence commensurable with a science whose fallibility, the confusion of control of nature

with being-in-itself, is needed to motivate the correcting experience of convergence' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 403). What was important in Adorno's eyes about Leibniz's infinitesimal calculus can perhaps be best seen in the Epistemo-Critical Prologue of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, where the philosophical idea is defined with the aid of Leibniz's concept of the monad, as is his own method, which to this extent was likewise adopted by Adorno: 'And so the real world could well constitute a task, in the sense that it would be a question of penetrating so deeply into everything real as to reveal thereby an objective interpretation of the world. In the light of such a task of penetration it is not surprising that the philosopher of the *Monadology* was also the founder of infinitesimal calculus' (*ibid.*, p. 48).

- 19 In 'The Essay as Form' Adorno discusses the fourth Cartesian rule, which calls for 'exhaustive enumerations and general surveys' so that one is 'sure of leaving nothing out'. 'The Essay as Form', *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, p. 15.

## Lecture 8

- 1 'A mortal must think mortal and not immortal thoughts.' Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Berlin, 1951, vol. 1, p. 201. Adorno used this sentence as the epigraph to *Against Epistemology*, p. 12. See also p. 80.
- 2 See p. 83 and note 18 below.
- 3 For Adorno's criticism of the term, see above all *Negative Dialectics*, p. 87f. The talk of 'project' or 'projection' [Entwurf] was made fashionable with the advent of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. It was this that Adorno had chiefly in mind, and not Sartre's use of 'projet' and 'choix'.
- 4 See Lecture 7, note 18.
- 5 On the concept of infinity in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see also Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 231, together with notes 10 and 11.
- 6 One of the adages in the collection 'Gott, Gemüt und Welt' (Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Friedmar Apel et al., Ist Division, vol. 2: *Gedichte 1800–1832*, ed. Karl Eibl, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 380).
- 7 See p. 67 above.
- 8 On the 'sociological' derivation of the idealist concept of infinity, see also Adorno's essay 'The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy', in his *Hegel: Three Studies*:

The experience of post-Kantian German idealism reacts against philistine narrowness and contentment with the compartmentalization of life and organized knowledge in accordance with the division of labour. In this regard even seemingly peripheral, practical texts like Fichte's *Deduzierte Plan* and Schelling's *Einleitung ins Akademische Studium* have philosophical import. The watchword 'infinity' which flowed so easily from all their

pens as it had not from Kant's, takes on its specific colouration only in relation to what were for them the privations of the finite, of entrenched self-interest and the dreary specialization of knowledge in which that self-interest was reflected. Since then, talk about wholeness has been divested of its polemical meaning and has become nothing more than anti-intellectualist ideology. In the early idealist period, when bourgeois society had not yet really taken shape as a totality in underdeveloped Germany, the critique of the particular had a different kind of dignity. (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 62)

- 9 See Benjamin's commentary on the letter Kant's brother had written to him:

There is no doubt that it breathes true humanity. But like all perfection, it also says something about the conditions and limits of that to which it gives such consummate expression. Conditions and limits of humanity? Certainly, and it appears that these can be perceived from our vantage point just as clearly as they stand out in their turn, against the conditions of medieval life. . . . Although this interdependence of a bare, narrow existence and true humanity is manifested nowhere more clearly than in Kant . . . this letter from his brother shows how deeply the vital feeling which was raised to awareness in the philosopher's writings was rooted in the people [*Volk*]. In short, whenever there is talk of humanity, we should not forget the narrowness of the middle-class room into which the Enlightenment shone. (Walter Benjamin, 'German Men and Women', *Selected Writings*, vol. 3: 1935–1938, p. 171)

- 10 This allusion has not been identified.

11

We have now not only travelled through the land of pure understanding, and carefully inspected each part of it, but we have also surveyed it, and determined the place for each thing in it. This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A235f./ B294f., p. 338f.)

- 12 See note 1 above.

- 13 See Reinhold Schneider, *Winter in Wien: Aus meinen Notizbüchern 1957/58*, with the funeral oration by Werner Bergengruen, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1958; now in Schneider, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Edwin Maria Landau, vol. 10: *Die Zeit in uns: Zwei autobiographische Werke*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978, p. 178ff.

- 14 The source has not been identified.

- 15 A phrase Adorno was fond of attributing to Hegel, but may have been Adorno's own (see e.g. pp. 165 and 203 above, and also *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 28 and 48, and *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 17 and 275).



- 16 Adorno alludes here to the meaning of the so-called Copernican turn in philosophy. See, e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 238, note 1.
- 17 Adorno had understood Benjamin's philosophy as a preparation for his own 'turn' towards a salvaging of empiricism. He wrote about this as follows:

Paradoxically, Benjamin's speculative method converges with the empirical method. In his preface to his book on German tragic drama, Benjamin undertook a metaphysical rescue of nominalism: he does not draw conclusions from above to below, so to speak, but rather, in an eccentric fashion, 'inductively.' For him philosophical fantasy is the capacity for 'interpolation in the smallest,' and for him one cell of reality contemplated outweighs – this too is his own formulation – the rest of the whole world. The hubris of system is as foreign to Benjamin as resignation within the finite.' ('Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, p. 222f.)

- 18 See *ibid.*, pp. 211ff.
- 19 A concept coined by Adorno in contrast to Leibniz's pre-established harmony.
- 20 The Stoic concept of indifference is ἀδιάφορος, -ον; the Stoic needs only virtue to obtain eudemonia, individual happiness; hence everything that is not virtue is ἀδιάφορον, neither good nor bad, a thing that is morally neither one thing nor the other (a moral *Mittelding* was Kant's word) and, as such, indifferent, of no value or significance. On the transition from the πῶλις to individualism in the 'short but mysterious period between the death of Aristotle and the rise of Stoicism', see Isaiah Berlin: At that time, 'in less than two decades, the dominant schools of Athens ceased to conceive of individuals as intelligible only in the context of social life, ceased to discuss the questions connected with public and political life that had preoccupied the Academy and the Lyceum, as if these questions were no longer central, or even significant, and suddenly spoke of men purely in terms of inner experience and individual salvation, as insulated entities whose virtue consisted in their capacity to insulate themselves still further' ('The Romantic Revolution', in Isaiah Berlin, *The Sense of Reality*, ed. Henry Hardy, New York, 1996, p. 168f.). Given Adorno's sober assessment of reality, he may well have felt the temptation of a Stoic attitude in his philosophy 'in the face of despair', but like Berlin, whom he had known from his time in Oxford and New York, he did not succumb to it. With the courage born of despair, he countered Stoic individualism by defending the need for responsibility for society as a whole:

From the moment in history when the Greek mind placed the concept of the individual at the centre of attention and deemed his happiness to be the greatest good, the individual has gradually lost his relation to those public affairs of whose meaning and purpose the care for the individual forms an indispensable part. In the course of this process, however, it was essentially the individuals of antiquity who set about the task of submitting

to despots and dictators on condition that they were allowed to enjoy a precarious happiness in a secluded corner. This development was not an invention of the Stoics and Epicureans but could already be seen in Aristotle. With a commonsense attitude that sometimes reminds us of the nineteenth century, he opposed the utopia of a totalitarian state espoused by his teacher Plato by championing the actual needs of individuals. But he no longer regarded as the highest ideal the realization of these needs through rational state institutions as Plato had done despite everything. Instead, the highest ideal for him was to retreat into a life of contemplation. This already implies an attitude of resignation towards public life. We see the beginnings of a profound contradiction in the relations of the individual and the state: the fewer restrictions that are imposed on the individual's ability to pursue his own interests, the more he loses sight of the need to shape the organizations of society by which these interests are protected. Through his unshackled liberation, the individual prepares the ground for his own oppression. Such a development does not redound to the benefit of the internal life of the individual, but instead impoverishes and stunts him the more, the more he confines himself to his own interests and those of his nearest and dearest, forgetting the public at large. (GS, vol. 20.1, p. 288f.)

For Adorno's criticism of the Stoic standpoint, see also Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, p. 112f.

21 See *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Supposing . . . that someone goes so far as to regard the emotions of hatred, envy, covetousness, and lust for domination as life-conditioning emotions, as something that must fundamentally and essentially be present in the total economy of life, [and that] consequently must be heightened further if life is to be heightened further – he suffers from such a judgement as from seasickness. And yet even this hypothesis is far from being the strangest and most painful in this tremendous, still almost unexplored realm of dangerous knowledge – and there are in fact a hundred good reasons why everyone should keep away from it who – *can!* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 1973 and 1990, p. 53f.)

22 Even though he did not have much in common with the philosophy of his American hosts, Adorno always spoke of John Dewey with the greatest respect, if not admiration. Dewey, who called his philosophy 'experimentalism' and whom Adorno thought of as having an affinity with the thrust of his own thinking in the direction of openness or unshelteredness, was in his eyes 'a contemporary thinker who for all his positivism is closer to Hegel than their two alleged standpoints are to one another' (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 144). In this sense, Adorno also agreed with Popper: 'Like Dewey more recently and Hegel at an earlier date, he makes an appeal for open, unfixd, unreified thought. An experimental, not to say a playful, element is indispensable in such thought. I would hesitate, however, to equate it simply with the concept of the "experiment" as such and even to adopt the maxim of trial and

error' ('Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften', GS, vol. 8, p. 555). Even in his later *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno notes that, whereas 'empiricism recoils from art – of which in general it has hardly ever taken notice', he makes an exception for 'the unique and truly free John Dewey' (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 335).

### Lecture 9

- 1 The figure 7 refers to the page number of the typescript of the Introduction to *Negative Dialectics* that Adorno corrected by hand (Vo 13401); for the intended insertion, see Appendix, p. 188.
- 2 Elsewhere, Adorno writes, 'In Montaigne . . . the timid freedom of the thinking subject is combined with scepticism about the omnipotence of method, namely science' (*Against Epistemology*, p. 12).
- 3 The source of this statement has not been identified; it was perhaps uttered in conversation in connection with a statement of Arnold Schoenberg's that Adorno reported in 1966 in his lecture on 'Wagner and Bayreuth': 'At the most serious level, there is a priority of reality over art. I found it unforgettable when one of the most passionate and important artists of the age, Arnold Schoenberg, said to me in the first few months of the National Socialist regime in Berlin, when I badgered him with questions about music: there are more important things in the world than art. Since art has no boundaries of its own, since it points beyond itself, it can only do itself justice if it bears this in mind' (GS, vol. 18, p. 211). See also the application of this in *Negative Dialectics*: 'Philosophy is the most serious of all things, but then again it is not all that serious' (*ibid.*, p. 14; and also p. 87 above).
- 4 This has not been identified.
- 5 On the concept of mimesis, which is of central importance for Adorno, see *Ontologie und Dialektik*, NaS, vol. 7, note 53. See also Lecture 18, note 1, below.
- 6 Adorno's view of the relations between philosophy and art remained unchanged at least from the writing of his book on Kierkegaard in 1931: 'All attempts to comprehend the writings of philosophers as poetry have missed their truth content. Philosophical form requires the interpretation of the real as a binding nexus of concepts. Neither the manifestation of the thinker's subjectivity nor the pure coherence of the work determines its character as philosophy. This is, rather, determined in the first place by the degree to which the real has entered into concepts, manifests itself in these concepts, and comprehensively justifies them. The interpretation of philosophy as poetry is opposed to this' (*Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 3).
- 7 When Adorno talks about intuition in philosophy he mainly has Bergson's concept in mind. As early as the first Habilitation dissertation of 1927 he insists, contrary to Bergson, that 'the function of memory is mediating, symbolic; thus never an intuition in Bergson's sense, as a

cognition that gets by without symbols' (GS, vol. 1, p. 9). However, even though he acknowledged Bergson's achievements in recovering for cognition the elements of unregimented experience that had been lost to the science of the nineteenth century, Adorno emphatically criticized his intuitionism:

Bergson shares with bourgeois thought the belief in isolatable and true method. He just assigns to it precisely those attributes which since Descartes have been denied it. He never realized that, whenever a well-defined method has been made independent of its changing objects, then rigidity has already been sanctioned which the magic glance of intuition is supposed to dissolve. Experience in the emphatic sense – the net of ungarbled cognition, such as may serve as a model for philosophy – differs from science not through a higher principle or apparatus, but rather through the use which it makes of its materials, especially the conceptual (which as such match those of science), and through its attitude towards objectivity. What Bergson calls intuition cannot be denied in such experience, but neither can it be hypostasized. The intuitions which intertwine with concepts and ordering forms achieve more legality with the expansion and hardening of socialized existence. But those acts do not constitute an absolute source of knowledge cut off from discursive thought by an ontological abyss. (*Against Epistemology*, p. 45f.)

This should be compared, for example, with Bergson's own essay 'L'intuition philosophique' of 1911 (in Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1970, p. 1345ff.). On the concept of intuition more generally, see Josef König, *Der Begriff der Intuition*, Halle an der Saale, 1926 (on Bergson, see especially p. 213ff.).

- 8 The idea of a convergence of the truth contents of philosophy and art recurs repeatedly in Adorno; see e.g. *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 88, 130 and 341; see also Friedmann Gentz, *Adornos Philosophie in Grundbegriffen: Auflösung einiger Deutungsprobleme*, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p. 107.
- 9 See especially, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', in *Parerga und Paralipomena*:

In the first place, we now find that very few philosophers have ever been professors of philosophy, and even relatively fewer professors of philosophy have been philosophers. Therefore it might be said that, just as idio-electrical bodies are non-conductors of electricity, so philosophers are not professors of philosophy. In fact this appointment, almost more than any other, obstructs the independent thinker. For the philosophical chair is to a certain extent a public confessional, where a man makes his confession of faith *coram populo*. Again, hardly anything is so obstructive to the actual attainment of a thorough or very deep insight and thus of true wisdom, as the constant obligation to appear wise, the showing off of so-called knowledge in the presence of pupils eager to learn and the readiness to answer every conceivable question. Worst of all, however, is that a man in such a position is seized with anxiety when any idea occurs to him, whether such will fit in with the aims and intentions of his superiors. This paralyzes his

thinking to such an extent that such ideas themselves no longer dare occur. The atmosphere of freedom is indispensable to truth. (*Parerga et Paralipomena*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne, Oxford, 1974, p. 150f.)

- 10 Cf. the – admittedly later – *Aesthetic Theory*: ‘What theorists take for a strictly logical contradiction is familiar to artists and unfolds in their work as that control over the mimetic element that summons up, destroys and redeems its spontaneity. Spontaneity amid the involuntary is the vital element of art, and this ability is a dependable criterion of artistic capacity, although it does not gloss over the fatality of this movement’ (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 114).
- 11 Alfred Schmidt (born 1934) was an assistant in the philosophy seminar and as such was assigned initially to Horkheimer and subsequently also to Adorno.
- 12 Seidel (1895–1924) is now almost forgotten. See, however, Siegfried Kracauer’s review of his only book (Alfred Seidel, *Bewußtsein als Verhängnis*, edited from his unpublished papers by Hans Prinzhorn, Bonn, 1927), which appeared after his death in a version shortened by the publisher: Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, ed. Inka Müller-Bach, vol. 5.2: *Aufsätze 1927–1931*, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 11ff. With regard to evidence of the friendship between Seidel and Adorno, the only document that has been found hitherto is a letter from Seidel, written in 1922, two years before he took his own life. This letter reveals that Seidel had discussed the contents of his book with Adorno and that he was on friendly terms with the latter’s schoolboy friends Kracauer and Leo Löwenthal, as well as being a welcome guest in Adorno’s home. Sectarian left-wing groups in the last century took a passing interest in Seidel in the 1970s after they came across his name in connection with Alfred Sohn-Rethel, another early friend (see also Sohn-Rethel, *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit: Zur Theorie der gesellschaftlichen Synthesis*, 2nd edn, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, p. 9).
- 13 By this Adorno understands Kant’s unity of apperception to which everything is ‘affixed’. See Appendix, note 18, below.
- 14 See Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dührings Revolution in Science*:

Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him freedom is the appreciation of necessity. ‘Necessity is *blind only in so far as it is not understood*.’ Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves – two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. (London, 1969, p. 136f. [The quotation by Hegel comes from the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Paragraph 147. Addendum. – Trans.])

## Lecture 10

- 1 See, for example, the encyclopaedia article ‘Society’ of 1965:

The cementing function which ideologies once possessed has been seeping from them, on the one hand, into the overwhelming power of existing circumstances as such and, on the other hand, into the psyche of human beings. If the concept of man, which is what matters, was turned into ideology in return for the fact that people have ceased to be more than the appendages of machines, so it might be said without greatly exaggerating that at present people have literally become ideology in their actual existence, since ideology is preparing to immortalize the false life despite its obvious wrong-headedness. (GS, vol. 8, p. 18)

- 2 What Adorno has in mind here is §1 of the *Foundation of the Entire Science of Knowledge* of 1794: ‘We must *seek out* the absolutely first, absolutely unconditioned principle of all human knowledge. It cannot be *proven* or *determined* if it is to be the absolutely first principle. It must express the *action* that neither does nor can fall under the empirical determinations of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of that consciousness and alone makes it possible. . . . If we are to conceive of the narrative of this action as standing at the pinnacle of a Science of Knowledge, it would have to be expressed more or less as follows: *the self originally postulates its own existence*’ (Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 285 and 292).
- 3 Hegel uses this phrase several times. See, for example, the section on ‘The living work of art’ in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: ‘The nation that approaches its god in the Cult of the religion of art is the ethical nation that knows its state and the sections of the state to be the will and the achievement of its own self. . . . The Cult of the religion of this simple, amorphous essence gives back to its votaries, therefore, in general merely this: that they are the people of their god, who secures for them only their enduring existence and their substance as such; not however their actual self which, on the contrary, is rejected. For they reverence their god as the empty Depth, not as Spirit’ (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 434f.).
- 4 The problem of theodicy, the justification of God in view of the existence of evil and wickedness in His creation as well as suffering among His creatures, although not unknown either to the ancient Greeks or the Bible, is generally held to have been defined by Leibniz in his ‘Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal’ of 1710. Leibniz argues that

there is an infinitude of possible worlds among which God must needs have chosen the best, since he does nothing without acting in accordance with supreme reason. Some adversary not being able to answer this argument will perchance answer the conclusion by a counter-argument, saying that the world could have been without sin and without sufferings; but I deny that then it would have been *better*. . . . Thus if the smallest evil that

comes to pass in the world were missing in it, it would no longer be this world; which, with nothing omitted and all allowance made, was found the best by the Creator who chose it. (G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, trans. E. M. Huggard, Chicago and La Salle, IL, 1998, p. 128f.)

As Fritz Mauthner scornfully observed, Leibniz's optimistic system had dominated discussion for barely fifty years before it was swept away by the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 (cf. also *History and Freedom*, p. 196ff.). Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and Kant's treatise *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee* (1791) set the seal on the end of this phase. And even though Hegel attempted to salvage theodicy by elevating universal history to the rank of the 'true Theodiceæ, the justification of God in History' (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, Amherst, NY, 1991, p. 457), Schopenhauer's gloomy pessimism had all the evidence on its side:

This world is the battle-ground of tormented and agonized beings who continue to exist only by each devouring the other. Therefore, every beast of prey in it is the living grave of thousands of others, and its self-maintenance is a chain of torturing deaths. Then in this world the capacity to feel pain increases with knowledge, and therefore reaches its highest degree in man, a degree that is the higher, the more intelligent the man. To this world the attempt has been made to adapt the system of *optimism*, and to demonstrate to us that it is the best of all possible worlds. The absurdity is glaring. (*The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, New York, 1966, vol. 2, p. 581)

That was the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Adorno wrote, alluding to the Lisbon earthquake: 'The visible disaster of that first nature was insignificant in comparison with the second, social one, which defies human imagination as it distils a real hell from human evil. Our metaphysical faculty is paralyzed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 361f.). Even though theologians, among them men of integrity such as Paul Tillich, continue to pose the question of theodicy (see Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie I/II*, 8th edn, Berlin and New York, 1987, vol. 1, p. 309ff), after Auschwitz it is possible to philosophize only as negative dialectics; Adorno's philosophy might well be described as an anti-theodicy.

- 5 We should no doubt think here of the posture of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a whole, but perhaps also of a passage such as this one from the Supplements to the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation*:

That the professors of philosophy are everywhere engaged at the present time in setting Leibniz on his feet again with his humbug, and, on the other hand, in disparaging and setting aside Kant as much as possible, has its good reason in the *primum vivere*. . . . But *primum vivere, deinde philosophari!* [First live, then philosophize!] Down with Kant, *vivat* our Leibniz! Therefore, to return to Leibniz, I cannot assign to the *Théodicée*, that

methodical and broad development of optimism, in such a capacity, any other merit than that it later gave rise to the immortal *Candide* of the great Voltaire. In this way, of course, Leibniz's oft-repeated and lame excuse for the evil of the world, namely that the bad sometimes produces the good, obtained proof that for him was unexpected. Even by the name of his hero, Voltaire indicated that it needed only sincerity to recognize the opposite of optimism. Actually optimism cuts so strange a figure on the scene of sin, suffering and death, that we should be forced to regard it as irony if we did not have an adequate explanation of its origin in its secret source (namely hypocritical flattery with an offensive confidence in its success), a source so delightfully disclosed by Hume. (*The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, p.582f.)

- 6 No work with this title has been identified.
- 7 The reference is to Ernst Wiechert (1887–1950), the author of a novel entitled *The Simple Life* which appeared first in 1939. Wiechert, who cannot perhaps be dismissed quite so readily, renounced his earlier nationalist beginnings and turned into one of the most courageous opponents of the Nazis. He almost invited imprisonment in a concentration camp (see *Der Totenwald: Ein Bericht, Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 9, Vienna, 1957). His later writings, above all the two-volume novel *Die Jerominkinder* (1945, 1947, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5), make him one of the few more honourable representatives of an 'inner' emigration. Notwithstanding that, Jean Améry's criticism of Wiechert remains valid. He maintained that 'the yearning for the simple life that he sought to transmit not merely in the novel he published with that title, but in all his other writings, exemplified the classical delight of the summer holiday-maker who fails to recognize the feeble mouthings of an old peasant for what they are – naïve inarticulateness – and imagines that they are priceless wisdom. Wiechert genuinely believes that "the earth heals all wounds"' (Jean Améry, *Bücher aus der Jugend unseres Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart, 1981, p. 45).
- 8 Originally this was the phrase used by the Pietists to describe themselves; see Goethe's *Poetry and Truth*: 'There came into being the Separatists, Pietists, Herrnhuter, those who are "quiet in the land", and whatever else they were known as, all of which epithets merely had the intention of coming closer to God, especially through Christ, than seemed to them to be possible in the forms of public religion' (Goethe, *Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe*, vol. 9, Hamburg, 1952, p. 43).
- 9 In English in the original. [Trans.]
- 10 The reference has not been identified. Cf. Adorno's statement in the printed version of *Negative Dialectics*: 'The aporetical concepts of philosophy are marks of what is unresolved objectively, and not just in thought. To lay contradictions at the door of incorrigible speculative obstinacy would be to shift the blame; a sense of shame bids philosophy not to repress Georg Simmel's insight that its history shows amazingly few indications of the sufferings of humankind' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 153 [translation modified]).



- 11 'But one thing remains / Nature has given us tears / And the cry of pain when a man finally / can no longer bear it – And beyond all that Nature gave me / Song and speech in my pain / To lament the deepest abundance of my need: / And when a man falls silent in his grief, / A god gave me the gift to say how I suffer' (Goethe, *Torquato Tasso*, Act V, ll. 3426ff., *Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe*, vol. 5, Hamburg, 1952, p. 166).
- 12 At this point the taped transcriptions of the lectures come to an end. The following lecture hours are available only in the form of the notes that Adorno wrote down before the classes and from which he spoke. Since these notes for the most part refer to specific pages of the 'Introduction' to *Negative Dialectics* (see Lecture 9, note 1, above), they are printed on the right-hand side of the page and juxtaposed to the related passage from the Introduction on the left-hand side. The Introduction is given *in extenso* in the Appendix of the present volume (see pp. 183, above).

### Lecture 11

- 1 Ulrich Sonnemann (1912–1993), a social scientist and psychoanalyst, had been acquainted with Adorno since 1957; in an autobiographical memoir, he noted: '1966, friendship with Th. W. Adorno'. Adorno gave his view of Sonnemann's chief work, *Negative Anthropologie: Vorstudien zur Sabotage des Schicksals*, in 1969: 'The language of Sonnemann's new book, the culmination of an intensive and self-critical development, is marked by its great density; it is allergic to the banal, to whatever goes with the flow. In his devotion to the cause under discussion he erects barriers to everything that goes by the fashionable name of communication. The power of resistance in his style is as great as in his ideas, each presumably mediating the other. Positivist professionals find such a style too essayistic, journalists will find it too difficult and demanding: a confirmation of its truth' (*GS*, vol. 20.1, p. 263).
- 2 Benjamin's Arcades project was conceived as his magnum opus. Its intention was to provide a prehistory of modernity, to read the recent past as a puzzle picture of the ancient past and to show how the nineteenth century had still failed to free itself from myth. He began work on it in 1927, recording ideas and notes from his reading haphazardly in diary entries under the heading of 'The Paris Arcades'. These notes provided the foundation for the 'Early Drafts' which came into being in the following years. They were as yet unconnected fragments of an essay entitled 'Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland' which he envisaged writing during the initial stage of his study. His work on this was interrupted in autumn 1929, an interruption Benjamin subsequently explained by referring to its 'rhapsodic character', the 'impermissibly "poetic"' form the work had taken. He thought this incompatible with a work designed to have as its subject 'the decisive historical interests of our generation'. These interests, Benjamin was convinced, were the exclusive preserve of historical materialism. Benjamin subsequently

ascribed the end of his 'carefree archaic, nature-bound philosophizing' which had determined the Arcades project in its initial phase to conversations with Horkheimer and Adorno that he himself called historic. Both sides will have insisted that it was not possible to discuss the nineteenth century seriously without a consideration of Marx's analysis of capitalism. In 1934 a different conception of the Arcades project emerged. Its 'new face' was characterized above all by 'the new and radical sociological perspectives' that decisively influenced Benjamin's work from that time on, even though it was destined to remain fragmentary. See also GS, vol. 10.1, p. 247ff.; Rolf Tiedemann, *Mystik und Aufklärung. Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins*, with a preface by Theodor W. Adorno and Six Corollaries, Munich, 2002, p. 220ff.; R. Tiedemann, Christoph Göttsche and Henri Lonitz, *Walter Benjamin 1892–1940: Eine Ausstellung des Theodor W. Adorno Archivs in Verbindung mit dem deutschen Literaturarchiv*, 3rd edn, Marbach am Neckar, 1991, p. 259ff.

- 3 The expression 'restitutio ad (or in) integrum' is nowadays probably current only in medicine, where it refers to complete recovery after an illness. Originally the notion had its origin in Roman legal language and referred to the quashing of a sentence or, in civil law, the terminating of some legal provisions or other. For his part, Adorno uses the term in the theological sense used, e.g., by Benjamin in his 'Theological and Political Fragment', where he says that 'Corresponding to the spiritual *restitutio in integrum* that leads into immortality, there is a secular one that leads into the eternity of destruction' (Walter Benjamin, GS, vol. 2.1, p. 204). According to the theology of Tillich (admittedly one distant, and not only from Adorno), underlying this idea is an antithesis that can be traced back through the history of Christian thought. On the one hand, 'the threat of death which means exclusion from eternal life', on the other hand, 'the certain knowledge of being rooted in eternal life and hence to be part of it'. 'The first view is that of Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and Calvin, the second of Origen, Schleiermacher and Unitarian universalism. The theological concept at issue in this debate is that of the "restitution of all things", Origen's apokatastasis panton. What is meant by this is that all temporal things revert to the eternal realm from which they sprang. In the antithesis between belief in the redemption of individuals and belief in universal redemption we can see the tension between these contradictory ideas and their practical importance' (Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* III, trans. Renate Albrecht and Ingeborg Henel, Berlin and New York, 1987, p. 469). The fact that Adorno speaks of the restitution in connection with 'pieces' into which the object has been 'smashed' may be a reminiscence of Isaac Luria's Kabbala, in particular, the 'Doctrine of so-called Shevirath Ha-Kelim, the "breaking of the vessels", and of the Tikkun, the doctrine of the mending or restitution of the stigma created by the break' (Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem, 1941, p. 261).

## Lecture 12

- 1 See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Der Gang aufs Land*: ‘Come! into the open, friend!’
- 2 See Adorno’s essay on Hölderlin, ‘Parataxis’: ‘To use one of Hölderlin’s favourite terms, the world of genius is “das Offene”, that which is open and as such familiar, that which is no longer dressed and prepared and thereby alienated: “So komm! Dass wir das Offene schauen / Dass ein Eigenes wir suchen, so weit es auch ist” [So come, let us scan the open spaces, / Search for the thing that is ours, however distant it is] (*Brot und Wein*, *Werke* 2, p. 95; Middleton, p. 39). See *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, p. 146. [The quotation from ‘Brot und Wein’ / ‘Bread and Wine’ is taken from Christopher Middleton, *Friedrich Hölderlin, Edward Mörike, Selected Poems*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.]
- 3 It is not clear which insertion is intended here. It cannot be the one numbered 12a (see p. 127 above), since the positioning of that passage is unambiguous. The second version of the Introduction has a marginal note: ‘Probably place the insertion about the concept of the concrete and what it comprises’ (Vo 13406 and Vo 13366), which is then crossed out in the third version. But see also *Negative Dialectics*, p. 74ff.
- 4 However, see Rolf Tiedemann, *Mystik und Aufklärung: Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins*, p. 224f. and note 5.

## Lecture 13

- 1 See Karl Heinz Haag, ‘Das Unwiederholbare’, in *Zeugnisse*, p. 152ff; see also Haag, *Philosophischer Idealismus*, p. 7ff.
- 2 Cf. Adorno’s use of the statement against Hegel in *Minima Moralia*, p. 50, and also in *Beethoven*, note 42, p. 204.
- 3 *Machine infernale* [time bomb, explosive device] was also the title of a play by Jean Cocteau (1934). It is conceivable that Adorno, who had some admiration for Cocteau – before 1933 he expressed the wish to set his monodrama *La Voix humaine* to music – had in mind this modern paraphrase of the Oedipus subject matter in which mythology is treated as a *machine infernale*.

## Lecture 15

- 1 An idea of crucial importance for Adorno’s efforts to decode the nature of capitalist society as these had developed in the last decades of his life. A book he had planned on his theory of contemporary society bore the title *Integration as Disintegration*, and was referred to at other times as *Integration–Disintegration*.

## Lecture 16

- 1 *Minima Moralia*, p. 192.

## Lecture 17

- 1 Like this in *Negative Dialectics*: ‘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’ (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 28). In Hegel himself only the following passage in the *History of Philosophy* has been identified: ‘It seemed plausible that we should begin by investigating the instrument, knowledge. It’s the story of the σκολαστιχός who refused to enter the water until he was able to swim. To study knowing means knowing how to know; but how one might know without knowing is hard to say’ (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 111, *Werke*, vol. 20, p. 430).
- 2 The affinity between Adorno’s philosophy and the monad has its philosophical basis in the collapse of the system and the impossibility of reaching any understanding of the whole or totality by thought alone. The concept of the monad – which Adorno tends to use by way of analogy (see Lecture 7, note 18, above) – commonly refers to the conventional idea of a particular in which the totality is symbolically reflected. However, once this is extended to include mention of the fragmentary, the term takes on a weightier significance, that of the discontinuity of history, a world in which Auschwitz was possible. The concept of the fragment is current mainly in the history of art, and Adorno frequently uses aesthetic fragments or fragmentary works of art as his starting point. It is hardly coincidental that one of the first dissertations to be suggested and then supervised by him after his return from emigration was concerned with the aphorism and the fragment as philosophical forms (see Heinz Krüger, *Über den Aphorismus als philosophische Form: Mit einer Einführung von Theodor W. Adorno*, Munich, 1988 [*Dialektische Studien* I]), and that not long before his death he gave one of his richest and most successful radio talks – an interview with Peter von Haselberg – on the subject of ‘The Fragment as Form and as Chance’ (NDR [North German Radio], programme recorded on 2 February 1967). Soon after the defeat of fascism Adorno published statements that were felt to be crucially important by the young generation of artists at the time: ‘It is in their stance as knowing that artworks become critical and fragmentary. Schoenberg, Picasso, James Joyce and Kafka, as well as Marcel Proust, are in agreement about what in artwork today has any chance of surviving. And this in turn perhaps permits historico-philosophical speculation. The closed artwork is bourgeois, the mechanical artwork belongs to fascism, the fragmentary artwork – in its complete negativity – intends utopia’ (*Philosophy of New Music*, p. 183). In connection with Berg’s *Lulu*, Adorno went on to write: ‘Evidently, in the present situation everything of decisive intellectual importance is condemned to be fragmentary’ (*GS*, vol. 14, p. 260). This statement can be applied without modification to philosophy today. The motif of a blind immersion in the

particular and the nondescript is something Adorno shared with Benjamin and Bloch; he even felt a debt to Husserl's phenomenology in the 'predilection for fragments, which it shares with scholars of the Dilthey and Max Weber sort. It juxtaposes "investigations" and completed analyses without adequately unifying them, indeed without even adjusting for inconsistencies which arise from the individual studies' (*Against Epistemology*, p. 214). It is not implausible that the preference for the fragmentary over everything that has been completed is one of the motifs for which Adorno was indebted to Benjamin: 'His dissertation was devoted to a central theoretical aspect of early German Romanticism, and in one respect he remained indebted to Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis throughout his life – in his conception of the fragment as a philosophical form which, precisely by being fragmented and incomplete, retains something of the force of the universal, a force that evaporates in any comprehensive scheme' ('Introduction to Benjamin's Writings', *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, p. 223). The 'state of utter negativity of utopia', however, the 'damaged life' arising from the catastrophic failure of the Enlightenment, is the substantial meaning registered by the idea of the fragmentary: 'The emptier of meaning existing reality appears today, the greater the pressure or the desire to interpret it and to have done with this meaninglessness. The light that is kindled in the phenomena as they fragment, disintegrate and fly apart is the only source of hope that can set philosophy alight: for philosophy . . . is the Stygian darkness that sets out to unveil meaning' (*History and Freedom*, p. 129).

## Lecture 18

- 1 A reference to 'the ancient principle of homology . . . according to which similarities can only be recognized by similar things, a principle that never entirely disappeared from philosophy once it had been promulgated by Parmenides and Empedocles' (Rolf Tiedemann, *Mystik und Aufklärung: Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins*, p. 160). 'If the eye were not sunny/it could never see the sun' is Goethe's translation in the *Zahme Xenien* of Plotinus' οὐ γὰρ ἂν πάποτε εἶδεν ὀφθαλμὸς ἥλιον ἥλιοεδῆς μὴ γεγεννημὸς (*Enneads* I 6, 9). The extremely important principle of homologous knowledge is the foundation for Adorno's own theory of mimesis, among other things; see, especially, the long footnote in chapter 3 of *Against Epistemology*, p. 143, as well as note 13 in *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 275f. For a recent discussion of the problem of similarities, see Renate Wieland:

The acquisition of knowledge through empathy, active participation, is historically on the retreat. For Goethe Plotinus's theory that only like knows like was still active, and it continues to survive in the subterranean current of mystical traditions. Today, under the hegemony of instrumental

reason such beliefs are found only among children and artists, but even here their residues have become less common and the mimetic impulse is increasingly restricted. In the new interest in emotional intelligence and mysticism, such repressed ideas have come to the fore once more, but remain marginal, merely private and frequently enough, they drift into a murky irrationalism. (Renate Wieland and Jürgen Uhde, *Forschendes Üben: Wege instrumentalen Lernens: Über den Interpretieren und den Körper als Instrument der Musik*, Kassel, 2002, p. 15f.)

## Lecture 19

- 1 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 134: ‘And thus the synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding’ (trans. Guyer and Wood, Cambridge, 1997, p. 247n).
- 2 Adorno used the English phrase.
- 3 Kracauer had been on terms of friendship with Adorno since the latter’s schooldays, although that friendship had many ups and downs. He had died on 26 November 1966, and so did not live to deliver a judgement on *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno is doubtless referring to Kracauer’s objections to his later work as a whole.
- 4 See the poem with this title in Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*, which for Adorno was one of the beacons of modernist aesthetics. For his interpretation, see e.g. *Mahler*, p. 153, and *GS*, vol. 18, p. 222, but above all in *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 22: ‘This is why Baudelaire’s cryptograms of modernity equate the new with the unknown, with the hidden telos, as well as with what is monstrous by virtue of its incommensurability with the ever-same and thus with the *goût du néant*.’
- 5 Adorno liked the idea of the assembling of concepts around the concrete and frequently used it. It refers to Benjamin’s Platonizing preface to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*:

It is absurd to attempt to explain the general as an average. The general is the idea. The empirical, on the other hand, can be all the more profoundly understood the more clearly it is seen as an extreme. The concept has its roots in the extreme. Just as a mother is seen to begin to live in the fullness of her power only when the circle of her children, inspired by the feeling of her proximity, closes around her, so do ideas come to life only when extremes are assembled around them. Ideas – or to use Goethe’s term, ideals – are the Faustian ‘Mothers’. They remain obscure so long as phenomena do not declare their faith to them and gather round them. It is the function of concepts to group phenomena together, and the division which is brought about within them thanks to the distinguishing power of the intellect is all the more significant in that it brings about two things at a single stroke: the salvation of phenomena and the representation of ideas. (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 35)

For Adorno’s idea of a constellation of concepts, see also Rolf Tiedemann, ‘Begriff, Bild, Name: Über Adornos Utopie der Erkenntnis’, *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter* II, Munich, 1993, pp. 92ff., and especially p. 104f.

- 6 Adorno used the English phrase.
- 7 See *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 61.

## Lecture 20

- 1 Luke 11: 23.
- 2 The concept of the 'free-floating' intelligentsia with which Mannheim hoped to replace the Marxist concept of ideology was always combated by Adorno; see, for example, a late essay, 'Opinion. Delusion. Society':

The later sociology of knowledge, particularly that of Pareto and Mannheim, took some pride in its scientifically purified concepts and its enlightened, dogma-free viewpoint, when it replaced the older concept of ideology with one that – not by coincidence – was called 'total ideology' and that fitted in only too well with blind, total domination. The theory holds that any consciousness is conditioned from the beginning by interests, that it is mere opinion. The idea of truth itself is attenuated into a perspective that is a composite of these opinions, vulnerable to the objection that it too is nothing but opinion: that of the free-floating intelligentsia. Such universal expansion empties the critical concept of ideology of its significance. Since in honour of beloved truth, all truths are supposedly mere opinions, the idea of truth gives way to opinion. Society is no longer critically analyzed by theory, rather it is confirmed as that which it in fact is increasingly becoming: a chaos of undirected, accidental ideas and forces, the blindness of which drives the social totality towards its downfall. ('Opinion. Delusion. Society', *Catchwords*, in *Critical Models*, p. 115)

- 3 On the problematic nature of relativism in Mannheim and Pareto, see also Adorno's 'Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre', *GS*, vol. 8, p. 457ff.
- 4 A phrase of Husserl's; see the first quotation in Adorno's *Against Epistemology*, p. 3: 'a sphere of being of absolute origins'.
- 5 See Thesis Five of 'On the Concept of History', "The truth will not run away from us" – this statement by Gottfried Keller indicates exactly that point in historicism's image of history where the age is pierced by historical materialism' (Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, p. 390f.).

## Lecture 21

- 1 The idea of *altera natura*, familiar to philosophy since the days of Cicero, was one Adorno took over in the form he found it in Hegel, Marx and the early Lukács. We can read about Hegel's conception of a second nature in the book version of *Negative Dialectics*:

In line with an automatism beyond the reach of the philosophy of spirit, Hegel cites nature and natural forces as models of history. They maintain their place in philosophy, however, because the identity-positing spirit identifies with the spell of blind nature by denying it. Looking into the abyss, Hegel perceived the world-historic derring-do as a second nature;

but what he glorified in it, in villainous complicity, was the first nature: 'The basis of right is the realm of spirit in general and its precise location and point of departure is the will; the will is free, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny and the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature.' But the second nature, philosophically raised again for the first time in Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, remains the negation of any nature that might be conceived as the first. What is truly  $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota$  – produced by the functional context of individuals, if not by themselves – usurps the insignia of that which a bourgeois consciousness regards as nature and natural. To that consciousness nothing appears as being outside any more; in a certain sense there actually is nothing outside any more, nothing unaffected by mediation, which is total. What is trapped within, therefore, comes to appear to itself as its own otherness – a primal phenomenon of idealism. The more relentlessly socialization commands all moments of human and interhuman immediacy, the smaller the capacity of men to recall that this web has evolved, and the more irresistible its natural appearance. This appearance is reinforced as the distance between human history and nature keeps growing: nature turns into an irresistible parable of imprisonment. (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 357f. The Hegel quotation comes from *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §4, p. 35)

This late-formulated passage contains many of the motifs that make the notion of a 'second nature' so important for Adorno's philosophy. Very early on, in a lecture of 1932 entitled 'Natural History', he set out seriously to explore 'the question of the relationship between history and nature'. Adorno hoped he would find an answer only 'if it were possible to comprehend history in its extreme historical determinacy as natural, at the point where things are at their most historical, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as historical at the very point where it seemed to be most profoundly natural' (*GS*, vol. 1, p. 354f.). The insistence on nature, 'natural existence', on the 'mythical, archaic natural stuff of history, of what has been' (*ibid.*, p. 362) reminds us of realms that have slipped increasingly from view, thanks to the growing disenchantment of the world in the course of progressive rationalization. In his lecture the concept of the mythical coincides with that of nature; Adorno concedes that it is 'quite vague'. 'What is meant by it is whatever has existed since time immemorial, whatever is established by fate, whatever is pre-given and underpins human history, appears in it and is substantial in it. Whatever is circumscribed by these expressions is what I mean here by nature' (*ibid.*, p. 346). The mythic nature described here has its antithesis in history: 'History refers to that mode of conduct of human beings . . . that is characterized above all by the fact that the qualitatively new appears in it, that it is a movement that does not proceed in pure identity, in the pure reproduction of what has always existed; it is movement in which there is novelty and which acquires its true character through that novelty' (*ibid.*). The task of critically defining the relations between nature and history or myth and history becomes one of the central strands of Adorno's philosophy. In the text of 1932 he writes: 'In truth



the second nature is the first one' (ibid., p. 365). In 'The Essay as Form', a piece dating from the 1950s, he wrote: 'Under the essay's gaze second nature recognizes itself as first nature' (*Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, p. 20). In the writings of his mature years Adorno ascribed the qualities of a 'second nature' to the relations of production of late capitalism (see *GS*, vol. 8, p. 365), people's responses to mass culture (see *GS*, vol. 10.2, p. 20) or the system of tonality in music (see *GS*, vol. 12, p. 514). However, in reading history as natural history in this way, his intention was always critical, never affirmative; and his critique was modelled on that of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*. For example, Adorno argued against Spengler in terms similar to those he had used in objecting to Hegel's use of 'second nature':

'Nature, with which men have had to struggle in history, is disdainfully pushed aside by Spengler's philosophy. Thus history becomes transformed into a second nature, as blind, closed and fateful as any vegetable life. What can be called human freedom constitutes itself solely in man's efforts to break the bondage of nature. If this is ignored, if the world is treated as a pure manifestation of the pure essence of man, freedom becomes lost in the exclusively human character of history. Freedom develops only through the resistance of the existent; if freedom is posited as absolute and souldom is raised to a governing principle, that principle itself falls prey to the merely existent. ('Spengler after the Decline', *Prisms*, p. 69)

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno takes sides against the shackles of both first and second nature. See also Lecture 22, note 2, below.

- 2 On the primacy of the object, see the section in *Negative Dialectics* with that title, p. 183ff. [the title given there is: 'The Preponderance of the Object' – Trans.]; see also *NaS*, IV.4, p. 412ff., note 196; *NaS*, IV.7, p. 333ff., p. 415, note 354; and *NaS* IV.14, p. 266, p. 442, note 282.
- 3 See Freud's essay *Wege der psychoanalytischen Therapie*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12: *Werke aus den Jahren 1917–1920*, London, 1947, p. 185f.

## Lecture 22

- 1 The title of the first chapter of *Against Epistemology*.
- 2 The category of fetish is the form Marx gave to the idea of a 'second nature'. He appears not to have used this latter concept himself, but nevertheless gave the theory a decisive turn with the idea that 'the evolution of the economic formation of society' is viewed 'as a process of natural history' (Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 10). Adorno probably learned about the theory of commodity fetishism from the reification chapter in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (see also *Ontologie und Dialektik*, *NaS*, IV.7, note 194). Whereas Lukács may be said to have transposed the economic concept of commodity fetishism into the realm of philosophy, and to have applied the concept of reification to the antinomies of bourgeois thought, Adorno succeeded in opening up the

concept to include historical phenomena more generally – in the first instance, though not exclusively, the phenomena of capitalist society. In his essay on ‘The Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening’ of 1938, Adorno cites the crucial passage from Marx:

Marx defines the fetish character of the commodity as the veneration of the thing made by oneself which, as exchange value, simultaneously alienates itself from producer to consumer – ‘human beings’. ‘A commodity is, therefore, a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.’ (*The Culture Industry*, p. 33f.)

What Marx discovered in the value abstractions of capitalist production, the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* rediscovered in individuals and their conduct vis-à-vis others and towards themselves, in this instance in the America of the 1940s:

Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things. On its own account, even in advance of total planning, the economic apparatus endows commodities with the values which decide the behaviour of people. Since, with the ending of free exchange, commodities have forfeited all economic qualities except their fetish character, this character has spread like a cataract across the life of society in all its aspects. The countless agencies of mass production and its culture impress standardized behaviour on the individual as the only natural, decent, and rational one. Individuals now define themselves only as things, statistical elements, successes or failures. (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 21)

Up to now nothing has happened to modify this ‘universality of the category of fetishism’.

- 3 *Metaphysics*, p. 154, note 6. – Adorno is probably indebted for the reference to Plato’s Parmenides dialogue to Karl Heinz Haag (see p. 222 above), who regularly attended his lectures.
- 4 See *NaS*, IV.7, p. 367f., note 100.

### Lecture 23

- 1 *Minima Moralia*, p. 192.
- 2 See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Gesellschaft’, *GS*, vol. 8, p. 9ff.
- 3 This is directed against Heidegger: see §40 in *Being and Time*: ‘The basic state of mind of anxiety as a distinctive way in which Dasein is disclosed’ (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford, 1973, p. 228). For Adorno’s criticism, see also *NaS*, IV.7, p. 177.
- 4 From this point on the page numbers refer to the so-called *Erste Zwischenschrift* [First intermediate version] (Vo 13352ff.).
- 5 See Lecture 8, note 15, above.

## Lecture 24

- 1 See e.g. Fritz Heinemann (1889–1970), who had obtained a chair in Frankfurt in 1930 and who had known Adorno from that time on. He had accused Sartre of having misunderstood Husserl's concept of intentionality:

The intentional object is for him [i.e. Sartre] external to consciousness, i.e. transcendent. Whereas Husserl emphasizes the merely phenomenal existence of the transcendent and the absolute existence of the immanent, Sartre is opposed to immanentism in any form. The image ceases to be a *content* of consciousness; it no longer exists *in* the consciousness. It transforms itself into an intentional structure of consciousness that refers to a transcendent object. This transcendence henceforth means something like 'being outside' . . . that is how Sartre is. In a genuine French manner he at once translates intentionality into something alive, an *éclater vers*, i.e. a breaking out, exploding, shattering, bursting forth in the direction of something or other. 'Connaître, c'est éclater vers.' To hate someone is likewise a mode not merely of gazing upon someone, . . . but of exploding at someone. It is as if intentionality had suddenly become filled with explosive force. . . . How charmingly French that is, but worlds away from Husserl! With the aid of a creative misunderstanding of Husserl he frees himself from an internal life: 'Ultimately, everything is external, everything, including us: it is outside, in the world, among others.' (Fritz Heinemann, *Existenzphilosophie – lebendig oder tot*, Stuttgart, 1954, p. 116f.)

- 2 See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris, 1960.
- 3 For Adorno's sparing references to Carl Schmitt, see also *Minima Moralia*, p. 132, and *History and Freedom*, pp. 234 and 324. Incidentally, it is very unlikely that this mention of Schmitt allows us to infer that Adorno had read Schmitt's book *Theorie des Partisanen* (Berlin, 1963).
- 4 Viz. the statements by Marx and Engels and even Lenin about the ultimate withering away of the state under communism.

## Lecture 25

- 1 For Kierkegaard's concept of 'decision', see *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, pp. 37f., 41, 66 *passim* [NB Robert Hullot-Kentor translates 'Entscheidung' as 'decisiveness']. See also *NaS*, IV.7, p. 177.
- 2 The criticism of Sartre's concept of spontaneity sketched here (and repeated in *Negative Dialectics*, p. 49ff.) appears to be backed up by numerous passages in *L'Être et le néant*. Whether it really applies fully to Sartre may appear doubtful in view of other, equally programmatic statements. See, for example, 'La structure du choix implique nécessairement qu'il soit choix dans le monde. Un choix serait choix à *partir de rien*, choix *contre rien* ne serait choix de rien et s'anéantirait comme choix. Il n'y a de choix que phénoménal . . .' (J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le*

*néant*: *Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, 1957, p. 559). And what Adorno concedes in the case of the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, that his project of 'a philosophizing subject preserved something of the freedom of thought against mere positivity' (*The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 103), ought surely to apply to Sartre. Admittedly, it is no less true that

The subjectivity that [since Kierkegaard] had been really incapacitated and internally weakened in the meantime is isolated and – complementing Heidegger's hypostasis of its counter-pole, Being – hypostasized. Unmistakably in the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, the severance of the subject amounts, like that of Being, to the illusion of the immediacy of things that are mediated. As mediated as being is by the concept and therewith by the subject, so mediated is, conversely, the subject by the world in which it lives, and so powerless and merely internalized too is its decision. Such powerlessness permits the victory of the tyranny of objects [*das dinghafte Unwesen*] over the subject. (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 123; translation altered)

- 3 See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Le Diable et le bon Dieu*, Paris, 1951.
- 4 Johannes Nestroy's *Judith und Holofernes*, his 'travesty with song' of 1849, is a parody of Friedrich Hebbel's tragedy *Judith* of 1840.
- 5 See Adorno's essay with that title, *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, pp. 76–94.
- 6 This alludes to a comment in Beckett: 'Cela, dire cela, sans savoir quoi' (Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable*, Paris, 1953, p. 8 ['It, say it, not knowing what.' *The Unnameable*, in *The Beckett Trilogy*, London, 1980, p. 267]).
- 7 The last date noted by Adorno; he probably gave the last lecture of the winter semester on 17 February and thus got as far as the notes to which he appended the date. In the printed version of *Negative Dialectics*, this corresponds to p. 52. The following notes seem not to have been made use of in the lectures.

### Additional Notes

- 1 Cf. the passage in *Negative Dialectics*: 'Cognition is a *τρώσας ἰάσεται*' (p. 53), a remedy for an injury. With this phrase Adorno is describing one of his fundamental ideas, that of alienation as a cure for alienation, the negation of reification through thing-ness; namely the idea that, as he often referred to in connection with Wagner's *Parsifal*, the wound can only be healed by the spear that caused it. [Strictly speaking, the phrase means 'the one who caused the wound will heal it', and I learn from Professor Brian Sparkes of Southampton University that it refers to an episode in the *Iliad*, not unlike the one Wagner used later in *Parsifal*, in which Telephos is wounded by Achilles' spear and his injury is healed only after rust from the spear is rubbed into the wound. – Trans.]

- 2 'Main stream' in English in the original.
- 3 According to Adorno's lectures on *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant, in his deduction of the categories, 'has in mind facts which are universal, but tied to the individual, facts such as memory, the reproduction of the imagination which (as I have already mentioned) represent the core of Kant's argument about the transcendental' (*Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 153).
- 4 'This schematism of our understanding with regard to appearances and their mere form is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty' (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 141/ B 180f., p. 273).
- 5 Adorno's vindication of rhetoric – see also p. 177f. and, especially, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 55ff. – might be compared with Lévinas's more conventional criticism of rhetoric as 'violence, i.e. injustice', as 'speech from the position of the person who approaches his neighbour with ruse' (E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 70f.).
- 6 This sentence was originally followed by this one, later crossed out: 'This is connected with the hypostasis of ideas as things that exist in themselves, as opposed to which, because they simply need to be transmitted, the How is a matter of indifference' (Vo 11060).
- 7 On the alternatives of mimetic or conventional theories of language and Plato's ironic criticism of both in the Cratylus dialogue, see also Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 'Sprachphilosophie', in *Philosophie*, ed. Alwin Diener and Ivo Frenzel, Frankfurt am Main, 1958, p. 315f.
- 8 Erich Trunz (1905–2001), a literary historian, the editor of the Hamburger Ausgabe of Goethe's works and expert on the baroque. He was a professor in Prague, Münster and Kiel. As a prominent Nazi supporter, he was especially despicable in Adorno's eyes. The source of the quotation has not been identified, but see, e.g., Erich Trunz, *Weltbild und Dichtung im deutschen Barock: Sechs Studien*, Munich, 1992.
- 9 See *History and Freedom*, p. 279, note 13, which refers to Adorno's *Hegel Studies*, p. 118. He writes there about Hegel's 'aversion to ornate and emphatic formulations [that is] in harmony with this; he has unkind things to say about the "witty phrases" of the spirit alienated from itself, of mere culture. Germans had long reacted this way to Voltaire and Diderot. There lurks in Hegel the academic resentment of a linguistic self-reflection that would distance itself all too much from mediocre complicity' (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 118).

### Appendix

- 1 The title has been taken by the editor from a handwritten marginal note of Adorno's (Ts 13352).
- 2 See Lecture 4, Note 20, above.
- 3 See the quotation from Marx, Lecture 4, Note 19, above.

- 4 A conjectured reading for ‘not daunted by’. Adorno had originally written ‘does not trust itself [to challenge]’, but then changed it to ‘daunted’, but forgot to cross out the ‘not’.
- 5 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 78.
- 6 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 36.
- 7 The definitive statement of Bergson’s and Husserl’s attempts to break out are to be found in *Negative Dialectics*, p. 8f.
- 8 Yet another reference to the final proposition of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (see also note 16, p. 233, above), about which Adorno wrote: ‘Wittgenstein’s maxim, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent,” in which the extreme of positivism spills over into the gesture of reverent authoritarian authenticity, and which for that reason exerts a kind of intellectual mass suggestion, is utterly anti-philosophical. If philosophy can be defined at all, it is an effort to express things one cannot speak about, to help express the non-identical despite the fact that expressing it identifies it at the same time. Hegel attempts to do this’ (*Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 101f.). See also *Negative Dialectics*, p. 9, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 51ff., as well as *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 178 and 268f.
- 9 The reference has not been identified.
- 10 A reference to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the first edition of 1807 the book was described as ‘Part One’ of a ‘System of Science’ which was referred to in its turn – following the ‘Preface’ but before the ‘Introduction’ – as ‘Part One’ and bore the subtitle ‘Science of Empirical Consciousness’.
- 11 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 6.
- 12 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A xvi, p. 103.
- 13 Benjamin to Gretel Adorno, 16 August 1935, in Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, p. 117.
- 14 See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Der Gang aufs Land*: ‘Come! into the open, friend!’
- 15 However, see Rolf Tiedemann, *Mystik und Aufklärung: Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins*, p. 224f., and note 5.
- 16 See Karl Heinz Haag, ‘Das Unwiederholbare’, in *Zeugnisse*, p. 152ff.; see also Haag, *Philosophischer Idealismus*, p. 7ff.
- 17 See Lecture 15, note 1, above.
- 18 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 134: ‘And thus the synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding . . .’ (p. 247n).
- 19 Adorno used the English phrase.
- 20 Adorno used the English phrase.
- 21 *Minima Moralia*, p. 192.
- 22 See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Gesellschaft’, *GS*, vol. 8, p. 9ff.
- 23 See note 1 to Additional Notes, p. 255 above.
- 24 *Gegen den Strom*, a collection of articles written during the First World War by Lenin and Zinoviev.

- 25 *Gegen den Strom* was the title of two periodicals, either of which could have been in Adorno's mind. The first appeared from 1928 to 1935 and was the organ of the KPD (Opposition); the other was the organ of a German-American cultural association and appeared in New York in 1938–9, published by Robert Bek-Gran and Rudolf Rocker. It was an anti-fascist and anti-Stalinist publication with anarchist leanings. It has not proved possible to identify a periodical with the title 'Hauptstrom' (Mainstream).
- 26 Descartes's *Discours de la méthode*, his first work, published anonymously, accompanies the presentation of his ideas with an autobiographical account in which he writes about history in connection with his schooling in the Collège Royal in La Flèche:

I knew . . . that the memorable deeds of history uplift it [the mind] and, when read critically, that they help to train our judgement; that the reading of all good books is like a conversation with the most eminent people of past centuries, who were their authors, and that it is even a studied conversation in which they reveal to us only the best of their thoughts . . . But I thought I had already devoted enough time to languages and even to reading the classics, to their stories and fables, because conversation with people from other periods is like travelling. . . . If one spends too much time travelling, one eventually becomes a stranger in one's own country; and if one is too curious about things that happened in past ages, one usually remains very ignorant about what is currently taking place. Moreover, . . . even the most accurate histories, although they do not change or exaggerate the significance of things in order to make them more worth reading about, at least almost always omit the less important or significant details; thus what remains does not appear as it really is' (*Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke, Harmondsworth, 1999, p. 8)

The situation is less unambiguous in Bacon, who was himself a noteworthy historian. He intended to treat of history in Part III of his *Instauratio magna*, which, however, remained incomplete. In his *Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre* [Contribution to the theory of ideology], Adorno focuses on Bacon's idols of the marketplace, emphasizing that 'the deception is laid at the door of men, in other words, unchanging creatures of nature, and not the conditions that make them what they are or to which they succumb en masse. . . . Furthermore, the deceptions of nomenclature are blamed on logical impurity and hence are ascribed to human subjects and their fallibility instead of objective historical circumstances' (*GS*, vol. 8, p. 459). In this sense, we may find closer bonds between empiricism and rationalism than is imagined by the *communis opinio* of the history of philosophy. (See also p. 31 above)

- 27 Adorno has in mind a passage in Husserl's *Formal and Transcendent Logic* of 1929 which he cites and comments on in *Against Epistemology*. The passage in question is to be found in Husserl's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, p. 215:

‘Uncovering the sense-genesis of judgements signifies, more precisely, an unravelling of the sense-moments that are implicit in and belong essentially to, the sense that has plainly come to light. Judgements, as the finished products of a “constitution” or “genesis”, can and must be asked about this genesis. The essential peculiarity of such products is precisely that they are senses that bear within them, as a sense-implicate of their genesis, a sort of historicity; that in them, level by level, sense points back to original sense and to the corresponding noematic intentionality; that therefore each sense-formation can be asked about its essentially necessary sense-history.’ Husserl hardly ever went further than in this passage. Its content may seem lacking in novelty. Basing thingly identity on subjective synthesis comes from Kant and the proof of the ‘inner historicity’ of logic from Hegel. But the significance of Husserl’s insight is to be sought in the fact that he forced synthesis and history from the hardened thing and indeed from the abstract form of judgement, whereas in classical idealists it belongs to precisely the ‘systematic’ interpretation of mind mentioned above which comprises the world of things without knowing the status of its own world in dialectical process otherwise than as one of reification and giving expression to this knowledge through the method. But Husserl, the specialist in detail [*Detailforscher*] and converted positivist, nags at the solid, foreign object of cognition till it submits to the Medusa’s gaze. The thing as identical object of cognition opens itself up and presents for an instant what its solidity should hide, viz. its historical accomplishment. (*Against Epistemology*, p. 215f.)

Karel Markus of Amsterdam, the most scrupulous of his readers, drew the present editor’s attention to the passage in *Metaphysics*, p. 163, note 9, that he had forgotten. See also p. 179 above as well as the conversation between Adorno and Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 12: *Nachgelassene Schriften 1931–1949*, p. 499ff. The importance for Adorno’s thinking of Husserl’s idea that ‘every judgement contains its own genesis within itself’ can scarcely be overestimated.

28 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 273.

29 See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Über Tradition’, *GS*, vol. 10.1, p. 310ff.

\*

‘Now I would wish that nothing may hinder the first good impression of the present little book. I have resolved therefore to elucidate, to explain and to demonstrate. . . . Understanding, however, is hampered by many unavoidable foreign words that are obscure because they refer to specific objects, to beliefs, opinions, traditions, stories and customs. To explain these was held to be one’s first duty. . . . This explanation, however, takes place within a certain context . . .’



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NaS = *Nachgelassene Schriften*. These are the writings that did not appear in Adorno's lifetime and are now being published in six parts by Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main. The lectures appear in Part IV.

The abbreviation Ts refers to unpublished typescripts, both complete and fragmentary, in the Adorno Archive, while Vo is used to designate typed transcripts of the audiotapes and shorthand records of Adorno's lectures, as well as his own handwritten notes. The audio transcripts on which the present edition is based can be found in the Theodor W. Adorno Archive with the shelf mark Vo 10809–10919; Adorno's handwritten notes for these lectures have the shelf mark Vo 11031–11061.

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# Index

- absolute idealism 184  
absolute spirit 91  
abstract subjectivity 14, 16, 17  
aesthetic element *see* art/artists  
Améry, Jean 243*n*  
antagonistic society 8–9, 168, 203  
anti-system 36, 37  
appearance and essence 96, 100, 102,  
107–8  
Aristotle xiv, 47, 60, 91, 226*n*, 236*n*,  
237*n*  
art/artists 69, 83–4, 92, 93, 94, 105, 188  
‘attempted breakouts’ 65–75, 185–6  
Auschwitz 19
- Bacon, Francis 31, 83, 179, 207, 258*n*  
Baudelaire, Charles 147, 249*n*  
Bauer, Bruno 52–3  
behaviour, thinking as 53  
Being  
  concept of 37, 38, 60, 63–4  
  Nothing and Becoming 29–30, 55–64,  
  184  
Beckett, Samuel 175, 225*n*  
Benjamin, Walter 110–12, 118, 150, 190,  
199, 234*n*, 236*n*, 244–5*n*, 248*n*,  
249*n*  
  infinity concept 79, 235*n*  
  philosophy without system 31–2, 38–9  
Bergson, Henri 70–3, 85, 116, 185, 208,  
230*n*, 232–3*n*, 238–9*n*, 257*n*  
Berlin, Isaiah xiv, 236–7*n*
- Bloch, Ernest 83, 247–8*n*  
Bollnow, Hans Erich 46, 55, 223*n*  
bourgeois ratio and system 124–6, 193–5  
Braque, Georges 62  
Brecht, Bertolt 21, 49–50, 52, 147, 175
- Camus, Albert 175  
Cézanne, Paul 105  
Cicero 181, 210, 250*n*  
circular procedure, Hegelian 27–9  
clarity of systems 41  
coercion 16–17, 164, 203  
concept 69–70, 187–8  
  *see also* non-concept/non-conceptual  
conceptual realism 71  
concreteness 116–18, 192  
  of truth 144–6, 198  
content-based philosophy 64, 66, 120,  
202  
  and method 168–70  
contradiction  
  concept of 1–11, 168, 186, 203  
  twofold meaning 7–9, 27–8  
*contrainte sociale* 16  
Coolidge, Calvin 147  
critical character of dialectics 20–1, 28,  
197–8  
criticism  
  and interpretation 51  
  self-reflection/self-criticism 26, 46, 57,  
  63, 73  
  two aspects of 40

- deduction 82  
 'depth', concept of 98–108, 189  
 Derrida, Jacques xv  
 Descartes, René 31, 74–5, 185, 194–5, 207  
 determinate negation 25, 26, 28  
 Dewey, John 86, 187, 237–8n  
 dialectics 6–7  
   critical character of 20–1, 28, 197–8  
   idealist, materialist and negative 10–11, 21, 50  
   positive nature of 19, 27  
   possibility of negative 22–32  
   'strait-jacket' of 120–2, 193  
   subjective aspect of 8, 11, 13–15, 16  
 Diderot, Denis 210, 256n  
 domination  
   of nature 9, 58–9  
   principle of 168, 203  
 'dregs of phenomenal world' 62–3, 69–70  
 Durkheim, Emile 16, 215n
- Epicharmus 76, 80  
 Empedocles 248n  
 empiricism 31, 82–3, 89  
 empiriocriticism 21, 50  
 'empty depth' 102, 106–7, 189  
 Engels, Friedrich 52, 58, 96–7, 223n, 226n, 227n, 240n, 254n  
 enlightenment 85  
 essence, appearance and 96, 100, 102, 107–8  
 exchange principle and system 128  
 Existentialism 170, 172–6, 203–5  
 experience *see* intellectual experience  
 expression and rigour 110, 190
- fallibility of philosophy 28, 85–6, 89, 90, 97  
 false practice 63  
 falsity, truth and 28–9  
 fetishization of positivity 18  
 Feuerbach, Ludwig 42, 45, 47, 49–50, 221n, 223n, 227n  
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 14–15, 36, 39, 78, 82, 102, 184, 186, 204, 222n, 233n, 234n, 241n  
 formalism 63, 64  
   and archaisms 66–8  
 freedom in thought 108  
 French Surrealists 69  
 Freud, Anna 216n  
 Freud, Sigmund 62–3, 69–70, 230n, 252n
- German idealism 78, 82, 96–7, 99  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 76, 78, 106–7, 243n, 244n, 248–9n, 256n
- Haecker, Theodor 80–1  
 happiness of thought 108  
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 5, 6, 11  
   'attempted breakouts' 66–7, 68–9  
   Being, Nothing 29–30, 57, 59, 60–2, 63–4, 184  
   'depth' 102, 105, 106–7, 189  
   element of speculation 91, 95  
   institutions, vindication of 16  
   intellectual experience  
     concept 78, 79–80, 82  
     theory 112–14, 183–201 *passim*  
   negation of negation 13–16, 17, 19, 20, 21  
   philosophy without system 36, 39, 41, 132–4, 136, 144–6  
   positivity critique 15–16  
   possibility of negative dialectics 25, 27–30, 31, 154  
   synthesis 27–30, 31, 158  
   theory and practice 46, 52  
 Heidegger, Martin 37–8, 63, 64, 67, 105, 199, 216n, 222n, 231n, 234n, 253n, 255n  
 Heinemann, Fritz 170, 254n  
 Helms, Hans G. 226–7n  
 Hitler, Adolph 2  
 Hölderlin, Friedrich xv, 116, 117, 191, 246n, 257n  
 Horkheimer, Max 51, 52, 58, 91–2, 212n, 217–18n, 222n, 226n, 240n, 244–5n, 259n  
 Husserl, Edmund 37, 116, 118, 192, 208, 228n, 230n, 232n, 233n, 247–8n, 250n, 254n, 257n, 258–9n  
   'attempted breakouts' 70, 71, 72–3, 185  
 hypostasis of mind/spirit 21
- Ibsen, Henrik 173  
 idealism 50, 74, 79, 183–5, 186  
   absolute 184  
   German 78, 82, 96–7, 99  
   materialist and negative dialectics 10–11, 21, 50  
   objective 14  
   speculation and 95–6, 99–100, 188–9  
   transcendent 37, 38

- identity  
 logic and 8  
 and non-identity 6, 8, 57, 59–61, 184  
 and speculation 95  
 of thinking and being 59–60
- ideology 100–1  
 of the positive 23–4
- images 70, 71–2
- immanence  
 critique 27  
 and transcendence 136–8, 197
- indeterminate/indeterminateness 60–2
- inference, judgement and 112, 191
- infinite, concept of 74–5, 77–80, 186–7
- institutions, Hegel's vindication of 16
- intellectual experience  
 concept of 75, 76–86, 89–90  
 theory of 110–14, 183–210
- intellectuals 24
- interpretation 50–1, 59, 136
- intuition 92–4
- irrationality 37–8, 91–2
- Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich 60, 62,  
 63–4
- Jaspers, Karl 216*n*  
 judgement and inference 112, 191
- Kant, Immanuel 14, 29, 38, 61, 158,  
 212–13*n*, 219*n*, 228–9*n*, 233–4*n*,  
 236*n*, 240*n*, 242–3*n*, 248*n*, 249*n*,  
 256*n*, 259*n*  
 idealism 183, 184, 185  
 intellectual experience  
 concept 77, 78, 79–80, 82, 234–5*n*  
 theory 183–208 *passim*  
 system 126, 138  
 unity 158, 201
- Kästner, Erich 17, 215*n*, 216*n*
- Keller, Gottfried 150, 151, 199, 216*n*,  
 250*n*
- Kierkegaard, Søren 45, 170, 204,  
 212–13*n*, 213–14*n*, 224*n*, 227*n*,  
 238*n*, 254*n*, 255*n*
- Klages, Ludwig 70, 232*n*
- Korsch, Karl 52, 226*n*
- Kracauer, Siegfried 145, 216*n*, 240*n*,  
 249*n*
- Krug's 'quill' 68–9
- language 209–10
- latent system 37, 38
- Lechter, Melchior 105
- Left Hegelianism 52–3
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 74, 77, 103,  
 197, 207, 233–4*n*, 236*n*, 241–3*n*
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 21, 50, 218*n*,  
 254*n*
- Lévinas, Emmanuel 231*n*, 256*n*
- logic  
 of disintegration 6  
 and identity 8
- Löwith, Karl 227*n*
- Lukács, Georg 16–17, 200, 216*n*,  
 250–1*n*, 252*n*
- Manet, Edouard 105
- Mannheim, Karl 149, 151, 250*n*
- Marx, Karl/Marxism 16–17, 42–3, 58,  
 102, 158, 200, 201, 217–18*n*,  
 223*n*, 224–5*n*, 226–8*n*, 229*n*,  
 245*n*, 250*n*, 252–3*n*, 254*n*  
 speculation 95–7, 99, 188–9  
 theory and practice 45–6, 47, 48–9,  
 50–3
- materialist dialectics 10–11, 21, 50
- meta-critical turn against first  
 philosophy 83
- metaphysical meaning 104–5, 106
- metaphysics of forces of production  
 96–7
- mimetic element 91–2, 187–8
- Monet, Claude 105
- Montaigne, Michel de 90, 151, 238*n*
- music theory 148, 198
- negation of negation 12–21, 14, 28
- negative ontology of perennial  
 conflict 162–4
- negativity, thinking as 112–14
- Nestroy, Johannes 173, 255*n*
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 18, 31, 85, 90,  
 102, 193, 195, 202, 216–17*n*,  
 237*n*  
 philosophy without system 37, 40,  
 132
- non-concept/non-conceptual 57, 62, 94–5,  
 118, 201–2  
 'attempted breakouts' 68–74, 185–6
- non-identity 30, 40, 92, 128  
 identity and 6, 8, 57, 59–61, 184
- Not-I 36, 73
- object  
 contradiction in the 9, 10  
 primacy of the 154–6, 199–200
- objective idealism 14
- objective reality 8–9

- objectivity  
 scientific 51  
 social 14, 16  
 subject within 141–3  
 open system 31  
 vs system of categories 80–2
- Parmenides 159, 248*n*, 253*n*  
 Parsons, Talcott 35–6, 221*n*  
 Pfemfert, Franz 48, 226*n*  
 phenomena, criticism of 40  
 phenomenology 37, 63  
 philosophy, definition of 47–8  
 Picasso, Pablo 62, 247*n*  
 Plato 185, 201, 209, 232*n*, 237*n*, 253*n*,  
 256*n*  
 playfulness 90–1, 187–8  
 Poe, Edgar Allan 147  
 Poincaré, Henri 27, 219*n*  
 Popper, Karl 40, 227–8*n*, 237*n*  
 positive nature of dialectics 19, 27  
 positivity  
 bad 28  
 concept of 17–19, 23–4, 39  
 Hegel's critique of 15–16  
 practical action/practice 47–8  
 theory and 44–54, 56–7  
 transition to 45–6, 183  
 production, forces of 48–9, 52, 96–7  
 profit motive 9  
 Proust, Marcel 66, 72, 208, 232–3*n*,  
 247*n*  
 provincialism 41–2, 46
- qualitative, concept of 141–3
- rationalism 31  
 Ravel, Maurice 221*n*  
 realism  
 conceptual 71  
 objective 8–9  
 recognition, interpretation and 50–1  
 reification, concept of 23–5  
 reified consciousness 24, 25, 53  
 repression 69–70  
 resistance 24–5, 25, 39, 107  
 philosophy as 101–2  
 rhetoric 209  
 rigour, expression and 110, 190  
 Ruge, Arnold 52–3
- Sartre, Jean-Paul 170, 172–4, 204, 234*n*,  
 254–5*n*
- scepticism 88–9, 90  
 Scheler, Max 63, 85, 162, 163, 201,  
 230*n*  
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von  
 92, 187–8, 231*n*, 234*n*  
 Schoenberg, Arnold 29, 148, 198, 220*n*,  
 238*n*  
 Schopenhauer, Arthur 18, 93, 104,  
 242*n*  
 science 186  
 and intuition 94  
 Marxist concept of 47, 51–2  
 secularized system 38–40  
 Seidel, Alfred 96, 240*n*  
 self-reflection/self-criticism 26, 46, 57, 63,  
 73  
 seriousness and playfulness 90–1  
 Simmel, Georg 108, 186, 201, 212*n*,  
 243*n*  
 social domination 9, 58–9  
 social institutions 16  
 social objectivity 14, 16  
 societal repression 70  
 sociology 35–6, 41, 47, 57  
 speculation 99–102, 188–90  
 element of 87–97  
 Spinoza, Baruch 128, 194–5, 213*n*,  
 219*n*  
 spirit 66–7, 68  
 absolute 91  
 hypostasis of mind/spirit 21  
 World Spirit 59, 97–8  
 spiritualization of the world 89–90  
 'strait-jacket' of dialectics 120–2, 193  
 subject within objectivity 141–3  
 subjective aspect of dialectics 8, 11,  
 13–15, 16  
 subjective choice 73  
 subjective consciousness 25  
 substantive and formal philosophy 63,  
 64  
 substantive world 41–2  
 suffering 103–4, 108, 189–90  
 synthesis 6, 27–8, 200–1  
 critique of 29–31, 156, 158  
 and unity 158–60, 162, 201  
 system  
 ambiguity of 132–4  
 bourgeois ratio and 124–6, 193–5  
 of categories 80–2  
 concept of 31–2, 34–6, 38–40  
 critique of 128–30, 195–7  
 exchange principle and 128

- 
- fragments, immanence and
    - transcendence 136–8
  - philosophy without 31–2, 33–43
  - relationship to 122, 193
  - visibility and clarity of 41
  - systemization 35–7, 122, 132
  
  - theory
    - and practice 44–54, 56–7
    - and reality 20–1
  - thesis, antithesis and synthesis 6,  
29–30
  - Tillich, Paul 2–4, 5, 19, 45, 211–12*n*,  
224*n*, 242*n*, 245*n*
  - transcendent idealism 37, 38
  
  - truth
    - concreteness of 144–6, 198
    - and falsity 28–9
    - fragility and unfathomability of  
148–50
  
    - unifying aspect of the positive 39
    - unity 158–60, 162, 195–6, 201
    - utopianism *see* idealism
  
    - visibility of systems 41
  
  - Wittgenstein, Ludwig 74, 185–6, 233*n*,  
257*n*
  - World Spirit 59, 97–8