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Culture, Science, Society

The Constitution of Cultural Modernity

Gyorgy Markus

BRILL

Culture, Science, Society

Social and Critical Theory

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The Constitution of Cultural Modernity

By

Gyorgy Markus

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To Marysia

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Volume Foreword

The Social and Critical Theory Book Series welcomes the publication of George Markus' *Culture, Science, Society. The Constitution of Cultural Modernity*. This innovative and wide-ranging collection of essays witnesses the culmination of Markus' work. Resident in Australia he is a central and leading figure of the Budapest School. The central idea around which these essays, and indeed Markus' intellectual trajectory, revolves is the modern concept of culture, which for him encompasses not only high culture, but also the activities of science. In this important collection of essays George Markus critically engages with this idea, tracing its genealogy, its problems, difficulties and legacies which still remain relevant for the way we see and understand ourselves today.

John Rundell, Series Editor
The University of Melbourne, Australia

Acknowledgements

With a collection of essays, some written quite recently, some others a few decades ago, it is rather understandable that many people have been helpful in their production and deserve my sincere gratitude. It would be impossible to name all of them. I refer here only to those, whose positive influence has been both essential and long lasting.

I shall mention first some of my colleagues at the Philosophical Department of Sydney University. Professors John Burnheim and Paul Crittenden were at the Department at the very time of my arrival to Australia and have been most supportive, assisting me to overcome that "culture shock" that someone coming from Hungary inevitably faces in this completely new environment, needing to cope also with the institutional conditions of academic life and activity significantly different from the Hungarian ones of the time. Among my younger colleagues I ought to mention first of all Dr. John Grumley, who has read many of the writings included in this volume before their publication, and has been truly helpful with his always relevant and acute critical remarks.

I am, however, equally deeply indebted to some colleagues from Melbourne. First of all to Prof. David Roberts, who through all this time indefatigably worked with my manuscripts, to transform my private language (sorry, Wittgenstein) into literate English. And I have been much helped also by Associate Professor John Rundell, with his instructive comments and continuous advice – this very volume never could have been realised without his contribution.

I arrived, however, in Australia forty-four years old, already with a quite significant theoretical baggage (including three books). They were the results of a shared collective effort and common project of a small group of theorists, today usually referred to as the Budapest School. It was essentially a group of four young philosophers – Agnes Heller and her husband, Ferenc Feher (who

is no more with us), Mihaly Vajda and myself, with two "allied" critical sociologists, Andras Hegedus and my wife, Marysia. Originally it was a group around Gyorgy Lukacs, aiming at the realisation of his project: "Renaissance of Marxism", meaning the attempt to regain the critical and emancipatory character of Marx's own theory, completely distorted and transformed into a senseless ideology, serving only the legitimation of the totalitarian character of Soviet-type societies. But even after divesting ourselves from our own Marxist illusions, this connection remained important for us. Agnes and her family arrived in Australia, to Melbourne, essentially at the same time as we came to Sydney. Agnes, Ferenc and myself then wrote a (rather widely translated) book – the critical analysis of social, economic and ideological structure of East-European societies of the time. Afterwards the character and the direction of our theoretical interests began to diverge ever more sharply. But the friendship remained and we continued to follow each other's work with undiminished attention and sometimes quite sharp – though always friendly – criticism. One does not thank a person for friendship; one reciprocates it. But I must clearly state my indebtedness to my friend, Agnes Heller for her always acute critical comments upon and suggestions concerning my current work.

I must express, however, my indebtedness also to some of my younger Hungarian colleagues. I shall mention here only one, the most important for me: Janos Kis. I found his writings on political philosophy truly enlightening and deeply engaging. So much so that they provoked my sole, polemical excursion into this field of philosophy, generally quite alien to my own interests. They certainly succeeded to wake me up from my slumber and rather simple-minded dogmatism concerning these issues.

Finally my greatest thanks go to the members of my own family. Our younger son, Andras, with his partner, Judy, were always there, supporting us in taking care of his elder brother, our Gyuri, deeply disabled due to a tragic sporting accident more than twenty years earlier. At the same time Andras was continuously helping concerning with all the technical tasks – for in this respect I am a true illiterate – involved in the preparation of manuscripts for publication. But I must also to thank Gyuri himself, trying to be considerate as far as it is possible in his condition. But I own the deepest indebtedness to my wife, Marysia. She has always been the first reader of whatever I have

been writing and my original manuscripts are invariably full of her marginal remarks: notes, question marks, references and the likes. She has always been one of my most severe critics and the final shape of my papers always bore the marks of her interventions. And the same time with her indomitable vitality she was always there to encourage and nudge me to go on and never to give up. This whole volume is dedicated to her.

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'A Philosophy Lost: German Theories of Culture at the End of the Nineteenth Century', first published in *Divinatio*, Volume 8, Autumn-Winter, 1998, pp. 53–74.

'Life and the Soul: The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture', first published in *Lukács Revalued*, edited by Agnes Heller, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, pp. 1–26.

'Walter Benjamin, or the Commodity as Phantasmagoria', first published in *New German Critique*, No. 83, Summer, 2001, pp. 3–42.

'Adorno and Mass Culture: Autonomous Art against the Culture Industry', first published in *Thesis Eleven*, August 2006, Vol. 86, 1. pp. 67–89.

'Antinomies of Culture' first published in *Collegium Budapest Institute Discussion Paper Series*, No. 38, February, 1997.

Introduction

The essays in this volume have been written throughout a rather longish period of time – nearly forty years. The chronologically first paper in this collection (on the aesthetic views of the young Lukács) has been produced still in Hungary, at the very beginning of the nineteen seventies, to be first published in seventy-three in German. It had a somewhat adventurous history. At this time I was, together with the other members of the so-called Budapest School, already without any stable job and under a strict prohibition of all publications. So this essay (which has no whatsoever political edge) was actually smuggled out from the country by a German friend. At least its publication did not involve any further punishments, discounting a few hours of a not particularly pleasant interrogation.

With this sole exception, however, all the other papers included here were written from the early eighties on, after our enforced emigration, when our family found a new home in Australia. These were the years of my teaching at the University of Sydney, and afterwards, with the beginning of the new millennium, the years of my retirement as professor of the Department of Philosophy.

What unifies all these writings is the fundamental identity of their subject matter, the *modern idea of culture*. This is, however, still perhaps too broad a formulation. The concept of culture, as it emerges in the second half of the eighteenth century, is a particularly complex one, covering a number of closely interrelated, but also distinct notions, resulting in various ambiguities and contradictions. In some of these writings I did attempt to draw, as it were, a cognitive map, allowing situating these difficulties, and simultaneously disclosing their non-accidental character. The basic theme and topic that is addressed by these essays, however, is something narrower, the specific *idea of high culture* characterising the modern times.

As I try to show, this conception emerges in a long process of transformation, in the result of which the classical (Ciceronian) conception of *cultura animi*, of cultivation befitting the (male) members of a socially well-defined elite is replaced by that of (high) culture denoting activities, social practices (primarily of the sciences and the arts) the results of which are posited as *universally valid*, while the practices themselves are regarded as intrinsically *autonomous*. Science in its development is assumed to progress towards objective, impersonal truth of ever more general character. This advance is made possible and ensured by the normative standards/principles guiding research (and embodied in its methods) and directly related to and based upon the very notion of objective truth. Works of authentic, high arts, on the other hand, while remaining in the nature of their meaning and significance always "personal", that is addressing the sensibilities of their audience, are posited as universally valid in the sense of being capable to appeal to the sensibilities of all coming, future generations.

In connection with this very claim of, and aim at universal validity, science and high art are, as indicated, posited as autonomous. This means that the successful results and products of these activities are valuable in themselves, not in view of some external end, but according to norms and standards immanent to these practices, which in principle are valid for every human being, and not only for those (usually a minority), who at any moment actually take a direct interest in them.

High culture, however, is more than a mere storehouse of such works of the past that retain as living tradition a significance and relevance for the ever new generations of recipients. For each of these generations is understandably

primarily interested in those of such works that directly address themselves to its own particular concerns and speak its own language. High culture is living, because it remains active and creative, produces new works that are both directly actual and at the same time of abiding, universal significance. However, in respect of such new cultural products their belonging to high culture is just a *claim*, an authorial intention that usually finds also well recognisable, institutionalised ways of expression. What decides, however, whether such a claim is legitimate, what are the empirical signs of its validity?

In trying to answer this question we have to face the deeply paradoxical character of the modern notion of high culture. Its idea, as indicated, encompasses two main domains: that of the sciences and of the arts (with philosophy and the humanities on a no-man's land somewhere in-between these two). These two, however, are unified in a single concept of culture by being systematically constituted as, and endowed with characteristics that do make them polar opposites, standing in a relation of strict complementarity. Thus they offer an answer also to this question in basically different ways.

In the sciences (meaning here primarily the "hard" sciences of nature) whether some theoretical innovation or a substantively new experiment really is acceptable and valid, contributing to the assumed progress of science, is at each moment fundamentally decided by the (argumentatively supported) opinion of a small, restricted group of "experts", members of the concerned, particular research community. It is certainly a fallible and revisable decision. But in so far as it is essentially shared by this group, it will temporarily decide about the fate of any particular claim to scientific validity. A broader public is simply regarded as incapable to understand and judge such works. Accordingly the universal, abiding significance of works of science in modernity (especially after the dissolution of the idea of a scientific world view) is basically dependent on their enormous role (primarily, though not exclusively, through their technical application) in influencing and shaping the life of us all. This practical role, however, is the *consequence* of the intersubjectively verified *truth* of scientific theories and never can serve as the ultimate basis of their validation. In fact, the structurally most fundamental theory of contemporary science ("big bang" theory) has no direct practical application.

Certainly expert opinions (eg. of literary critics) and particular decisions (eg. of directors of art galleries) also play some role in influencing, whether the

claim raised by some new work to belong to high art is legitimate. This is, however, a rather short term, fleeting influence. Fundamentally, it is the sustained, long term positive interest of the relevant recipients (readers, listeners, viewers) in a particular new work that can and does substantiate (at least for some time) its claim to be a true, successful work of high art. There is, however, only one basic, reliable empirical sign of such an interest – the long-term success of this work as a marketable good in the appropriate segment of the modern cultural market.

This stable, complementary unity of opposites, however, almost from the very beginning gave rise to a conflictual dynamism of antagonistic programs and tendencies: Enlightenment and Romanticism. The first aimed at the scientisation, the second at the aesthetisation of culture. Both had in their own time significant impact and success, influencing the creators and the recipients of high culture. On the whole, however, their great attempts to overcome its paradoxical character as the unity of direct opposites failed, and slowly, by the end of nineteenth century they died away. But the disquiet about this fundamental feature of its very idea remained. It found its expression in the twentieth century "culture wars" within some of the leading Western nations, having, however, a more particular character, depending on the actual composition and state of the national culture concerned.

This restlessness, however, was not groundless or accidental. There were (and are), at least *prima facie*, rational grounds for this uneasiness. For as time went on, significant internal difficulties have emerged concerning both of the great components of high culture.

The claims of science concerning the atemporal and impersonal, universal validity of the results of research *prima facie* runs into the difficulty due to the simple fact that the actual standards of their truths are time-bound, dependent on the particular state both of its experimental and cognitive instruments (experimental equipments and cognitive tools like the available mathematical apparatuses). This strain is, however, integrated into the very structure and practice of contemporary science. For it explicitly posits all its results and theories as *fallible*. This means that it actually encourages the ever renewed experimental testing even of its best-established and most foundational theories. Contemporary science recognises its own historicity, constantly probing the limits of its own claim at atemporal, universal validity.

It may also be argued (and sometimes it is) that science's claim of the universal validity of its results to be recognized by all rational human beings, is at least in a strainful relation with the fact that, as we have already indicated, only a very specific group of experts, members of the particular research community are regarded as competent to judge the validity of any such a concrete claim. The common person with general education is, no doubt, both uninterested in and incapable to grasp the relevant details of such theories. But why should he or she simply accept the verdict of such a small, specific group of persons, who no doubt, have also their own, specific interests?

The relevant fact, however, is that such a verdict is usually just accepted, and moreover it is rational to do so. Scientists, of course, are no moral virtuosos – they strive for prestige and recognition. Misrepresentations and in a very few cases explicit frauds did occur in the history of contemporary science. They have been, however, exceptionally rare and short-lived. This is ensured by the way contemporary experimental science is socially-institutionally embedded – in a number of independent from each other, and highly competitive with each other research centres and institutes. Any claim to an essentially new, unexpected experimental result and based upon it theory is usually immediately verified, by repeating (as exactly as possible) the experiment in question and the conclusions based upon it. The common person, of course, is unable to do so, neither practically, nor cognitively. Thus when faced with the shared, common opinion of the relevant group of experts, the only rational attitude on his/her part is to accept it as valid. Of course, they usually have also no interests in such "details". They have today a general *confidence in science* based primarily on the enormous role and ever widening scope of the practical application of science in the shaping, fundamentally in positive direction, the conditions of our life today.

Thus, it would seem that the sceptical doubts concerning the universal validity of the results of scientific inquiry and the based upon it autonomy of science, as one of the principal constituents of high culture are just baseless. This is, however, an overhasty conclusion. For as far as the most successful and significant field of scientific inquiry, that of the sciences of nature is concerned, modern developments seem to undermine their very autonomy, this elementary precondition of pertaining to high culture at all. As indicated earlier, the scientific community of experts certainly acts as the collective agent, having

the appropriate cognitive authority to decide upon the theoretical and/or experiential validity and value of a particular publication or experimental equipment. This is, however, insufficient to determine on its own the *general direction* of scientific development. Contemporary experimental science, with all the equipments it demands, requires in general very significant long-term investments that only the existing political (the state) or economic powers can provide. Certainly in some cases there can be and are popular pressures upon these centres of power in support of scientific activities directed at the solution of particular problems (from some medical issues to the ecological crisis). And the scientists themselves need not to be the passive objects of such decisions either. Overall, however, this does not change the basic fact that the development of contemporary experimental science is fundamentally influenced by "external" forces; it is, so it seems, *heteronomous*. Not by chance, some of the greatest discoveries of our times, like that of the nuclear fission, primarily served and serves ends that may well endanger the very existence of human civilisation. The most important branch of contemporary science thus does not seem to be legitimately regarded as high cultural activity in the sense indicated – it is just not autonomous in elementary sense. Is this, however, an acceptable conclusion? This is the question to be faced.

There are no less serious internal problems and difficulties concerning the idea of "high art" as well. I shall discuss them here mostly referring to (or at least having in mind) the conception of "high literary art" (in the sense of *belles lettres*). It is certainly the field of artistic creativity with the relatively widest circle of stable, regular recipients and, at the same time, that branch of art in which these strains appear in the sharpest and most direct form.

In modernity all works of literature (and all the other branches of art) succeed or fail to meet with their intended, adequate recipients (the internal *telos* of all kinds of artistic creativity) though the mediation of the institutions of cultural market like bookstores. It may seem that such a "commercialisation" represents a debasement of the very idea of literature as high art. Putting a price on such works makes them comparable to all other marketable goods, satisfying some, real or merely imagined human need, in general completely external to their own nature. It makes non-sense of the idea that such works can meaningfully claim to be intrinsically valuable.

This, however, completely misunderstands and misrepresents the historical role and actual impact of the rise of cultural markets in early modernity. It is only marketisation of arts that made possible the emergence of the very idea of high art. For only the great homogenising power of the market could and did succeed in destroying that pre-modern patron-client relationship, in the framework of which artistic activities (conceived as a perhaps more sophisticated kind of artisanship) were earlier socially embedded. It made them, on the one hand, *free* from serving the expectations and following the directions of their high standing patron. Simultaneously it made, at least in principle, their results, the works of art available to all recipients who have such interest, quite independently of their social standing. Of course, they have to be able and willing to pay their (in case of works of literature generally not so forbidding) market price. And even the socially restrictive character of this elementary condition is alleviated due to the development of such modern institutions as public libraries.

However, this marketisation of all products of artistic creativity, making possible the very idea of "high art", at the same time seems to undermine and confute in practice its very claim to universal significance. This idea historically emerged together with that what is posited as its sharp, direct opposite, the "low": works of the vulgar, popular, commercial or mass art. These are conceived as works, serving merely the end of some thought- and valueless entertainment, driven by momentary monetary interests of their producers, by their assumed immediate, wide marketability. On the cultural market, however, they appear as potential *competitors*. They share the same channels and media of communication, their production and distribution are realised through the same type of institutions, have analogous forms of objectivations etc. No doubt, there are always clear indicators of their difference, well recognisable by a culturally savvy consumer. But it always will be his/her decision on what to spend in a given occasion his/her money.

No doubt, from the viewpoint of the reception of works of art there is something absurd in the presupposition of such a competitive relation. A person may be well-versed in the classics of literature (time to time even re-reading some of them) and following new works of high literary art with lively interest, while at some other times being quite happy to read a not so badly written

thriller. Well, he or she now just wants to be entertained – what is wrong with that?

The cultural market itself, however, seems to relativise this difference that is posited by the very notion of high art as the sharpest opposition allowing no mediations. It certainly, as already indicated, articulates it in terms of the differing strategies of the (broadly conceived) cultural producers – short- *versus* long-term success on the market. Already this, however, seems to transform a direct opposition into some type of quantitatively characterisable difference that seems to allow various degrees of gradation and thus mediation.

If so, then cultural history only supports and justifies this vague indication of the market. Because in fact high and popular-commercial arts did and do represent rather two poles of a continuum with blurred boundaries. There has always been and still is a whole spectrum of "middle-brow" works of art, "double-coded" works that can be read, viewed, listened to with expectations of authentic aesthetic pleasure or as just pleasing entertainments. (Let say, as far as music is concerned, the works of Johann Strauss, Offenbach or Lehár.)

This is further complicated by the fact that the cultural market, which emancipated art from the control and direction of a patron, at the very same time set also its recipient "free". It is his/her decision what they look for, what they want and in fact enjoy in any work of art. The novels of Fennimore Cooper are the first true classics of American literature. But today they are mostly read by (usually male) adolescents as tales of some exiting, great adventure. And nothing stops a recipient to read, let say, Balzac's *Old Goriot* merely as a good yarn, perhaps just skimming all those longish and "boring" descriptive passages.

The great aesthetic theories of the past, from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century faced up to and attempted to answer these difficulties. By offering a general characterisation of the authentic work of art (as primarily determined by its form), they made clear their fundamental, irreconcilable difference from the works of a commercial-popular pseudo-art, and simultaneously articulated in a well-grounded, argumentative way the normative requirements that any appropriate reception of them must satisfy.

But the late modernist and post-modernist artistic tendencies actually robed the aesthetic tradition of this orientating function. Avant-garde and

post-modernist art, in its ever more radical search of "originality", challenging the expectations even of cultivated recipients, consciously rejected some of the characteristics which this tradition (in its own time quite rightly) regarded as constitutive to any authentic work of art. In respect of the fine arts the contemporary movements of environmental art or performative art actually deny the very notion of a "work" of art as a stable and enduring objectivation, independent from the comportment of its author/producer. And the post-modernist works of literature programmatically aim at the elimination of the personal voice of the author (in lyric poetry) or that of the narrator (in the *nouveau roman*) to make the text completely self-referential. This, of course, would deny any intrinsic relation to a possible reception, which would undermine the very notion of art. What is actually expected in practice is a reception to come, its "futurisation" – works of art are intended for the viewers in "museum of the future" or for readers that their own influence and impact will first create and educate.

But in this process something more was lost than merely the orientating function of aesthetics in regard of late modernist and contemporary art. The aesthetic tradition was animated by a much broader and more fundamental expectation. High art (or high culture in general) were seen as capable and destined to replace and supersede the function and power of religion – to offer an orientation toward universally valid but worldly human ends, able to confer meaning upon the life of each individual and thereby fill that normative deficit, which emerged in the result of the on-going processes of secularisation.

This long-held belief and expectation – to transform the universality claim of high art into empirical reality – ultimately proved to be untenable. For even after the disappearance of the basic, socially grounded cultural inequalities (liquidation of illiteracy, coming of systems of obligatory elementary education) high art remained a matter of stable interest for a restricted, relatively small circle of recipients – in general, up to the present no more than the fifth of the whole adult population. No doubt, the number of readers has significantly grown – only they regularly read "low" trash and not works of high literature. And similarly, very many listen today to music, only not that of Mozart or Beethoven, but the production of the latest rock star, who usually will be forgotten in a few years.

In no way does this imply the denial of the practical impact and significance of high art. First of all its particularly constructed traditions usually play an important role in the construction and maintenance of the consciousness of national identity (especially so in nationalistic ideologies). This is, however, something that ultimately – in opposition to its claim to universal validity - divides and not unifies. On the other hand, in respect of the minority of its true recipients, its works can have a genuinely life-transforming effect, opening the way to radical self-reflection upon its habitual course. (The episode of Bergotte's death in Proust's great novel provides a great artistic representation of its power.)

But what high art has lost in modernity, due to its very autonomy, is any *preset* social function that its work would be required or expected to fulfil. In this sense it became "defunctionalised". Each new work of high art today must create its own function, to find recipients for whom it has an enlightening-transforming meaning in some sense and respect. In this regard it is rather characteristic that what Kant regarded as one of the basic function of authentic art – to become the vehicle of sociability, creating a terrain of friendly social intercourse among equals in a highly competitive society, in contemporary conditions is fulfilled rather by works of "low", commercial art. The just running, latest Hollywood comedy or the last great rock-concert performed at a sporting arena are certainly better suited to such task, being familiar to so many. Interest in recent works of high art, due to the great individualisation of taste and the great variety of available choices create little commonness and social bonding even among the minority of their committed recipients.

However, the fact that so many of the originally held expectations and beliefs, motivating the very introduction of the notion of high art, proved to be fundamentally illusory – this fact makes it advisable, nay necessary to raise the critical question about the coherence, or at least contemporary relevance of its very concept. And such an investigation raises serious doubts – both about the cognitive and the empirical-pragmatic adequacy of its outlined conception.

What concerns the first: identifying high art with the intrinsically valuable works for (at least in principle) every human being, with the "classics" of the past and the present leaves us with a "conceptual deficit". For it offers no conceptual space for the characterisation of the majority of the contemporary

artistic productions that are certainly relevant to its concept. As earlier underlined, in their respect belonging to high art is certainly a claim and a claim that in most cases fails. Creating masterpieces, the "classics of the future" is a very hard task, very rarely crowned with success. But this claim is, even when it fails, nonetheless real. These are works that according to the intentions of their authors, the expectations of their recipients and the appropriate institutional signals locating them in the realms of cultural production belong to high art. They fail just because they do not succeed to realise these unmistakably recognisable intentions and to meet the appropriate expectations of the culturally literate recipients. In all these, relevant respects they are works of high art (they certainly do not belong to the category of either "low"-popular or "double-coded" works), but they will relatively soon fade away, been forgotten – becoming perhaps just a footnote in particularly detailed histories of art. The outlined and usually accepted normative concept of high art is simply incapable to account for them.

In view of this failure it may perhaps seem to be appropriate to turn to that empirical-pragmatical distinction the cultural markets offer to draw between the "high" and the "low" – all the more because, as I have argued, it was the emergence of this market that actually allowed the formation of a conception of "high art". For in this respect their difference consists of that between two opposed strategies of success, independently of the fact whether in any particular case these strategies work or fail. Long-term, historically stable and cumulative success (being the empirical expression of that "test of the time" that traditionally has been regarded the true indicator of artistic validity) is opposed to the instantaneous, but very rapidly fading away mass impact. It will take a very long time for a truly great work of high art to reach (of course, in a historically cumulative sense) an equally wide circle of recipients that a mass cultural product may achieve in that short period that it commands the attention of readers or listeners, before it became completely forgotten. But the former proves on the market its greatness and artistic validity by being in the above sense a successful competitor of the latter.

Does, however, this assumption pass the test of reality? Proust's *Recherche* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, both written quite some time ago, in the first two decades of the last century, are the truly path-breaking, great classics of modernist literature. How long a time may, however, it take for either of them (and their

translations into numerous languages) to reach a readership that can be even compared to that of the recipients of the *Harry Potter* fictions (especially if one counts also all their "derivates": the viewers of the films, DVDs and CDs, not to mention the visitors of an own theme park)? And more importantly, what will happen, if they fail this test, do not succeed in any foreseeable time to achieve such an end? Would this prove that they cannot be legitimately counted among the intrinsically valuable works of high literary art?

If someone in response would refer to the particularly "high-brow" character of these two great novels that makes them an uncharacteristic exception, history of reception of art would undermine such a possible counter-argument. Let say, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is with us almost two hundred and fifty years as one of the great classical works of English literature. And it is certainly not "high-brow" in any sense – just a great, truly enjoyable and engaging story. But I am convinced that in a "competition" for readership, it does not have a chance to beat our *Harry Potter*.

So we are seemingly in a conundrum. Neither the normative, nor the empirical-pragmatic approach seem to offer adequate means (though for quite differing ways and reasons) to convincingly characterise the conception and delimit the realm of "high art". No doubt, some could and would use this fact for arguing that its very concept is an ideological construct of literati and intellectuals, to provide a spurious sanctification for their own products/objectivations, to endow them illegitimately by a universal human significance. This is certainly not the view represented by the essays that follow. On the other hand they take these strains and internal difficulties quite seriously – to address them is one of their principal aim.

Let me refer at this point to one of the important causes of these difficulties, which also indicates one of the main methodological assumptions that unites essays in this volume. The discussed-criticised attempts to clarify the notion of "high art" (and more generally: "high culture") fail, because they intend to answer this question once for all. This is understandable, since from the time of the emergence of its idea, it certainly denotes a valid and important *continuous* task. This, however, should not obscure the no less important fact that the conditions and manners of approaching the solution of this task change – sometimes radically – in history, because they depend on the historically shifting and altering ways, these activities are embedded into the actual

social-economic structure of society and on the on-going cultural struggles that partly react to them. It is in view of such considerations that the writings included here have a strongly, emphatically historicist orientation.

On the background of such an underlying unity the essays in this volume clearly fall into two different groups. The first part of these writings attempts to address the difficulties and strains of our notion of high culture directly, but they deal primarily (though certainly not exclusively) with the cognitive constituents of its idea, i.e. with science and philosophy. The problems connected with the idea and with the past and present practices of high art (and its antagonistic relation to popular-mass art) are primarily addressed by the essays constituting the second part of this collection (though some of them continue the discussion of the more general questions related to the idea of high culture). They, however, approach this task indirectly – through the critical discussion of the main, most influential theories of authentic, high art from Kant to Adorno, of the ways they account for and attempt to overcome the internal difficulties and ambiguities of its idea. It is my hope that such a multi-faceted, though indirect approach makes possible to understand better both the richness and the complexity of its conception and its internal strains.

Part I

Chapter One

A Society of Culture
The Constitution of Modernity

The connection between reason and imagination, on the one hand, and modernity as culture, on the other, may be too intimate to be captured solely in the causal terms of impact and influence. The opposition between reason and imagination is itself the product of cultural modernity, and at the same time, it is what confers upon this culture (at least in one of the constitutive meanings of this term) the character making it modern. The notions of "reason" and "imagination" have, of course, a genealogy quite independent of, and reaching far back beyond, such a relative newcomer to our conceptual equipment as the idea of "culture." But it is only as cultural powers, that is, as culture-creating, that reason and imagination appear in an antithetic unity, replacing the old antinomies between reason and the passions, the senses, or revelation. Only conceived in this way does *phantasia*, originally understood as the intermediary between perceiving and thinking,[1] or even as an inferior component of rational knowledge itself

[1] Compare Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 427b–429a.

providing the primary material for the *katalepsis* of the intellect,[2] acquire the dignity to be the excluding supplementary to reason, as equally original and fundamental to our capacity of being human. In a Hegelising language the concept of culture is the ground upon which the opposition between reason and imagination can become erected, and the space that is filled by them, and thus transformed into an articulated field endowed with a force of its own. So to be *gründlich*, to grasp this opposition at its originating *ground*, it is perhaps advisable to enquire into the constitutive connection linking it with the concept of "culture."

Heidegger once listed[3] – alongside such rather self-evident features as machine technology, modern science or secularisation – the conception of culture, the comprehension and performance of human activities as culture, among the most fundamental phenomena of modernity. Let us make, at least for the time being, a somewhat more modest claim: it is only under conditions of modernity that the ways people live and act in the world, and also the manner they understand this world, are conceived by them as constituting a form of culture, that is, as not being simply natural, or God-ordained, but as something man-made and re-makable which conforms with equally humanly created and changeable standards and ends. Cultural modernity is a culture which knows itself as culture and as *one* among many. And precisely because this self-reflexive consciousness belongs specifically and particularly to modernity, its positing of itself as a society of culture makes it *the* society of culture, or, as Hegel would say, defines it as the world-epoch of *Bildung*.[4]

This consciousness of culture is, however, a deeply ambiguous, if not split, one, for the designation "culture" interrelates and unites two concepts that seem to be utterly different. On the one hand, "culture" means some pervasive aspect of all non-biologically fixed human behaviour in its dominant and contemporary understanding: the meaning-bearing and meaning-transmitting aspect of human practices and their results, "the symbolic dimension of social

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[2] Compare Cicero, *Academica II*, I, 40–42.

[3] Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1972, pp. 69–70.

[4] Compare Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ch. VI, B.I.

events" (Geertz) that allows individuals to live in a life-world, the interpretation of which they essentially share, and to act in it in ways that are mutually understandable to them.

This broad or anthropological use of the word "culture" is, however, accompanied by another, seemingly quite unrelated one which could be called the "high" or value-marked meaning of the same term. In this latter sense it designates a circumscribed and very specific set of human practices – first of all the arts and the sciences – which, under the conditions of Western modernity, are regarded as autonomous, that is, as having a value in themselves. In spite of the efforts frequently undertaken to construct either an immanent meaning-connection between these two ideas of culture, or to dissociate them completely, they also remain in contemporary discursive practices in this paradoxical relation of close association of incomparables. The force which keeps them together is not that of logic, but of their historical origin. Culture as we understand it is the invention of the Enlightenment, or perhaps more exactly, the outcome of the way the Enlightenment invented and defined itself, both negatively as critical, and positively as a constructive historical power. The perplexing unity of the two meanings of culture is the unity of these two aspects in the project of Enlightenment.

The broad or anthropological notion of culture originated in the Enlightenment as *critique,* in its effort "to raise the edifice of reason upon the ruin of opinions." In the attempt to destroy the irrational "superstitions" of the age, seen as the cause of all its ills, the Enlightenment mobilised the hitherto neglected regions of human time and space. It endeavoured to demonstrate that people living beyond the pale of our traditions, following other precepts of conduct and possessing a different set of beliefs, had nevertheless led a satisfactory and/or civilised way of existence. And as it became increasingly obvious that the "prejudices" distorting reason have an "external" social-institutional support, this critique also became more and more radical, finding ever new targets, spreading over new spheres and arenas of life: initially, the theological and metaphysical systems of the past; then the canons of classical literature; followed by the ascetic morality and the overall authority of the Church; "heroic" historiography and its myths; the artificial manners of the court and the parasitism of the aristocracy, together with the institutions of feudalism and the antiquated system of economy supporting them; and lastly the arena

of politics itself and the institution of the absolutist state. In this steady expansion of the scope of critique not only has the subject-matter of history been enormously extended, but also a new way of comprehending the present has arisen. Contemporaneity was no longer seen in terms of the hallowed tradition of our ancestors which conferred legitimacy upon its institutions and provides us with exemplary models of action. Generally speaking, the legacy of the past lost the meaning of tradition: something which has a normatively valid, internally binding claim upon the living. It *now* acquired the sense of all those accumulated and enduring "works" and accomplishments of earlier generations – be they the most humble and ordinary – which transmit definite forms of conduct and ways of thinking, embody acquired abilities and tastes that can either contribute to *or* hinder the perfecting of human spirit and the amelioration of life. Thus a conception of culture emerged as inherited and inheritable human objectivations constituting both a *determining force* upon, but also a *determinable resource* for, our activities. They are the power the past exercises upon us, conditioning the way we live. But they are also the material, the storehouse of possibilities which we can – if we do not fall under the spell of blind habit and uncritically accepted "opinion" – selectively use to create something *new*, to make novel acquisitions and discoveries satisfying the demands of reason under the changing conditions of existence. Enlightenment thus proclaimed a new age and type of society – a society of culture as opposed to societies of tradition, to "traditional" societies.[5] And it was precisely for this reason that the new age could acquire its self-consciousness under the nonsensical name of "modernity."

"*Modernus*," "modern," means simply what is just now, the contemporary, as opposed to the "*antiquus*," to the bygone, the passed away. To obtain a non-relativised sense which can designate a whole new epoch of world history, the "modern" had to acquire a new antonym so it could be opposed not to the

[5] Or, as the young, still "Graecoman" Friedrich Schlegel, perhaps for the fist time giving a genuinely historiosophical formulation to this idea, stated this contrast: modern times represent a society of "artificial culture" characterised by the *System der unendlichen Fortschreitung* as opposed to societies of a "natural culture" developing according to the *System des Kreislaufes*. Compare "Vom Wert des Studiums der Griechen und Römer, in *Kritische Ausgabe*, Padeborn, Schoningh, 1969, Abt. I, Bd I, pp. 631ff.

"ancient," but to the "traditional," to that which cannot keep up with the relentless force of historically progressing time. By announcing itself to be modern, the age located its essence in its ability to be always up-to-date, to be abreast of the times, where time is conceived of not as the inertial power of erosion, but as the creative force of change, which can be missed or harnessed for human ends.

However, this creativity of time needs harnessing. And at this point the Enlightenment inextricably fused the broad, anthropological notion of culture with another one as its necessary supplement in one and the same practical project. Replacing the principle of imitation with that of rational innovation, the new age inaugurated by the Enlightenment proclaimed itself as an unprecedented expansion and the steady perfecting of human potentials. This opening up of the horizon of historical expectations, however, did not mean the affirmation of an unforeseeable and uncontrollable dynamism of change. The coming epoch of the reign of reason was at the same time envisaged as that of a never before encountered social cohesion, security and stability. The Enlightenment hoped to create circumstances in which change would no longer signify the breakdown of the normative order and a loss of social identity and continuity, due to either accidents or to the play of passions and naked interests. The positive program of the Enlightenment was to impose a unique direction charted out by reason upon the processes of change for which the path had been cleared by the destructive force of critique. This demanded, as guarantees, appropriate powers stemming from and directly expressing the very font of human specificity and superiority: man's ability to create an order of meanings and values and to superimpose it upon the senseless causal sequence of events. Only if activities embodying and directly realising human spirit, *esprit humain*, *Geist*, can be set free from all restrictions, can social and cultural change – cultural in the broad sense of the word – be submitted to the *universally valid ends* which culture, in its highest and most authentic sense of "high culture," provides. And only then can innovative progress, on the one hand, and social integrity and stability, on the other, be reconciled, for culture then will no longer be merely conventions and opinions, but rather will be based on the progressive realisation of the conscious values that are dictated by a rational and free spirit as the genuine "nature" of man.

Socially stratified societies usually possess some hierarchical classification of various types of activities and interpret some of them as "higher" or "elevated" in the sense of befitting persons of distinction, power or prestige. Without doubt, the way "high culture" of modernity became concretely constituted and conceived depended, to a significant extent, upon such a pregiven, inherited evaluation of the social practices in question, which, as the conjunctural outcome of a particular historical development, represented both the precondition and the unreflexively accepted tradition of the Enlightenment itself. But it did not simply codify these activities by conferring upon them a new legitimation and label: the transformation from what belongs to *politesse* and cultivation into what is cultural (in the narrow/"high" sense of the word) involved the imposition of an interpretive grid which also served as a latent principle of selectivity. The very notion of culture implied criteria by which practices, accepted as *cultural sui generis*, were thought of as being able to satisfy. In this way the Enlightenment conferred a degree of systematic and conceptual organization upon the emerging sphere of high culture, both reinforcing processes under way and endowing them with new direction and meaning. The most important criteria and requirements in question perhaps can be signalled by the catchwords of *objectivation*, *innovativeness*, *dematerialisation*, and *autonomy*.

To qualify as belonging to the realm of high culture, a practice, first of all, had to meet the requirement of *creativity*, and in two senses. On the one hand, it had to be interpretable as being *productive*, that is, as bringing forth something detachable from the comportment and person of the practitioner, something which in the continuity of its subsistence can intersubjectively transmit accumulated experiences, insights or abilities. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all the terms we now use for the designation of various branches and kinds of high cultural activity ("science," "philosophy," "art," "literature") underwent, by and large simultaneously, a fundamental semantic shift from connoting definite types of personal dispositions (habituses of mind) or abilities to signifying particular activities of *objectivation* and/or the totality of their products.

High-cultural activities, however, must also be thought of as creative in another, stricter sense of this word: what they produce must be novel, not in simply transmitting but enlarging the scope of human possibilities.

The historical transition to a society of culture meant the replacement of the authority of the *origin* as the standard to be followed, with the demand of *originality*, which any "work," *objectivation*, must satisfy to be regarded as belonging to the sphere of culture in the strict sense. Novelty became both a constitutive condition and one of the criteria of evaluation for all that claims a sui generis cultural significance.

The creation of something new, however, only has such a significance when it is a work, an embodiment of "spirit," that is, when the resulting objectivation can be thought of as fulfilling its function solely in the character of an *ideal* object, that is, as a complex of meanings. In their social interpretation, practices qualifying as high-cultural ones have undergone a process of "dematerialisation:" the physical reality of their product became regarded as the transparent, diaphanous vehicle of significations constituting their essential reality. Works of culture are objects that are appropriated solely through being understood. This process of "idealisation," which certainly began much earlier than the Enlightenment, found its most dramatic manifestation in the dominant conception of the fine arts – from the late Renaissance theories of *disegno* and *concetto*, through to the classical conception of the ontological status of the art-work as *Schein*, as sensuous presence "liberated from the scaffolding of its purely material nature,"[6] to the expressivist theories of art like that of Croce and Collingwood, or to the Sartrean characterisation of the being of the work of art as irreal. Less spectacular, but essentially parallel, processes can also be observed in the case of discursive and literary textual practices. Here one also meets a tendency to divorce what a work of science, philosophy, or literature (up to the great turn of modernism) really *is* from the linguistic medium of its expression and its direct inscription. This is unreflexively entailed not only in the customary use of such notions as "scientific theory" or "philosophical system," but underlies many of our elementary cultural practices, such as those of "translation" or "quotation" in their modern sense.

I cannot attempt here to give even a cursory characterisation of these constitutive criteria of the "cultural." I wish merely to underline their effectivity,

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[6] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 38.

perhaps most clearly exemplified by the case of *religion*. In most "traditional" societies religious representations and practices provided the fundamental and ultimate framework of interpretation through the sense which they gave to existential experiences. The majority of the representatives of the Enlightenment regarded such a function as indispensable. Nevertheless, religion, the validity of which was directly linked to the sanctity of its transcendent source and origin to be preserved in unchanged purity, did not enter the realm of high culture. One important facet of the process of secularisation consists precisely in this loss of the function of a central *cultural* power to be distinguished from the actual spread of belief and disbelief as a sociological fact.

I would like, however, to make at least some very schematic remarks concerning the concept of *autonomy*, usually associated, as its distinguishing mark, with the culture of modernity. First of all, autonomy should not be simply identified with the social evaluation of some activities as being *autotelic*, that is, valuable in and for themselves. Such an understanding is much more widespread and is well illustrated by the classic conception of *philosophia* as the highest and purest form of *praxis*. But in pre-modern societies activities are usually regarded as autotelic because they are seen as satisfying the noblest human desires, so that their exercise coincides with living the best, the most fulfilling, human life. The modern conception of autonomy represents, in a sense, the direct negation of this idea, since it implies that the objectified results of definite kinds of practices are valuable in themselves according to criteria wholly immanent to them and completely independent from their direct impact upon the life-activity of their producers and/or recipients. The idea of the autonomy of culture, in this (its negative) sense, expresses and reinforces processes through which definite types of practices became *socially disembedded* (through the dissociation of patronage-relations, commodification, professionalisation, and so on), that is, ceased to be, on the one hand, subordinate to pre-given, externally fixed social tasks, and on the other, to be internally organised around determinate social occasions and situations and addressed to some particular, restricted circle of recipients.

But it essentially belonged to the Enlightenment's idea of culture that this process of social dissociation was conceived by it as emancipation, as guaranteeing that freedom which alone is appropriate to the activities of the "spirit,"

geistige Tätigkeiten. Cultural autonomy also meant *autochthony*, the determination of the activities in question solely by internal-immanent factors, their ability to follow in their change and development no other requirements and logic but that of their own. Cultural practices in this understanding constitute a sphere in which no other authority counts but that of talent and no other force is applied but that of the better argument. They can be archonic, directing and guiding processes of social change towards the realisation of genuinely valid ends, because in their internal organisation they embody what is the, perhaps never completely realisable, *telos* of social development: the reconciliation of the self-conscious autonomy of each individual with the harmonious integration of all, made possible when everyone follows the dictates of the "universal voice." As embodiments of the end of social evolution and as creators of binding ends for social evolution, "high-cultural" activities, freed from being subordinated to externally imposed and particularistic social tasks, do not become afunctional – only in this way do they acquire the *universal* function of general social orientation and integration which in the past was usually performed by sacralised, and therefore ossified, systems of historically conditioned religious belief.

It was Kant who first consistently and comprehensively charted out the internal constitution of such a sphere of high culture and, by conceptually articulating it, also uncovered its deep internal strains. As distinguished from the *culture of skill* – a cultivation consisting in the development of our capacity to realise purposes in general, any kind of purposes, be they right or wrong – the *culture of discipline* (*Kultur der Zucht*) means the cultivation of our capacity to freely posit meaningful and valid ends for our activities: it consists in the "liberation of the will from the despotism of desires which renders us incapable of making our own choices."[7] This sphere of a "higher culture" which "prepares man for a sovereignty in which reason alone is to dominate"[8] consists of the sciences, on the one hand, and the fine arts, *schöne Künste*, on the other: it is constituted through their strict antithesis (even if, though on a

[7] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, section 83, in *Werke*, Cassirer edn, Bd 5, Berlin, Cassirer-V, 1914, p. 512.

[8] *ibid.*, p. 513.

single occasion,[9] Kant mentions the *humanioria* as a mediating link between the two).

The sciences are based upon the legislative power of *understanding* (*Verstand*), as it progressively emancipates itself from the empirical limitations of the human senses and from the pragmatic restraints that natural needs impose upon cognitive interests. Artistic creativity, on the other hand, is rooted in the emancipation of *productive imagination* precisely from the constraints of understanding and its pre-given concepts. Both articulate and objectify attitudes and viewpoints towards the world as empirical-phenomenal reality which are communicable, capable of being shared, and inter-subjectively binding, but these attitudes are diametrically opposed to each other. They are opposed as the objectivity of knowledge is opposed to the subjectivity of feeling, as the unity of scientific truth, ideally constituting a single, coherent system, is opposed to the irreducible plurality of objects of beauty, each strictly individual and irreplaceable; as the unambiguous and univocal meaning of concepts is opposed to the plurivocal and inexhaustible meaning of the aesthetic ideal ("a presentation of imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, that is, no *concept*, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely");[10] as the strict, universal and exactly reproducible rules of scientific method are opposed to a free creativity which no determinate rule can encompass and the unity of which is manifested only in an inimitable "manner" as the expression of a unique personality. Science represents a collective endeavour in which even the most significant individual achievements become surpassed in the cumulative process of cognition, so that even the greatest scientific minds are only artisans, technicians of reason, *Vernunftkünstler*,[11] since the tasks they solve must be impersonal, their solution exactly replicable by others for their achievements to count as scientific at all. Fine art, on the other hand, "is the art of the genius,"[12] a favourite of nature, possessing skills that "cannot be communicated,"[13] the work of which can only serve as an exemplary model to be

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[9] *ibid*., p. 432.

[10] *ibid*., p. 389.

[11] Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B867.

[12] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, p. 382.

[13] *ibid*., p. 384.

followed, but not reproduced or imitated. And, most importantly, in science we encounter nature as the sum total of all objects of possible experience insofar as they stand in a thoroughgoing interconnection according to empirical laws, the meaning and necessity of which is unfathomable to human insight. In the arts, on the other hand, we imaginatively create a "second nature," a nature which "has held us in favour,"[14] *Gunst*, and which is in harmony with the free play of the constitutive powers of our consciousness and thus satisfies our deepest, specifically human, needs. The dichotomy between the rational-intellectual and the imaginary thus receives here a clear articulation and in their polarity they demarcate the legitimate realm of the cultural – but with an important proviso.

For this great reconstruction which confers a conceptual grounding upon the *de facto* articulation of high culture, simultaneously "deconstructs" its conception in the Enlightenment. How can the idea of a unity of culture – without which its guiding role is inconceivable – be upheld if it is organised around the direct opposition between intellect (understanding) and imagination (and the power of .judgement associated with it)? In Kant's formulation, the autonomy of the aesthetic experience should have provided the transition and the mediating middle between theoretical and practical reason attesting to their unity – in fact its introduction resulted only in a new dualism. Kant conceives the relationship between the sciences and the arts as one of complementarity, but he never indicates how to demarcate the legitimate scope of those opposed attitudes towards the world which they objectify and make autonomous. The premises of the Weberian conclusion concerning the irreconcilable conflict between the great cultural value-spheres were already, even if unintentionally, laid down by Kant.

This unintended outcome partly follows from a seemingly strange architectonic imbalance in Kant's transcendental constitution of the realm of a "culture of discipline." Of the three superior cognitive powers, *Erkenntnisvermögen*, which in their interplay constitute the specific structure of human consciousness and in their diverse relations ground the possible human attitudes to the world, only two have a cultural "representation:" reason, fulfilling the

[14] *ibid*., pp. 458–459.

highest function of the unification and alone legislating in the realm of morality, does not ground any independent sphere of cultural activity. Or does it? For what are, on Kant's own account, the historical forms of positive religion (what he calls *Kirchenglaube*) if not cultural embodiments of practical reason? Nevertheless, Kant does not admit them to the realm of a higher culture. For, in contradistinction to science and art, religion in the form of some "ecclesiastic faith" does not emancipate its underlying transcendental principle, but acts in just the opposite way: that is, it introduces heteronomous incentives into the realm of moral action which, to be deserving of its name, must always already be thought of as autonomous. Precisely therefore, and again in opposition to genuine cultural forms, a form of positive religion "is incapable of being universally communicated with convincing force."[15] Its necessity is based solely on "a peculiar weakness of human nature"[16] as an empirical fact, giving rise to a need for props to ensure even the external compliance en masse with the imperatives of morality.

However, by this Kant seems to undermine the very meaning the Enlightenment ascribed to a "higher culture." For not only is it the case that, given "human weakness," the question of possible social effectivity necessarily also arises in respect of those spheres (of truth and beauty) which can acquire their autonomy only through cultural development: as is well known, from the mid-1880s on, Kant is increasingly preoccupied and pessimistic about the problem of the spread of the Enlightenment. Much more importantly, his conception inevitably raises the question: how can culture provide us at all with the guiding ends of social development, if the sole ends and values in themselves, those of morality, cannot be transformed into direct cultural powers? Up to the end of his life Kant gave contradictory answers to this problem of the possibility of a "moral cultivation" through history. But the sole answer which is reconcilable with the logic of his system (and the only one to be found in his systematic writings) is *negative*: cultivation through high culture merely provides the negative condition for, but in no way guarantees, the ability to follow genuinely valid ends, befitting our humanity. It merely weakens or eliminates the despotism of natural desires to do good *or* evil by our

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[15] Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, *Werke*, Bd 6, p. 255.

[16] *ibid*., p. 248.

own choice. Culture is the ultimate purpose (*letzter Zweck*) of nature with man, but it does not endow us with a directive with which to approximate the final purpose (*Endzweck*) of human existence. In all, its autonomy must rely on something else.

Thus the first, and paradigmatic, attempt at the philosophical articulation and legitimation of the Enlightenment's conception of culture actually ended with the revocation of the basic idea of its project. Not surprisingly it was then almost immediately followed by the cultural utopias of an anti-Enlightenment, which were motivated by the intention to realise the failed promises of the Enlightenment. Before the turn of the century this had received an exemplary formulation in the enigmatic document referred to as the *Earliest System-Program of German Idealism*. It proclaims the idea of the unification of the "monotheism of reason and heart" with the "polytheism of imagination and art" in a "new mythology," but a mythology which "must be in the service of Ideas, must be a mythology of Reason."[17] Instead of the differentiation and autonomy of the cultural spheres, this program announces the need for their reintegration into the totality of life; instead of the replacement of religion and sacralised tradition by the free activities of value-creating spirit, it proposes a re-sacralisation of the latter. Instead of a culturally produced "second nature" which, by its very character, demands and evokes a critically distanced and reflective attitude, it aims at the synthetic creation of a "second naturalness" as a higher-level return to immediacy. But making philosophy mythological still only intends "to make people rational," to "create a higher unity" in which "enlightened and unenlightened clasp hands," so that there will never again be a "blind trembling of people before its wise men and priests" but "universal freedom and equality of spirit will reign."[18]

This anti-Enlightenment, which still retains at least some goals of the Enlightenment, is, from early Romanticism on, a regularly recurring feature of the history of cultural modernity. Some of its ideas even resound in theories of post-modernity: a programmatic syncretism, a tendency towards the aestheticisation not only of theory but of ethics and politics as well. In general,

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[17] Hegel, "Das älteste Systemprogram des deutschen Idealismus," in *Mythologie der Vernunft*, ed. C. Jamme and H. Schneider, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1984, p. 13.

[18] *ibid*., p. 14.

one could see in the narrativisation of all discourses merely a diluted version of their mythologisation. However, this mythologisation is not presented today in the name of the utopia of a future all-encompassing unity. Even if the often celebratory tone in which some representatives of postmodernism talk about difference, dissent, and dispersal evokes some associations with the anarchist project (itself one of the heirs of the Enlightenment), the overall thrust and sense of these theories is deeply anti-utopian. While many elements in the proposed diagnoses of a postmodernity – let us say, the dissolution of all *grand narratives* in Lyotard, or the reign of *simulacra* in Baudrillard – show far-reaching similarities of content with some of the most despairing criticisms of cultural modernity (in Heidegger or Adorno), these phenomena are now accepted with an air of aestheticising self-satisfaction or resigned disillusionment.

Historical experiences have certainly much to do with the fact that anti-Enlightenment – or should one say, less contentiously, a fundamental critique of Enlightenment – no longer takes on the form of the utopia of a remythologisation. But it also no longer needs to appear in such a form. For, in the meantime, not only the promises of the Enlightenment – which degenerated into the myth of engineering a society of universal happiness on the basis of the sole "scientific worldview" – but also the basic concepts in terms of which the original project could only be formulated, have lost believability and attractivity; not least, the idea of a "higher culture" itself has seemingly been divested of empirical support. Their critique no longer needs to invoke other alternatives to attack the way they have been legitimated. It can rest satisfied by the demonstration that these ideas have no hold upon, or relevance to, contemporary reality.

Modernism and postmodernism have brought forth cultural processes which seem to undermine the very conditions and criteria through which the conception of a "high culture" could and had been articulated in modernity. Loosely, one can speak of processes of *desobjectivisation*, *rematerialisation*, *divorce of novelty from creativity*, and *heterochthony* as tendencies indicating the direction of changes in the character of appropriate practices and/or their dominant interpretations.

By *desobjectivisation* I mean a trend towards the unmaking of the idea of a "work" of culture as a self-subsisting (ideal) object – either, in the hard

sciences, in favour of an uninterrupted *process* of decentred communication mediated perhaps only by signals of interlinked electronic apparatuses, or, in the case of the arts, in favour of the discontinuous and disruptive *event*, an occurrence without clear boundaries. (And one should also include here interpretations according to which even traditional "works of art" acquire an aesthetic significance only in the fleeting and unreplicable acts of appropriate reception alone.) *Rematerialisation* refers to a process of the *evaporation of the sense*, either (in the sciences) its reduction to a complex of formulae, the non-operative constituents of which seem only to fulfil a referential function in, and in relation to, highly specific and particular experimental situations, but do not constitute a universe of comprehensible meanings, a systematically intelligible interpretation of their alleged referents; or (in the arts) an intentional blockage of relations of signification, in order to self-referentially foreground the signifier, the material medium of communication itself, and for setting free its "energies of semiosis." *Novelty*, of course, retains its role of the constitutive criterion of cultural significance. However, its ever more radicalised demand becomes dissociated from the idea of a *creative subject* as the intentional source of a consciously willed originality. This is expressed not only in such interpretative-theoretical ideas as "the death of the author," but also, to some degree, in the changes in the character of the respective practices themselves, seen, for example, in the predominance of multiple authorship in the "hard" sciences, often comprising scientists of different specialities, none of whom possess (at least formally recognised) competence in respect of the whole content and subject-matter of the paper. In some theories of intertextuality cultural activities in general come to resemble the image of Novalis' "monstrous mill" which, without a builder and a miller, only grinds itself.

Lastly, the problem of *autonomy*. High-cultural practices are certainly autonomous and not only in the sociological sense of taking place as specialised-professional activities within the framework of some functionally differentiated network of institutions. They are also autonomous in the sense that their results are socially posited as valuable in themselves, that is, evaluable only according to standards and criteria internal and immanent to the particular sphere in question, without taking into account their potential and "external" socio-practical effects. However, this normative autonomy of cultural practices does not ensure their *autochthony*, that is, both the internal and independent determination and direction of their development. This can best be

illustrated by the example of the *empirical natural sciences* which represent the most convincing candidate for the role of a practice, the dynamic of which is conditioned by its own logic – the logic of a problem-generating problem-solving paradigm – and where the appropriate internal criteria of evaluation are the most unambiguously articulated and consensually accepted.

The rationality of modern science is fundamentally tied to the inter-subjective empirical (experimental) verifiability/falsifiability of its theoretical results. To fulfil such a role, scientific experiments themselves must be interpreted according to the discursive norms which pertain to the genre of the "experimental report." Roughly speaking, these demand a completely depersonalised description of the complex of intentional action and interactions situationally contingent upon the local conditions of a laboratory, that is, a stylisation which transforms them into a coherent sequence of events taking place under standardised conditions, in the occurrence of which the experimenter-"author" (usually a number of persons within a complex, hierarchical organisation) plays only the role of the anonymous executor and distanced observer of methodologically codified operations. To be able to fulfil a verificatory/falsificatory function the experimental report ought to mention, as a cognitive norm, only those, but then *all* those, so described physical conditions and processes which could influence the outcome of the experiment. Only the satisfaction of this condition ensures its replicability, and thereby makes the claim to intersubjective validity rationally legitimate.

It is clear, however, that in this generality the norm is in principle unfulfillable: in a fallibistic science the range of potentially relevant conditions is open. Any description of an experiment is to be actually understood as claiming validity under an unspecified and unspecifiable *ceteris paribus* clause. Therefore, any experimental report is open to the objection of not having taken into account all the possible relevant factors and considerations. Since such criticism can always be made, it also has no force whatsoever. It only acquires significance if one can present substantive considerations as to the concrete nature and character of some unaccounted intervening factor. And while this is often possible on the basis of theoretical argumentation alone, this latter becomes a *tentative falsification* of the original interpretation of the experiment (and the theory which supported it) only if it can be corroborated by experimental data incompatible under the given interpretation with the

outcomes of the original experiment. This, however, demands its "replication." But whether or not such a replication is *practically worthwhile and feasible* depends, in the situation of highly specialised and extremely costly contemporary research, on conditions in which "external" viewpoints and criteria play a significant, if not decisive, role. In fact, the possibility of such replication will, as a rule, ultimately depend upon financial and administrative decisions of bodies and organisations that, from the viewpoint of science, are not competent to make such decisions rationally, since usually the majority of their members are not expert specialists working in the particular area of research. In general this means that the actual direction of scientific development is in fact underdetermined by the internal cognitive criteria of scientific rationality. This does not make these latter ineffective – they constitute a normative framework which makes possible the intersubjective evaluation and re-evaluation of the results of research. However, the character of these very norms (their counterfactuality) is such that their effectuation *requires* the intervention of "external," from the viewpoint of the cognitive structure of science, conjunctural factors which are dependent both upon its own social organisation (such as the presence/absence of monopolies of research) and upon its linkage with the overall power structure of society. The connection between science and power is immanent to the *functioning* of science itself. The "rationality" of scientific development has no internal guarantees. Its standards and criteria, which make operational the idea of "objective truth" (in the Kantian sense of the word), ensure, in principle, the revisability of the results of earlier, "externally" influenced, choices between competing theories and interpretations, but they ensure it only under the condition that there is, again, "external," social space and motivation for their effectuation.

All these considerations, which refer to diverse processes of change in the character of "high-cultural" practices, are – and in various degrees – one-sided, and do not provide a balanced picture of the complex metamorphosis they are undergoing today. However, in their ensemble they have sufficient empirical relevance and force to make the "classical" conception of a "higher culture," inherited from the Enlightenment, inapplicable as an interpretive description of what these practices are, and untenable as an ideal of what they can and should become. The sciences of today no longer offer, or promise to offer, a "worldview;" they have become completely monofunctional: the intellectual

component of a (potential) technique, a matter of mere expertise. "Free" arts became genuinely free of all function; they are no longer the harmonious play of imagination and understanding, but complex games, no doubt amusing in the incessant and unforeseeable change of their rules which also endow their players with a social badge of distinction. And the connection between these autonomous realms and the signifying-interpretative systems that orient our everyday activities, that is, culture in the very wide sense, appears to be constituted merely by the visible and invisible mechanisms of power that permeate them both.

Nevertheless, the inherited idea of a "high culture," which was forged by the Enlightenment, is still with us, untenable and indispensable at the same time. It acts as a countervailing corrective precisely against the tendencies just described. It still exercises a weak, and certainly non-messianistic, power from which eccentric impulses originate keeping the direction of cultural development open. And this idea is still present not only in the critical questionings of the function of these practices and their relations to power, but also in those forms of concrete-practical self-reflexivity, the emergence of which Foucault regarded as the sign that what remains from the task of the Enlightenment is today shouldered by "specific intellectuals;"[19] it is equally present as embedded in the *very* practices themselves.

It is not only a naive and misguided public which still from science expects the disclosure of what the world really "is" to make our place in it understandable and allow us to judge not only the conditions of successfulness but also the sense of our ends. Anticipations of an "ultimate ontology" are also operative within the practice of science itself. For, to correct an earlier one-sidedness, the theory-choice is externally conditioned not only by the outcome of quasi-political negotiations and decisions between persons of authority, within and outside science; it is also often influenced by the diverse beliefs of the members of the scientific community in some final shape of truth. God does not "play dice," the unified field theory is just not crazy enough – such intimations and sentiments, even gut feelings, are, from the

[19] Compare Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, New York, Pantheon, 1984, pp. 67–73.

viewpoint of the existing standards of scientific rationality, not merely external, but "irrational," and not because they are radically conjunctural, but because they presume a notion of truth not reducible to warranted assertability. They played, and play, however, an important role especially in the critical re-examination of the dominant paradigms of research which direct its general development.

Whatever concerns the art of our time, it is – in spite of its ironic self-reflexivity – not ruled by the consciousness of art-history alone. The effort, both creative and interpretive, and the demand to express "ideas" which refer to what is beyond art and what would otherwise remain ineffable, returns again and again, interrupting or derouteing the would-be logic of a filiation of forms as dictated by the ever more radical requirement of innovation or problematisation of the concept of art itself. If postmodernist works of art, a most heterogenous multitude, no longer present us with closed meaning-totality as the aesthetic prefiguration of a utopian reconciliation and harmony, they nevertheless often retain the intention and impulse to challenge our habitual sensibility, to make us experience the joy or, more frequently, the pain of the Other and the others – and sometimes they even succeed in it. The ambition to be the universal language, the "bridge from soul to soul" is still at work in art – and who today can give credence to such claims?

To cling to ideas and beliefs that are known to lack legitimacy seems to be the classical case of "bad faith." We are the inheritors of the Enlightenment; it is the "bad faith" of our culture, a culture still haunted – by Spirit. The effort to exorcise and extirpate it is certainly understandable. Yet, I am convinced that its success would deprive our culture of the basic impulses of its critical vitality. This is our perplexity.

Chapter Two

Beyond the Dichotomy *Praxis* and *Poiesis*

Aristotle is undergoing a veritable renaissance in contemporary practical and political philosophy. The conceptual dichotomy of *poiesis* and *praxis*, of making and doing, with the associated distinction between *techne* and *phronesis*, technical skill and practical reason, occupies a prominent place among those peripatetic ideas which contemporary philosophical thought frequently resuscitates as especially relevant to our present situation. This long-neglected division of human activities into these two fundamental types brings into focus – so it is argued – the fundamental malaise of our social existence: the atrophy of *praxis* as action proper, the transformation of all intentional human activity into some mode of making, into technically effective modes of behaviour. The degradation of practical reason to mere instrumental control is a diagnosis which we encounter in the writings of Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, with Hans-Georg Gadamer and Michael Oakeshott, with a number of the outstanding representatives of the so-called "humanist" Marxism, but also with Alasdair

MacIntyre, to name only a few. This diagnosis has already become a cultural commonplace which shapes our understanding of the perplexities and tasks we face.

And this is perhaps the first point where one might feel some slight unease with that fundamental Aristotelian schema of opposition which – explicitly or implicitly – underlies these characterisations.

For the striking similarity of the general formulations employed by our illustrious thinkers does veil to some extent the very substantive differences, sometimes irreconcilable oppositions, in the understanding of the "sickness of our times" which they seemingly all share. Are our problems primarily located in that unrestrained dynamism of production and technology which undermines the permanence and stability of the surrounding human world as our "home"? Or is it primarily due to the fact that the per se emancipatory powers of technical mastery have escaped the rational control of citizens due to an illegitimate invasion of the public realm by standards and forms of organisation which are necessary, but necessary only for the integration of our instrumental activities? Or perhaps is the domination of a technical expertise in contemporary life merely a powerful ideology which effectively disguises the de facto rule of power interests following their own logic quite distinct from that of a technical rationality? Or does it simply hide the sheer impotence and irrationality of those who are in the position to rule?

All these, certainly deeply divergent standpoints, can be found among the authors I have referred to. Similarly, the atrophy of *praxis* is seen by some of them as bound up with the dissolution of those communities which were rooted in the organic continuity of transmitted traditions and in the shared traditional manners and modes of behaviour, a process of dissolution which is expressed in the pathological demand for a universalistic justification in regard to all actions impairing the integrity of moral-political intercourse. But the same atrophy is also explained by the fact that the mediation between technical progress and social life-world is accomplished, under modern conditions too, by spontaneous, unreflectively accepted, traditional mechanisms and forms lacking rational legitimation. And the realm of true *praxis* which we so deplorably have lost, can be conceived as that of self-revelatory activities offering an adequate expression to irreducible individual uniqueness and human plurality, *or* as that of "civility" in the sense of the exercise of

commonly shared standards and norms of conduct which cannot be inferred from conscious individual intentions and aims, *or* as the totality of those activities which can ensure the convergence of the multiple intentions to a consensus arrived at by purely rational, argumentative means.

These fundamental disagreements – and the list could easily be continued – among authors who all deliberately use the same inherited conceptual scheme and use it with the same end in mind and with seemingly the same result, may make us pause and ask the question: is this conceptual scheme, the Aristotelian dichotomy of *poiesis* and *praxis*, sufficiently clear both in itself and in its application to our social-political experiences, if such a range of divergent opinions can be formulated in its terms in nearly identical ways? If, with this question in mind, we take a closer look at the relationship of modern conceptualisations to the Aristotelian one itself, we can, I think, make some pertinent observations.

The distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* – as we know from the exegetic literature – is beset in Aristotle with a number of serious interpretative difficulties and paradoxes. It is quite immaterial from our viewpoint whether these difficulties are real or merely apparent, that is resolvable if one takes into account that metaphysical *framework* within which Aristotle in fact articulates these categories, since none of the modern authors would think of taking over Aristotelian metaphysics as such. At least *prima facie* there are problems and opacities associated with this conceptual distinction, among which I shall indicate only three:

1. There are difficulties in reconciling Artistotle's *definition* of *praxis* (as doing, as action in the narrower-proper sense) with his insistence upon the *teleological* structure of all specifically human activities (action in the broad sense) Actions in general, says Aristotle, "are for the sake of things other than themselves."[1] "[O]n our earth it is man that has the greatest variety of actions – for there are many goods that man can secure; hence his actions are various and directed to ends beyond them – while the perfectly conditioned has no need

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[1] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. with intro. Richard MeKeon, New York, Random House, 1941, Book III, ch. 3, 1112 b 33. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to the works of Aristotle are to this edition.

of action, since it is itself the end, and action always requires two terms, end and means."[2] Nevertheless, Aristotle distinguishes *praxis* from *poiesis* (making, production) by defining the former as action which has no end other than itself, by being its own end.

2. The actual examples of *praxis* to which Aristotle refers in the context of his various writings seem to be so heterogeneous as to make it questionable whether anything can be meaningfully asserted about a class of such disparate acts and activities. Beyond the totality of a well-lived life, the examples of *praxis* seems to range from simple acts of sensation (seeing is frequently called *praxis* by Aristotle)[3] to the activities of consumption or use,[4] to complex accomplishment like playing the harp well,[5] healing some illness,[6] and to all morally good and virtuous deeds, the foremost of which are political and military activities.[7] And, one should add, Aristotle also refers to the management of the household as *praxis*.[8] Furthermore, and more importantly, there are certain activities that in one context are designated by Aristotle as *praxis*, and in some other context as makings, as *poiesis*. To take only the example which is crucial for all modern receptions of the Aristotelian dichotomy: while there is no doubt that politics represents for Aristotle the main terrain of *praxis*, he also maintains that the excellent and noble political and military actions "aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake;"[9] he compares the highest political activity, legislation, to the doings of manual labourers;[10] and often designates the habitual disposition necessary to act in the right way politically as *techne*, that is, skill. Nevertheless, Aristotle does insist that *techne*

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[2] Aristotle, *De Caelo: The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908–52, Book II, ch. 12, 292 61–66.

[3] For example, see *Metaphysics*, Book IX, ch. 6, 1048 b 23 ff.

[4] *Politics*, Book I, ch. 4, 1254 a 1ff.

[5] *Magna Moralia*, Book I, ch. 34, 1197 a 9, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, ch. 6, 1098 a 11.

[6] *Metaphysics*, Book IX, ch. 6, 1048 b 25.

[7] *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book X, ch. 7, 1177 b 6–7.

[8] *ibid*., Book VI, ch. 5. 1140 b 10.

[9] *ibid*., Book X, ch. 7 1177 b 17.

[10] *ibid*., Book VI, ch. 8, 1141 b 39.

"must be a matter of *making*, not of acting,"[11] and so it is quite distinct and separate from *phronesis* as the "reasoned state of capacity to act," since "neither is acting making, nor is making acting."[12]

3. Lastly, while it may be difficult to establish the exact scope of human activities encompassed by the concept of *praxis*, there can be no doubt as to what constitutes for Aristotle the highest humanly possible, most perfect, and self-sufficient form of *praxis*. This is *bios theoretikos*, the life of contemplation. Now this is truly paradoxical, since Aristotle consistently characterises *theoria*, contemplation, as being opposed to both *praxis* and *poiesis*.[13] The most perfect embodiment of *praxis* seems to lack the character of action as such.

These difficulties (be they real or imaginary) of the Aristotelian *praxis/poiesis* dichotomy, however, seem to engage us in a quite pointless philological enterprise. For the authors to whom I referred earlier not only do not accept the metaphysical framework of the peripatetic distinction in question, but they do not take over its Aristotelian articulation either, and hence usually offer more or less radical reformulations of the categorical distinction between production and action proper. But it is just this fact that perhaps confers some interest and importance to the above considerations, precisely because it seems that the difficulties indicated above *usually do recur*, despite all the revisions, in the modern employments of this dichotomy.

This is certainly a sweeping statement, the justification of which would demand a detailed analysis of the works of each of the authors concerned. Here I must restrict myself to a few illustrations – and even these will relate only to the first and the last of the aforementioned difficulties.

Let me begin with a recent example. Fred Dallmayr has been for many years one of the American philosophers most emphatically urging the reintroduction of the classical concept of *praxis* into political theory. His latest book, *Praxis and Polis*, is an illuminating critical overview of various contemporary attempts in this direction serving not least the task of a conceptual clarification. The vexatious question about the teleological character of *praxis* seems,

[11] *ibid.*, Book VI, ch. 4, 1140 a 16.

[12] *ibid.*, Book VI, ch. 4, 1140 a 5–6.

[13] *ibid.*, Book X, ch. 8, 1178 b 10 ff.

however, to resist this effort. For in a critique of Habermas, Dallmayr insists upon the point that action in general, even communicative action (to the extent that it is a mode of "action"), "is invariably animated by a 'telos' and thus teleological."[14] But elsewhere in the book, Dallmayr maintains that "in a radical sense, non-instrumental action must be construed as action unconcerned with outcomes and goal-achievements."[15] The hesitation at this point seems to be all the more peculiar because it is precisely this unresolved tension which Dallmayr makes one of the central points of his criticism of Habermas. He charges that there is an endemic quandary with Habermas, produced by the admittance of a teleological structure as fundamental to *all* types of action, on the one hand, and on the other hand, by the postulated sharp opposition between success-oriented teleological and consensus-oriented communicative action (which, one can add, fulfills with Habermas the function of *praxis* par excellence). Dallmayr's criticism seems to be quite convincing, only the unresolved dilemma seems to be shared. But, I hasten to add, this is not a problem peculiar to them. The problem is also manifest in Hannah Arendt's path-breaking book, *The Human Condition*. Arendt radically rejected the application of any teleological scheme to action proper (she even criticised Aristotle for his "inconsistencies" in this regard): action, she claims, "lies altogether outside the category of means and ends," and the concept of end-in-itself is either tautological, or self-contradictory.[16] Nevertheless, in spite of all her emphasis on the self-revelatory, expressive and initiatory character of action, she certainly does not identify it with *action gratuité*. Action is meaningful, its meaningfulness is connected with its "for-the-sake-of" structure,[17] with the fact that it has a purpose,[18] even if this latter almost never is achieved. And in fact Arendt speaks about action as having an end which is, however, not "pursued" but which lies in the activity itself. How to reconcile these characterisations remains undisclosed in her work.

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[14] F. Dallmayr, *Praxis and Polis*, Cambridge MA, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 240.

[15] *ibid.*, p. 180.

[16] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1958, pp. 207 and 154.

[17] *ibid.*, p. 154.

[18] For example, *ibid.*, pp. 184, 198 and 206.

It would seem that contemporary authors at least escape the paradoxes connected with the Aristotelian elevation of contemplative life to the most perfect form of *eupraxia*. In a direct sense this is certainly true. But the search for a kind of activity which can consistently be counterposed to the instrumental activities of production seems again to result in a concept of *praxis* which lacks some fundamental action-characteristics, the characteristics of an active intervention in the course of events and of an endeavour of realisation in concrete situations in which something is intended to be done or accomplished. The place of contemplation today is usually occupied by *speech*. The not inconsiderable differences between our authors concerning their respective understanding of true *praxis* sometimes seem to be reducible to that model of speech and communication – the discourse, the debate, or the dialogue – they accept as paradigmatic. This point has so often been made in the critical literature that I do not need to elaborate upon it in detail. Contemporary practical philosophy has, to a large extent, reintroduced the ancient concepts of *doing/acting* for the sake of having a category which adequately captures the specific nature of political activities undermined today by process of bureaucratisation, opinion-making and alleged expertise. This philosophy, however, seems ultimately to forget that the sphere of the political is not only that of conversation and dispute, but a sphere in which something is enacted and done.

I have attempted to provide some basis for the suspicion that there may be something questionable and misleading in the classical and renewed attempt to categorically separate action proper and production, doings and makings, as two fundamentally opposed classes of human activities. Before endeavouring, however, to offer some fragmentary considerations concerning the sources of these difficulties, I should like first to digress slightly.

The attraction and the enlightening power of those diagnoses of modernity to which I referred at the beginning do not consist solely, or even chiefly, in drawing our attention to some forgotten conceptual distinction and to its contemporary relevance. They also recount a whole story of repression and forgetting. Certainly there are vast differences between the authors I refered to, both concerning the character and the substance of these "narratives." But what they do share is the attempt to ground a definite way of rethinking our present upon a coherent understanding of our past which formed both our

situation and the way we conceive it. Each of the diagnoses, though to differing extents, endeavours to present us with a story of our theoretical tradition as it grows out and answers the challenges of its own social context, as it is interconnected with changing life-practices. It is this style of thought which above all unites these authors, despite the formidable differences in their standpoints, and it is largely these stories which confer an argumentative power to their analysis – and to which we are indebted for so many insights. No critique of their respective standpoints can simply sidestep this aspect of their oeuvre, lest it be a struggle against mere shadows.

Of course, I cannot face up to the challenge I have just formulated – I cannot present in this space a counter-narrative about the origin and development of modernity. Not only because a short paper certainly is an inadequate medium for such an attempt, but primarily because I *do not know* a story sufficiently coherent to be worth telling. But I would like at least to intimate that the story of the "atrophy of *praxis*" can perhaps be re-told in terms other than we are used to, with a different outcome and different moral. For this purpose I propose to re-examine, in a very perfunctory way, two figures and traditions of thought which are apt to – and usually do – play a prominent role in any such narrative: Kant and Marx.

Kant certainly represents a break in the history of practical philosophy. It is with his ethics that the realm of the practical becomes radically divorced from that of the public: it becomes not simply privatised, but principally subjectified. Since, according to the Kant of the *Critiques*, only that which is moral properly belongs to the subject-matter of practical philosophy, and moral values pertain unconditionally only to the resolution of the will, action as such disappears from the field of vision of philosophy. With it the moral ideal of a fulfilled life as the accomplishment of the meaningful unity of actions of excellence also comes to be replaced with an unfulfillable and unlimited subjective striving. Accordingly, the very meaning of practical reason is also radically transformed: where the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* was heretofore seen as the disposition to judge correctly what is the proper thing to do in concrete situations, and which is acquired in active moral experience, it is now embodied in a formal procedure of universalisation able to test the moral admissibility of various rules of conduct. In all this Kant certainly accomplishes a revolution in ethics; a revolution against Aristotle, and the classical

tradition in general. And the roots of this break can be traced back to the ultimate point: to a restrictive understanding of action itself. Because when Kant defines action in general as rule-prescribed "means to an effect which is its purpose," when he identifies action with the empirically unconditioned, freely initiated form of *causing*, he actually equates it with *poiesis*, with production alone. Once this equation is accomplished, once *praxis* is forgotten, the privatisation and interiorisation of morality becomes inevitable, with all its ensuing consequences.

This is not an unfamiliar and certainly not unenlightening interpretation of Kant's relation to Aristotle. But it is possible, I think, to draw another picture. We should not forget that the direct challenge which Kant had answered was primarily the moral philosophy of the late Enlightenment, not least Hume's denial of practical reason as an effective moral agency. To prove that reason can be practical, that it is not a mere servant of the passions, is the task towards which Kant's main efforts are directed in his practical philosophy and in that he certainly stands on common ground with Aristotle. And the way he addresses this task is again not so alien to Aristotle's own efforts. For Kant also begins by drawing a principal distinction and dichotomy, which he formulates again and again under various titles as the distinction between empirically conditioned and pure practical reason, between hypothetical and categorical imperatives, between technical-practical rules and moral-practical principles. Certainly, the Kantian dichotomy concerns not the structure of the particular action itself, but the structure of the rational will and its principles that determine the action. From Kant's standpoint, not only can a concrete action embody different maxims, but under differing circumstances it can also fall under differing principles of practical legislation. To make this distinction is for Kant the task of *judgement* which in many respects resembles the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. ("To the intellectual concept that contains the rule, an act of judgement must be added whereby the practitioner distinguishes whether or not something is an instance of the rule."[19]) However, for the actor who judges correctly, actions in any concrete situation do fall

[19] I. Kant, "Uber den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis" in *Kant's Gesammelte Shriften*, ed. Preussische Akademie dei Wissensehaften, Berlin, 1902, vol. VIII, p. 275.

into two unambiguously determined and mutually exclusive classes: those in which the sole determining considerations are technical-prudential or those in which they are moral.

In respect of these two spheres Kant seems to reproduce all the fundamental characteristics ascribed by Aristotle to *poiesis* and *praxis*, respectively, with one fundamental exception. Actions that fall under the scope of technical-practical rules have external and conditional ends, the totality of which is ultimately subsumed under the natural end of self-preservation, life as such (as opposed to life which is good in moral sense). In this sense they all belong to the sphere of necessity.[20] They are exercises of skills and prudence (in the sense akin to the Aristotelian *deinotes*), to be judged in terms of success in respect of which only knowledge counts and intentions are immaterial.[21] By contrast, an action is moral only if it is done for the sake of its goodness alone and not for some end external to it. Such an action is a true exercise of freedom, for only through such an act is man, to repeat the words of Aristotle, a "law to himself,"[22] and only through it does he disclose his character. Moral actions therefore are capable of imputation and they cannot be judged independently of intentions. For an act to be moral the actor "must choose the acts and choose them for their own sake,"[23] to cite again a point on which Kant and Aristotle are in full agreement.

Far from abolishing the Aristotelian distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*, Kant quite painstakingly reconstitutes it in the language of his own theory. Why does he then refuse to accept the fundamental Aristotelian characterisation of this dichotomy in terms of the distinction between living and living well? Why does he reject the concept of *eudaimonia* as the highest of all practicable goods for humans, and why does he consistently misinterpret it – or so it seems – as meaning "happiness" in the sense of an external state of affairs satisfying all our wants, instead of its original sense of an integrated, meaningful and fulfilled life as action?

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[20] See Aristotle's remark about arts "being only pursued for the sake of what is necessary," *Eudemian Ethics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Book I, ch. 4.

[21] *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, ch. 4.

[22] *ibid*., Book V, ch. 8.

[23] *ibid*., Book II, ch. 4.

The answer to these questions – which explains Kant's fundamental opposition to all classical types of ethics – was given by him, it seems to me, with great clarity. As soon as we ask what is common in that striving for happiness that *all* people necessarily share, happiness is reduced to mere well-being, ultimately to self-preservation. Once reference to the specific character of human communities and the distinct forms of life grounded upon them is excluded, the distinction between mere living and living well collapses. With this Aristotle certainly would agree completely: he defines those who are "slaves by nature" as men for whom the highest good is life as such, and therefore all men do not share more than this striving for self-preservation. Kant's disagreement with Aristotle follows from his relentless insistence on the *universality* of ethics: the moral law is equally obligating and also equally comprehensible and realisable for all human beings. Men *qua* men possess autonomy and therefore dignity. But then, according to Kant, we cannot define the morally good in material terms. Kant no less than Aristotle intends to maintain a strict division between technical-pragmatic and practical-moral activities, and the absolute supremacy, the commanding role of the latter in respect to the former; only he envisages this distinction under conditions of strict universalisation.

This also explains why human action in general, despite its accepted dichotomy, acquires with Kant an overall *poietic* character. In its content Kant's ethic – despite its subjectivist character – is communal. But the community to which it is necessarily related is not its given, existent precondition, but its willed end. Moral action, pursued for the sake of its rightness (dutifulness) alone, posits a highest end which is transcendent to the action itself: the moral community of the whole of mankind in the life of which virtue and happiness become commensurate. Each rational human being is obliged to will that their action be a means for the coming of such a community, even if we do know – as Kant is convinced – that it can never be *made*.

Let me now turn, however, to Marx, who is apt to play a central role in any story about how, under conditions of modernity, the very idea of *praxis* disappears and becomes swallowed up by an unrestrained *poiesis* (making). Certainly, Marx programmatically made production both the generic and the paradigmatic form of all human activities. His formulations of this idea could not be clearer or more aggressively sweeping. "Religion, the family, the state,

law, morality, science, art, etc. are only particular modes of production and therefore come under its general law."[24] "The history of the world is nothing but the production of men through human labour."[25] And so his theory, which aims to be nothing other than a theory of *praxis*, actually transfers the instrumental model of production, forming of the objective world as nature, to all human activities. Theoretically this leads to the identification of technical innovation with the true kernel of all processes of historical change, to a reductivist understanding of politics and culture as mere superstructures and functional derivates of the economic structure of society. Practically, this results in an apotheosis of technical progress, of the unrestrained development of material productive forces, on the one hand, and to the ideal of a society which ensures the former through the optimally rational and unified organisation of, and control over, social activities. As a corollary of this, the Marxian vision of the emancipated future implies both the collapse of the private/public distinction and the liquidation of the institutional realm of genuinely practical-political activities ("abolishment of the state"): it is a vision of a planned and planning society which literally *makes* its history. Such a theory, however, not only fails to recognise the fundamental fact of human frailty and finitude, it also – and more importantly – identifies rational historical change with a progress of instrumental reason in human affairs.

Again, this familiar interpretation of Marx as the theorist of labour or technique can, and perhaps ought to, be queried not only from the particular aspect of philological correctness, but also in terms of its fidelity to the basic structure and the corresponding intentions of his theory, or at least late theory. There is no doubt that the Marxian definition of *labour* strictly corresponds to the Aristotelian concept of *poiesis*: labour is an active process through which the labourer, according to his pre-set purposes, forms the material of nature to satisfy some human needs as an end external to this process. This definition is so striking, because it seems to contradict completely both Marx's general theory and his concrete analysis of the situation of labour under conditions of capitalism. As to the first, Marx always

[24] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingston and G. Benton, Hammondsworth, Penguin, 1975, p. 349.

[25] *ibid*., p. 386.

emphasised that production consists not only in the making of new objects for pre-existent needs, but in the creation of *new needs* which – at least partially – are internal to its very process. And it is precisely for this reason that production constitutes a uniquely human activity. As to the second, the central concept of Marx's economic analysis, that of abstract labour, actually entails – among others – the proposition that under capitalist conditions, the concrete labour of the worker become completely independent from his own purposes and ends-in-view; that is, its teleological character is ensured only by subordinating it to the will of the capitalist, which in turn is ultimately determined by the uncontrolled and impersonal demands of the market and capital accumulation. This "impotence" of the individual labour, the loss of its purposiveness in the subjective sense, which – in the last instance – expresses the subordination of the *ends* of the total productive process to automatically and autonomously functioning mechanisms of the economy acting with a quasi-technical necessity, is a central element in Marx's critique of the alienation of labour in a bourgeois society.

These ideas of Marx stand in apparent contradiction with his own definition of labour (the general validity of which he constantly insists upon) only as long as it is not realised that he did not identify the concept of production with that of labour. Even terminologically, from the *Grundrisse* on, he draws a clear-cut distinction between the two: labour as a technical process between man and nature constitutes only *one aspect* of production, separable from its complex only in theoretical abstraction. Production itself is always the unity of a dual process: the instrumental activity of labour, *poiesis*, and the "reproduction" of definite social relations, the active maintenance and change of social forms of interaction between men, which, as *praxis* par excellence, determines the "goal" of the whole productive process specific to a historically particular social system. Both these comprise the "material" and the "formal" constituents of that paradigmatic activity that Marx designates as production – and in elaborating this "matter/form" dichotomy he reaches back (during the early 1860s) directly to Aristotle. However, as long as these two aspects and the distinct requirements they pose for human activity, remain *institutionally fused and indistinguishable* – as has been the case in all history – alienation and reification, in one form or another, will continue to reign in social life. In Marx's understanding, in precapitalist, traditional

societies, labouring activities were directly embedded in, and subordinated to, pre-set forms of communal organisation based on personal dependence and domination, so that the community necessarily dissolved with the unintended emergence and encroachment of new needs. Only capitalism, as a *dynamic* society par excellence, made the production of new needs and technological change an imminent necessity of its social reproduction, but it did so only by subordinating the whole of social life to social automatisms which, like blind forces of nature, emerge from the seemingly rational organisation of the economy, and in uncontrolled ways determine the direction of its development.

The Greek *polis* represented for Marx the great historical example (the "normal childhood of mankind") of how to create a free and separate space for the autonomous and participatory decision-making of all citizens – but it accomplished this task by freeing the citizens from the tasks of labouring and ascribing this latter to a majority excluded from the particular and particularistic ("*borniert*") political community. Future human emancipation has to solve a similar task, but in the context of the *dynamic* and *universalistic* demands of modernity. Socialism is therefore a society in which the way of realisation of labour tasks and their distribution between the members of the association is submitted – through a "socio-economic bookkeeping" – merely to the demands of a technical rationality, but the social goals of production and the overall direction of its development are established in the free intercourse and decision-making of all individuals emancipated from all particularistic institutional constraints and hierarchy (abolishment of the state). Labouring as the "realm of necessity" cannot but remain determined "by needs and external compulsion"; the task is to transform its organisation in such a way that beyond it there could emerge a "realm of freedom," as the institutional space for human activities representing "ends-in-themselves" – a realm of free communication, decision-making and self-realisation which subordinates the logic of instrumental rationality to the joint will of all. The whole of human-social life is conceived by Marx as "production" because the very distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*, to become not a theoretical abstraction but practical reality, has itself to be consciously and collectively *made* and actively maintained by humanity in a future emancipated from their reified fusion in the present and the past.

I have presented here these, not only fragmentary but also very one-sided, interpretations of Kant and Marx only to demonstrate that the often encountered depiction of modernity and the history of its thought as an uninterrupted process of "forgetting" the true meaning of human action as *praxis* is hardly sufficient. The contemporary attempts to restate the dichotomy of *praxis* and *poiesis*, and to address critically the possible conditions of its realisation, are in a sense not so new as they might at first appear. In the history of modern thought we encounter again and again efforts to maintain this dichotomy in spite of those differences which distinguish our times from the epoch of the *polis*, to maintain it under the modern requirements of *universalism* and *dynamism*. If, from our vantage-point, these attempts have proved to be unsatisfactory in many respects (and the familiar criticism of Kant and Marx to which I referred, do contain many justified observations in this respect), we should not think that this can simply be explained by their overly complacent acceptance of some conditions of modernity. For the twin demands of universalisation and dynamism cannot easily be renounced by us, here and now, either. In this sense MacIntyre's programmatic statement: "the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place,"[26] seems to me not only disastrous in the practical situation we face, but also insincere. Because even if we wish a world of plural communities – or, to speak with Oakeshott, a world not of enterprises but of civic associations united by ties of "friendship" and shared forms of life based on distinct traditions – we nevertheless *should* not (and perhaps even cannot) – and I am certain MacIntyre does not – *will* a world in which individuals are *bound* to some pre-given community, ascriptively attached to some customary forms of life, and treat all other individuals in terms of friends or foes. And similarly, even if we are opposed to a society which makes unrestrained growth, in the sense of unlimited accumulation of manipulative powers of all kinds, both a necessity and a value-in-itself, we hardly *can will* in our practical situation (and perhaps also should not) the coming of a form of social-cultural life which normatively replaces the principles of *inventio* with that of *imitatio*.

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[26] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, p. 118.

All this leads us back to the question about the ultimate source of difficulties involved in the employment of the *praxis/poiesis* dichotomy, especially under modern conditions. And we can now add to it another one: why does this idea – despite all the difficulties it encounters – retain its enormous attraction in our intellectual history?

The fundamental distinction between doings and makings is usually envisaged – and this is so even in the classical tradition itself – as one concerning a fundamental difference in the objective structure of different types of actions. To be more precise: the observation upon which the persuasive power of this conceptualisation partly depends concerns our usual action-descriptions and their division into two classes. The first identifies an intentional action as an action of a definite kind by defining criteria which refer to some object, or state, brought about by it and constituting its end separate from the action itself. By contrast, the second specifies an action without reference to an external outcome – the end (or goods) realised by it is here posited as internal to its own course and actual throughout its whole performance (as opposed to becoming actual in its result). Since meaningful human action can only occur under some interpretation, it is not unjustified to regard this division, insofar as the two types of description can legitimately be applied to differing instances of action, as indicating categorically different ways in which an action – as to its structure – can be intentional. In this sense we may distinguish *achievements* from *accomplishments*.

The distinction drawn here, however (besides being vague and certainly not sufficient to encompass all kinds of action), unifies such heterogeneous action-kinds under one category that – as I have already indicated in reference to Aristotle – its informative value seems to be meagre. Since both a cobbler making a shoe and Van Gogh painting a shoe are instances of achievement, and eating and helping someone in distress are equally accomplishments, it seems that little of theoretical or practical significance can be formulated in these terms. And certainly, the dichotomy of *poiesis* and *praxis* cannot be reduced merely to this difference. It is usually augmented (mostly surreptitiously) by further ones. On the one hand, this distinction can be seen in the rational standards of social appraisal of actions – mostly formulated in terms of a contrast between various standards of *efficiency*, and those of intrinsic *rightness and excellence*. On the other hand, it is interconnected with the

principally different kind of rational motives an actor can have for engaging in an action – broadly speaking between subjective purposes related to utilities as opposed to those related to values. It is this inter-connection between the three types of opposition – the teleological structure of action, the social standards of their evaluation, and the subjective intentions (with their corresponding action-strategies of the actor) – that constitutes the dichotomy of *praxis* and *poiesis*, making it both sharper and much more significant.

It should be emphasised that neither of these steps is unmotivated. It is quite natural to judge and evaluate various kinds of achievements in terms of how successfully and efficiently they realise their ends, while accomplishments are often appraised in terms of standards intrinsic to the activity itself. Furthermore, it is true that in many (though certainly not all) cases the actor's subjective purpose (and knowledge) is constitutive, or even determining, in respect of what action-description can be legitimately ascribed to them. Nevertheless, the three oppositions mentioned cannot in a general and systematic way be interrelated with each other, they do not coincide – and all the analytico-logical difficulties connected with the application of the *praxis/poiesis* dichotomy (which I pointed to earlier) are the consequences of this fact.

Leaving a number of important but secondary considerations aside, a fundamental problem arises from the well-known fact that one and the same intentional action can have many different, equally correct and legitimate descriptions, depending upon the width and understanding of the circumstances under which it is conceived to be taking place and the consequences it involves – and that these different descriptions *can* fall under quite different categories in terms of the three oppositions already mentioned. "Making a dress" may at the same time be "earning a living," or "being engaged in a hobby," or "exercising artistic creativity," or "helping someone in distress." Accordingly, different and sometimes opposed standards of appraisal may be simultaneously apposite to the same action. Further, the actor's intention may be related both to utilities and values or only to one of these (and, in the latter case, never permanently or exclusively so). And the different valid descriptions cannot be – as is often suggested – ordered according to a well-defined hierarchy of ends, because the situations to which the action becomes related do not constitute a series of widening horizons, but may only partially overlap, and because the ends implied in the descriptions may involve

irreconcilable action-strategies. Against the Aristotelian dictum, according to which "neither is acting (*praxis*) making, nor is making acting," the fact is that many of our makings are at the same time doings, actings in the narrow sense, and most of our actings are simultaneously makings of one sort or another. The attempt to keep these two classes strictly separate as distinct *types* of purposeful human activity leads not only to logical incoherence (the constant shift in the employment of the terms from the objective to the subjective plane and vice versa; the opacities regarding the teleological structure of action and so on), but also stimulates a search for pure *praxis*, for *praxis* which is not and cannot ever be *poiesis* – and which then turns out not to be action any more.

How might we then explain the immense attraction of this dichotomy through the ages if it runs counter to so many elementary considerations and experiences? The answer lies in the fact that once the linkage between the structure of action, its standards of appraisal, and the subjective intentions is made, the paradigmatic distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* – terms seemingly connected with elementary observations concerning our conduct – become the vehicle for the formulation of fundamental philosophical insights. *Poiesis* now means the sphere of those activities which, being purposefully related to utilities, to mere means to other ends, ultimately concern themselves with the necessities and amenities of life, with well-being as opposed to living well. Precisely because of this, therefore, these activities always remain under the sway of necessity – the compulsion of an external, and our own, physical nature. To exercise rational choice in this sphere, and to perform it well, means to use these necessities efficiently for pre-set ends. So these actions can be appraised only in terms of skill and knowledge, independently of the character and personality of the actor – and therefore they are delegable and transferable activities constituting the legitimate realm of *expertise*. By contrast, *praxis* encompasses all those activities in which our uniquely human capacity of *setting ends* is expressed. It is the sphere of actions directed at what is good for us as freely acting beings capable of choice and therefore also bearing ultimate responsibilities. It constitutes the area of self-disclosure and self-realisation of our collective and personal identities; the *meaning* life has for us is affirmed and enacted through it. So the dichotomy allows us to relate the twin imperatives under which our finite life stands – that of *self- preservation* and *self-affirmation* – to two distinguishable, in principle separable, kinds and spheres of human activities. Through this it also

renders possible for us to tell where our untransferable personal and social responsibilities lie and where they end. And not least it gives a meaningful, well-defined direction to our quest for a good community or society: we are to find those forms of arrangement of communal life that make it possible for *praxis* to control, rule and "issue orders" to *poietic* activities.

As long as the potential social roles of the actor are to a large extent pre-set and relatively fixed by conscious or institutional traditions, and the situations of action are relatively stable and transparent, the dichotomy – despite all the analytical difficulties its formulation entails – has a great orientative significance. When these conditions are, however, gone, it inevitably turns into an instrument of critique which may – and increasingly does – miss the character of our practical predicaments, both personal and social.

"… [L]ife is action not production"[27] – this justly famous sentence of Aristotle certainly retains its enlightening power even today. *Eudaimonia*, living well, is not some state of euphoria or self-containment, to which one can look forward and which can be produced as an outcome of, or reward for, some conscious effort. The good life is the accomplishment of a whole life which is good all through – it is the realisation in noble actions of their various ends in such a way that they constitute a meaningful unity. But granting the force of the Aristotelian insight, we immediately have to add: *for us* life is also, and inevitably, a production. Partly in the sense that in a society where some kind of work constitutes – both normatively and in fact – a central element of life itself, the concept of the good life cannot be separated from the kind of labour one performs. Partly because in a society where social roles, at least in principle, are not fixed ascriptively, life is also – in its various periods, aspects and fragments – a matter of making, of achieving competences, recognitions and results which *we* have chosen and set for ourselves as goals. There are many and profound criticisms of the achievement-principle, but I do not think that we should choose the option of living a life that is purely an excellent accomplishment of what we are *expected* to do. And lastly, while life for us is both an action and production, it is, of course, neither, since it is largely a series of unpredictable events, neither produced nor initiated by us, but befalling to us, in respect of which we can only react and counteract to

[27] *Politics*, Book I, ch. 4, 1254 a 8.

preserve in its course some fragile unity. Nobody knew this better and in a sense trivialised it more radically than Aristotle. Without any hesitation, his realistic genius recognised fortune, or faring well, as a constituent of *eudaimonia*, only to leave the greatest fortune of all, to be born free or unfree, as being beyond the scope of all ethical considerations. Since we cannot and certainly should not follow him in this, we must not only ask what kind of communal arrangements can enclose a free social space for the exercise and disclosure of human excellence, but also what kind of arrangements can ensure for all human beings that irrational concatenations of events do not deprive them completely of the possibility of giving meaning to their lives – both in the sense of achieving some chosen goals and accomplishing something uniquely meaningful.

Critical diagnoses of modern society first of all emphasises as the greatest danger to the solution of both tasks that "atrophy of *praxis*" which is primarily expressed in the transformation of all public forums and institutions into organs of control and manipulation of the public for the sake of compliance with the efficient functioning of these very institutions. This domination of a self-perpetuating instrumental rationality over all walks of life is certainly one of the basic tendencies of modern society. But it is only one of them. Simultaneously – and precisely this constitutes our unique predicament – we can observe an "opposed" process: the practicalisation of all those matters and activities which traditionally were regarded as the exclusive domain of *poiesis*. It was Hannah Arendt who forcefully drew attention to this fact – in her terminology: the intrusion of the social into the realm of political – which she resented and rejected. This however left her, it seems to me, with a concept of the political that to a large extent is irrelevant for the solution of those vital tasks which today we cannot neglect. And in the last decades we can see an enormous acceleration of this process: the epitome of *poiesis*, the character of technique and production as such, has been made into an issue of socio-political and moral concern, and certainly not without reason.

Under present conditions we have to make *choices* as to where to draw the dividing line between the jurisdiction of expert knowledge and personal or social responsibility, where to follow the principles of efficiency or those of rightness or how, and through what strategies of action we might reconcile them and in what way – always with reference to the concrete situation and

the actors concerned. The distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* as types of activity has been thoroughly relativised in social practice, while the difference, even opposition, between the various principles, policies and norms which legitimately can be applied to various kinds of action, certainly have not disappeared, and today are seen as even sharper than ever before. The idea that actions themselves, by their intrinsic character, fall into some natural hierarchy – be it envisaged through the contrast of servile versus liberal, technical versus moral, basic versus superstructural – and therefore open up specific places for the exercise of our necessitatedness and freedom, can no longer serve either theoretical or practical orientation. We live in a situation where perhaps without a minimum of a good life for all – a life of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity – mere life, our survival, may become impossible. We have to *make* distinctions or compromises about what is to be regarded as "*praxis*" and what is to be regarded as "*poiesis*" in the concrete situations of our active life. We have to make these choices "judiciously" with "practical wisdom" – and in both senses of these words: in the sense that these choices are not arbitrary, but must be based on rational considerations and thus that we bear responsibility for them. We can be terrifyingly wrong about them – it is, as we know, within human possibilities to transform even the extermination of millions into a task of efficient productive organisation. On the other hand, this choice is a matter of *phronesis* also in the sense that we do not have such universal, either procedural or material principles, which could effectively guide us as how to decide rationally in each case. We have only the rich but also confusingly contradictory traditions of moral and practical experience and thought – and the voice of each other, on which to rely.

Practical philosophy, I submit, should rethink its task beyond the dichotomy of *praxis* and *poiesis*. And in this enterprise the genius of Aristotle represents a classical counterpoint rather than a guide pointing out for us the way forward.

Chapter Three

The Paradoxical Unity of Culture
The Arts and the Sciences

First some introductory remarks, just to clarify the topic of this article. "Culture" is used here not in its broad, anthropological sense, in which it is usually contrasted with "nature," but exclusively in the meaning of "high culture" as opposed to "low" or "mass" culture. In this sense culture encompasses the domains of the arts, the sciences, and what vaguely can be called the "humanities," occupying an ill-defined, intermediary position between the first two (and with which I shall not specifically deal in this article).

Such a composition of culture is remarkable first of all in view of what it does not contain – religion. The process of secularisation constitutive of modernity certainly did not lead to unbelief becoming the dominant attitude in society. Secularisation led, not to the disappearance, but to the *privatisation* of religion. With this transformation into a matter of private beliefs, religion lost its earlier central cultural role.

As these remarks indicate, the concept of culture to be discussed is of relatively recent origin, but its emergence was, of course, the

outcome of complex and long-term processes. Broadly however, one can point to the late eighteenth century as the period in which the new concept of culture acquired stable content. This is the *terminus a quo* for the discussion to follow. It has, however, also a *terminus ad quem*, that – with an equal degree of arbitrariness – can be fixed at the end of World War II. So the subject of this article is a matter of the past: "classical modern culture," a shocking oxymoron.

I

I would like to address here a single question – whether it is meaningful and legitimate to talk about culture in the singular, whether there is any kind of unity that connects the different domains of the sciences and the arts. From Kant through Hegel, up to the later representatives of a German *Kulturphilosophie*, a positive answer to such a general question would have been almost self-evident. This belief in the unity of culture, however, disappeared in the early decades of the twentieth century, together with the social stratum, the *Kulturbürgertum*, for whom such a unity was at least an ideal and perhaps also an experience. What motivates me to raise the question are some present-day observations and experiences, strange similarities in the contemporary situation of the two great cultural domains: science and art. Their now completely unrelated discourses have long been characterised by the same unresolved dispute between the normatively oriented essentialist-"internalist" and the empirically oriented relativist-"externalist" approaches. These opposed approaches give irreconcilable answers to the seemingly simple question: what makes something belong to science, or to be art? Even the recent "science wars" are closely mirrored by the "culture wars" in the arts. Today we hear equally often prognoses of an "end of art" and of an "end of science." The list of such analogies can be easily continued: the well-known slogan of the "death of the author" in literary theory finds its parallel in the "reflexivist" approach in science studies, with its advocacy of a new, "multivocal" form of science writing. Is there perhaps some deeper and hidden connection between these two very different domains of practices, a unity that we have lost sight of, and of which we are forcefully reminded now that it actually may be disintegrating?

Of course, a positive answer to this question makes sense only if one can propose a single conceptual scheme, in terms of which it is possible to articulate both the basic similarities and the no less fundamental differences of these domains. My contention is, at least for the "classical modem" period, that there is such a framework. Namely, whatever belongs to the realm of culture must be conceived as fulfilling one of the functional roles defined by the relation Author–Work–Recipient, and thus being related in a normatively demanded way to persons or objects embodying one of its terms. It is in terms of this relation – the "cultural relation" – that the common characteristics necessarily shared by all forms of cultural practices can be articulated and demarcated from utilitarian-technical activities. For the outcomes of these activities are artefacts, not works in the sense intended here. They may have a maker, but not an author. They are there for users/consumers, not recipients. The constitutive terms of this relation receive particular and different determinations for each domain of culture, according to the normative requirements and expectations that authors, works and recipients are supposed to satisfy in each specific field. These normative roles, however, do not prescriptively determine the actual character of these practices, nor the effective evaluative criteria of their results. They are (in Kantian terminology) not of constitutive, but only of regulative character. They only indicate delimiting conditions that ought to be met if something is to be regarded as pertaining to the general realm and to a particular domain of culture. In this sense, however, they *orient* both the reception of the works of culture and, indirectly, their production as well.

On the basis of this cultural relation, the common features of all cultural practices can be designated by the terms objectivation, idealisation, autonomy and novelty.

Culture is first of all a realm of works, that is, objectivations. Many pre-modern societies distinguished a group of activities to which a particular spiritual significance and excellence were ascribed. These activities were understood and valued in terms of their contribution to the formation of a particular mental habitus and the corresponding conduct of their practitioners. Culture in the modern sense, however, is primarily conceived not as an edifying but as a *productive* activity. The significance attributed to cultural practices is based on the value of what they produce – objectivations that are publicly accessible,

transmittable and detached from the comportment of those who produced them. In fact, as culture develops, its "cultivating" role declines. For there is a sense – true, a merely negative one – in which today's culture is radically autonomous: it is *nobody's culture*, no-one can master it even in the bare outlines of its whole compass.

Cultural objectivations are sometimes stagings of public events or performances, but usually they are objects of particular kinds: texts, paintings, buildings, and so on. These objects are regarded as culturally significant only because they are conceived as vehicles and embodiments of some ideal complex of meanings. These meanings are posited as inherent in these objects, but in no way reducible to the material properties or the elementary, direct significance of these things. What the practice of science truly "produces" are not short-lived scientific texts, but ideal constructs – experiments, hypotheses, theories, paradigms. A musical work of art is not identical either with its score or with any of its actual performances, though only its fixation as a score and its realisation through performances sustain its existence as a work of art. This distinction between the actual objectivation and its ideal meaning is present also in autographic arts (painting, sculpture), even though in these cases no practical differentiation can be made between objectivation and meaning. Cultural modernity developed a whole vocabulary to articulate this difference – copy, reproduction, quotation, translation, adaptation, arrangement, replication of an experiment, and so on.

As embodied meaning-complexes, works of culture are regarded as *intrinsically valuable*. They are valuable not in view of some external end, but of norms and standards immanent to these practices themselves. As such they are regarded as valuable not only for those who may need them for some relevant purpose, but in principle valuable for everyone, though in fact it is only a minority who take an active interest in them. This does not mean that they cannot promote some "external" end, such as fulfilling a social function – only that it is conceived as the *consequence*, not the *criterion* of their intrinsic value. This is the positive meaning of the *autonomy* of culture. This autonomy is not only an ideal claim made on behalf of these practices, it has a wide, general social acceptance.

Lastly, to have cultural significance the objectivation in question must be *original* (arts) or *novel* (science). The making of a material object of utility is only a single moment in the repetitive cycle of modern industrial production.

A mere act of reproduction does not, however, pertain to the sphere of culture. Cultural practices are conceived not simply as productive, but as *creative* acts. Such a requirement, however, has a determinate meaning only if there is a stable background against which something can be judged to be novel in relevant ways. This adds a further determination to the concept of the "work." To be recognised as a work of culture the objectivation must in some systematic way be integrated into an appropriately constituted *tradition* that it then expands, changes or challenges. The work both stabilises and destabilises the tradition, in the context of which it alone exists. Radical temporalisation and historisation are thus constitutive of cultural modernity. Cultural practices manifest a consistent tendency towards an ever greater acceleration of the tempo of innovation. In their development the sciences and the arts approximate more and more to a state of "permanent revolution."

These shared characteristics exemplify the internal coherence of our conceptual scheme, the Author–Work–Recipient relation. A Work is an objectified meaning-complex. As such it is to be understood as the result of *intentional* activity that must be attributed to a subject. This is the Author – not necessarily the actual maker of the object, but the one who can be considered as the originator of the meaning realised in a uniquely determined fashion in the Work. Since this meaning must be novel, the Author is to be conceived as creator, inventor or first discoverer.

The Work is posited as valuable in itself. It is an objectivation for others – not for specific persons in view of their particular needs or purposes, but for *anonymous* others, the Recipients. It belongs to the public sphere, in principle accessible to everyone. Only this allows works of culture to be systematically novel – their recognition does not depend on meeting the imperative demands or expectations of particular persons, that is, traditional patrons. And since the Work is an objectified meaning-complex, the proper relation of the Recipient to it is understanding, interpretation, appreciation and critical evaluation. The practical relation of a consumer/user to an artefact, that is, its consumption/use, results sooner or later in the destruction of the purposeful form that gave it its relative value. In the case of works of culture, alternatively, it is only the appropriate relation of recipients that preserves and sustains them as culturally significant. In its absence they become mere historical documents.

Our cultural relation includes not only the common features shared by the diverse forms of cultural practices and their creations. The cultural relation also allows us to articulate the fundamental *differences* between its main domains. However paradoxical it may seem, it is not their common characteristics but primarily the differences between them that confer an essential unity upon culture. Culture's most important and determining domains, the arts and the sciences, are systematically constituted and endowed with characteristics that make them *polar opposites*. Culture has an abiding structure, stable for at least one and a half centuries, its main domains are to be conceived as standing in a relation of strict *complementarity*.

Let us begin with *art*. In the aesthetic domain the relation of the work to its author – a relation that in general we characterised through the concept of intention – becomes specified as *expression*. The work of art in its meaningfulness is to be comprehended as the generally significant, yet unique, manifestation of an original and incomparable creative subjectivity. The aesthetically relevant "authorial intention" cannot be simply identified with the explicitly stated views and purposes of the author. Nor are the significations commonly associated with what (if anything) the work represents directly relevant here. For it is not *what* the work brings to presence (its "content"), but the *way* it expresses and makes it present, its "form" in the broadest meaning of this term, that makes it aesthetically significant. Form primarily constitutes the meaning of the work. This meaning is retroactively attributed to its author, as the expression (perhaps an unconscious one) of their personality and unique vision of the world.

Such a vacuous notion of "authorial intention" is not particularly useful for exegetical or explanatory purposes. Its genuine accomplishment lies elsewhere – it firmly situates the significance of an artwork in the sphere of *subjectivity*. Subjectivity is most intimately connected with what makes something a work of art. For it to be so conceived the objectivation must have a meaning that is original and unique, it cannot be fully and adequately expressed in any other way. Because this meaning does not involve abstract, conceptual comprehension, it has to be *imaginatively experienced*.

While authorial subjectivity is central to the constitution of the art domain, authorship as a social role is without a clear-cut mechanism of accreditation. To be an author (in the culturally relevant sense) is not a professional

qualification. It is rather the recognition of achievements conferred by an extremely ill-defined and manifold milieu constituted by the various institutions associated with art. Since many of these institutions are in a competitive relation with each other, there rarely emerges in the shorter term a consensus about our contemporaries.

The "subjectivisation" of aesthetic significance implies also the "subjectivisation" of reception, of "taste." This competence is paradoxically constituted. The ideal recipient is characterised, on the one hand, by a contemplative absorption in the work, a self-abandoning openness to its unique meaning. On the other hand, this attitude must be active, because the recipient is posited as critically capable of judging whether what is offered as a "work" deserves attention. In addition the ultimate end of reception is to imaginatively re-experience what constitutes (for me) the meaning of the work, to make it personally significant as enlightening, comforting, upsetting or challenging. The autonomy of art also makes its recipient autonomous, a subject who freely chooses, without legitimating grounds, what it "likes" – whether they have a liking for, and an interest in, art at all. The distribution of such an interest and the associated competences are to a large extent – in statistical average – socially determined. They depend on the educational level, professional and social standing of the anonymous recipients. The great cultural efforts of the eighteenth century at an aesthetic education later became the institutionalised aims of the system of general education. These efforts to transform the universal claim of art into an empirically true state of affairs, however, failed radically. The culture of "high" art remained the minority culture of a largely self-styled elite.

As aesthetic modernity developed, the gap between these two autonomies became ever broader. It grew into a gulf between artistic practice and its (restricted) public. The demand of originality in principle always implied an incongruence between the work as meaning-complex and the ingrained expectations of the recipients. As the tempo of innovation accelerated with the emergence of the avant-garde, the usual complaints about the uncomprehending public become transformed into a hostile attitude. Art declares itself autonomous from its reception as well. Although this is impossible in a direct sense, since it would undercut the artwork's very claim to cultural significance, adequate reception is now projected into the future. The work created today is actually the artwork of the future, subject solely to the "test of time"

as legitimate judge. The "futurisation" of artistic practices is one of the constitutive aspects of the historicity of art.

It is, however, only one of its aspects. The very idea of originality, as indicated, presupposes a particularly constituted tradition against which something can be novel. The two fundamental characteristics of tradition in art are that it is living and effective, and that its compass constantly expands. The whole range of aesthetic heritage is "living" in the sense that it is continuously accessible, both for the recipient and, as an imaginative resource, for practice as well. The art of the past (all forms and kinds of art) has been musealised. This provides an historical legitimation for the boundless varieties of individual tastes that have become a signature of personality. At the same time it contributes to the dissolution of all fixed standards of aesthetic evaluation, even more generally, of the boundaries of art.

This is the case because the compass of aesthetic tradition constantly grows. Whether one labels it as a sign of the incredible openness of modernity or of its insatiable cultural imperialism, the history of modern art is also that of the recovery and absorption of forgotten or alien aesthetic pasts – and this process is still going on. It certainly results in a growth of artistic freedom. Tradition now lacks what it was always meant to be – a binding force for contemporary practice. But as the *power* of tradition dissipates, its *weight* constantly increases. Hence the need to create something novel against its immense wealth and variety, in which, so it seems, everything has already been tried out. Innovation not only accelerates, its drive becomes ever more radical, transgressing the boundaries of art as they are conceived by the recipient public.

This acceleration and radicalisation of the production of novelty, however, only contributes to the expansion of the musealised tradition which spurs it on. As the temporal distance between the outdated old and the radically new becomes ever shorter, the life-span of the new, in which it still counts as novel, of contemporary relevance, diminishes too. The more radical the novelty, the more rapidly it becomes musealised. The more artistic practice seems to approximate to the state of permanent revolution, the more the artwork of the future turns immediately into the artwork of the past. Its novelty proves to be just the fading memory of how original it appeared to be just an historical instant ago.

Let us now compare, in the most schematic way, this cultural constitution of the domain of art with that of the modern *sciences*. I shall restrict my remarks to the most significant and paradigmatic field of scientific research, the experimental sciences of nature, and here primarily the very idea of *experiment*.

To speak about "authorial intention" with regard to an experiment may seem rather odd. Nevertheless it is just the explicit statement of such an intention that transforms the mixture of material, social, and cognitive activities in a laboratory into a scientifically relevant experiment. The results of the experiment must be made public through reporting. The author – often a *persona ficta*, since multiple authorship is common in science – is assumed to be the one who designed and directed the conduct of the experiment and is automatically identified with the "writer" of the experimental report. In this latter role they must clearly relate the methods and the results of the experiment to the actual state of research in the field and indicate explicitly in what sense they are new. This alone confers a meaning on the experiment in the sense of scientific relevance. And it is truly an intention, something "subjective" – a meaning merely *claimed*. As regards the establishment of what the results really "mean," the author has no specific authority in comparison with the other members of the research community. They can accept, reinterpret or reject the author's claim. For while the experimental results must be novel, they cannot be *unique* – they must be replicable. Only reproducibility in the appropriate circumstances confers upon the experiment its cultural significance, the discovery of new *facts* about nature. The author first made this discovery, but they made it by being a competent member of the research community. The author figures in the report as the reliable performer of methodologically certified operations, the accurate recorder of their outcomes and the capable interpreter of such data in accordance with accepted methods of analysis. In respect of their cognitive authority, there is a complete symmetry between the positions of the author and that of the adequate recipients.

The interchangeability of the roles of author and recipient is made possible by the *depersonalisation* of the authorial voice and its role in science. The textual objectivisation that transforms the happenings and doings in a laboratory into an "experiment" simultaneously transforms a local, complex, and messy history into an "objective" general description. The report should mention only typified physical objects and materials, codified procedures, and events

belonging to recognised classes of physical occurrences. It does not say who did what and when, but what occurs under replicable conditions. Even the general structure of such a paper is regulated: it is to consist of an established sequence of appropriate sections. One could say that the textual objectivations of experimental science reduce the role of literary *form* to the minimum possible, in order to foreground their referential, *factual content*.

This "interchangeability" of the author and recipient has of course also another precondition – the very narrow definition of the adequate recipients. The addressee in science is certainly anonymous (publications are not addressed and accessible to particular persons only), but the circle of readers recognised as competent is narrowly drawn. It is essentially restricted to the members of the particular research community. This does not mean that this circle is closed. Depending upon the broader theoretical implications of an experiment, members of the wider disciplinary, or even scientific, community may legitimately take an active role in the discussion of the acceptability of the authorial claim. In the case of the general or even the interested public, however, the opinion of its members is in principle considered as incompetent and irrelevant in these matters. In fact to present such a claim to a diffuse "public" before it has been certified by scientific peers is regarded as a serious breach of the rules of correct scholarly conduct.

Given that the "work" in science is addressed to a narrow professional group, there arises the question – in what sense can science be regarded as a domain of culture at all, if culture is defined by claims to some intrinsic value, in principle significant to everyone? The commonsense and correct answer points to the fundamental role of science in sustained technical progress. *Prima facie* this answer seems to undercut the very claim it is supposed to legitimate, since it appears to transform science into a means for something else, negating its autonomy. Technical applicability is, however, neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of scientific validity. It is constructed as the *consequence* of the intrinsic character of scientific practice, which provides us with *true* (even if fallible) *knowledge* of the objects of its inquiry. This is the reason why science as a whole can be the great motor of technical development, even though it is in general unpredictable which concrete areas and lines of research will have direct practical relevance in the future. Practical relevance is certainly not the criterion of scientific significance.

Thus in respect of their autonomy the two great domains of culture are constituted in sharply divergent ways. As already stressed, their autonomy does not imply that they cannot fulfil some "external," social function. But for the arts, autonomy meant their defunctionalisation, that is, the loss of any preset social purpose they would be required or expected to meet. Every work of art must now *create* its own function, to find recipients for whom its meaning has genuine human significance in *some* sense, as education of sentiments and sensibility, as better self-understanding, as presentation of the idea of a better future and so on. The range of these significations is open and underdetermined. Modern science, on the other hand, has become in its development essentially *monofunctional*. As a result of its professionalisation and specialisation, and the dissolution of the very idea of a stable "scientific world- view," due to the quick succession of "revolutions" in its basic disciplines, science has progressively lost its edifying and cultivating role that the eighteenth century still regarded as its greatest contribution to human progress.

There are also equally fundamental differences between art and science in respect of how *tradition* is constituted and how new works are inserted into tradition. The aesthetically relevant tradition, as we have seen, is ever expanding, of great depth in time. Scientific tradition, on the other hand, is short-term, since it is an "evolving" tradition.

On the one hand, the effective tradition in natural sciences – meaning the texts researchers utilise, discuss or at least refer to in their practice and writings – is of exceptionally short temporal duration. Even seminal theoretical publications tend to "disappear" after 30–50 years. On the other hand, this skin-deep tradition is usually explicitly presented with each new research paper, which is expected to open with the reconstruction of the "present state of research" in the relevant area. Each paper draws in this way a boundary between what it now makes the past – what is, or assumed to be, known – and its own contribution, that is, what it offers as addition, modification or refutation in respect of this pre-existent corpus of knowledge. Science is thus not only in a process of constant change, it "advances." It is culturally constituted as *progress* towards its objective – *truth*.

This form of constituting the effective tradition is in a sense necessitated by the very progress and acceleration of science. The short life-span of some scientific result or idea in its textual presentation is at least partly due to the fact

that such texts have a "built-in obsolescence." The experimental apparatuses they mention have in the meantime disappeared from the laboratories, the results presented by them do not satisfy contemporary standards of accuracy, the theoretical concepts they employ may have been refined or revised, and so on. To be able to use them the scientist would need some working knowledge of the history of their discipline. Such knowledge, however, does not pertain to their required competence.

That this knowledge does not need to be part of this competence is rendered possible by another constitutive feature of the practice of natural sciences. It proceeds usually on the basis of a widely shared *background consensus* among its practitioners. Disputes are endemic in experimental sciences, but they are usually resolved in a short time by the research community consensually accepting or rejecting the contentious claim, though one can almost always argue (and some "crazy outsiders" usually do) that there are no strictly compelling epistemic reasons for such a decision. It is estimated that disputes which really occupy the scientific community usually do not last longer than ten years. Science is constantly advancing, because it constantly normalises and stabilises its state. It can approximate to the state of permanent revolution, because it succeeds in transforming what was completely unexpected and unthinkable yesterday into what is simply evident today.

From the viewpoint of the principles regulating the Author–Work–Recipient relation, the arts and the sciences (at least the experimental sciences of nature) are constructed as possessing *directly opposed* characteristics. This direct opposition is reflected in the fundamental differences in the institutional mechanisms through which their practices are integrated into the broader society. To put it simply – works of art are legally and economically constructed as private property which is at the same time a common good (in the economic sense). Scientific knowledge, as the genuine product of science, is treated as a common good, the appropriate employment of which can legitimately give rise to a particular form of private property.

In the domain of art, it is not only the physical object, of which the author is usually (though not necessarily) the maker, but also the unique ideal object, of which they are the creator, that is constituted as their private "intellectual property" defined as "copyright." The author as its holder has the appropriate dispositional right over the work as ideal meaning-complex, which they

can sell, bequest or otherwise alienate. In most cases it is through such transactions that the artwork ultimately reaches its recipients.

"Intellectual property" is, however, a rather particular concept. It concerns the product of activities whose social recognition is based on the acceptance of their claim to create something of universal value that is "good" for everyone. Monopolistic private appropriation of such objects may seem to be contrary to their *raison d'être*. This is taken into account by the legal system as well. Though intellectual property may be seen as the paradigmatic case for a liberal labour theory of private property, it has – in contrast to most other instances of ownership – a *temporarily restricted* validity, it is a self-extinguishing right. After some specified span of time the work of art becomes a public good legally and a common good economically. No-one can claim a privileged right of disposition over it *as an ideal object,* in distinction from its material objectivation that remains in the sphere of private property and market exchange. And the common good of artworks is recognised (especially in continental European legislations) also in a number of other restrictions concerning the rights of those who acquired copyright from the author through legitimate transactions: for instance, regulations concerning objects belonging to "national patrimony," the "moral right" of the author to the integrity of their work, etc.

With all these restrictions, it is however predominantly through market transactions with objects of private property that artistic practices are integrated into the economic systems of modern societies and artworks become accessible to recipients as commodities. This is the predominant, but not the sole mode of their integration. In modern societies artistic practices also usually receive public, that is not directly market-driven, support from agencies of the state and municipalities, and also from private institutions and individuals, in the form of *neopatronage*. I use this term to underline the principal distinction between this form of support and the pre-modern practices of patronage. Pre-modern patronage was, in its ideal form, a person-to-person relation having the formal character of gift-exchange. Neopatronage, on the other hand, is realised through impersonal relations with an implicitly or explicitly contractual form.

The extent, distribution and concrete manner of this support varies from country to country. There is, however, one general point to be made.

Though neopatronage only supplements the working of cultural markets, this supplementation is necessary on economic grounds alone. This is the so-called problem of "cost disease." Crudely formulated, all high cultural activities are characterised in various degrees by the fact that – in distinction from processes of material production – general technical advances do not systematically result in the growth of artistic (or scientific.) productivity. In economic terms: they only allow to a very limited degree for the substitution of labour by capital. If artists are not to become what they are in cultural mythology, the impoverished and starving martyrs of their calling, neopatronage is necessary, since total marketisation would slowly but inevitably price their works out of the reach of a broader public, thereby undermining the cultural markets themselves.

There is thus a remarkable fit between the cultural constitution and the legal-economic institutionalisation of artistic practices. This should not be understood as implying a unidirectional causal dependence of the cultural upon the social, or the reverse. In fact the institution of copyright originally had nothing to do with securing the rights of authors. It was motivated by considerations of effective censorship and by the necessity to regulate the competition between proliferating printing houses. It acquired its contemporary sense as the result of struggles in which writers played a prominent part. And they could play such a role because they were already accepted as public figures owing to their cultural status and prestige. Yet institutionalisation did not simply "codify" pre-existent cultural roles and meanings. One point seems to be of particular significance: the distinction between *form and content*, fundamental to the modern understanding of art, was, to my knowledge, first clearly formulated in the legal sphere. In the English disputes concerning the meaning and scope of copyright, a conceptual discrimination was made between the ideas expressed in a literary work, that constitute common property, and their expression. The "style and sentiment" (Blackstone), peculiar to each original work and its author, were deemed the sole proper object of copyright.

The institutionalisation of science could not be accomplished through mechanisms effective in the domain of art. For "style and sentiment" are just what should not distinguish scientific publications. Science is all about "content." Its contents are posited as "facts," which by definition belong to

the public domain. The scientist-author is, of course, holder of copyright, their writing and results cannot be published without their consent, they cannot be plagiarised. And many scientific publishers are profit-oriented enterprises, just as scientific publications in general are commodities. All this has, however, little relevance to the way scientific activities are sustained and integrated into a broader social context.

Authorship plays a fundamental role in the organisation of science – not because it constitutes an entitlement to a commodifiable private property, but because it is the ground upon which recognition and reputation among scientists' peers depends. Recognition, at least ideally, determines the actual rewards of the individual – promotion, tenure, awards, and so on. This organisation of scientific activities is, or at least was, possible because in the period concerned forms of neopatronage provided the link between the practices of "pure" science and its broader environment. Agencies of the state and non-profit-oriented private academic institutions generally funded "pure" research. This distinguished it from "applied" science. The organisations of applied sciences were usually created and supported by large industrial firms with a view to a long-term financial return. Profit was made possible by the legal institutions of *patent*.

Scientific knowledge belongs to the public realm – anyone can use it for their legitimate purposes. When, however, the use of such knowledge results in a new invention capable of industrial application and of potential usefulness for others, it can be patented, that is, turned for a limited period into the marketable intellectual property of the inventing person or institution. Thus while experimental natural science, from its very inception, was primarily legitimated through its immense technical-practical fecundity, science proper, "pure" science, was simultaneously sharply divorced from the practical realisation of its usefulness, which was conceived as mere "application." The two follow distinct socio-economic logics. The social system of artistic practices is organised through market mechanisms *supplemented* by forms of neopatronage. Science as a social system functions through the *complementarity* of two distinct principles of organisation – pure science through neopatronage and applied science through the market, the two are strictly kept apart. No doubt, such a separation was always only an ideal, but the problems it posed only came to the fore in our time.

II

Cultural modernity had an enduring structure which confers upon it a unity, but of a paradoxical kind. It was not a unity based on some dominant constituent pervading and constraining all other practices. Nor was it founded on a persisting process of mutual adaptation among its diverse elements through an accommodating syncretism. Unity was based upon the fact that the two most significant domains of this culture were constituted, both categorically and institutionally, as *polar opposites*. How is this particular form of structuration to be explained? Does it serve some particular function, a function pertaining to culture as such, as an autonomous sphere and unity? One possible answer to this question is articulated by the idea of *compensation*.

The background to this idea is the familiar diagnosis of the antinomies of modernity. Modernity's dynamics, on the one hand, destroyed the organic communities of the past and transformed the unrestrained freedom of atomised individuals into the highest value alone capable of conferring meaning upon life. On the other hand, this very same process made the originally embedded spheres of social interaction into independent, self- steering systems with their own uncontrollable logics of development, to which individuals are subjected. By destroying their personal integrity, this process ultimately transformed individuals into unresisting objects of impersonal social influences. The cult of the personality and massification are the two sides of the same process.

Culture itself is, first of all, a *part* of such a society; it is one of its autonomous spheres. It is, however, a quite particular sphere: the oppositional dualism of its most prominent constituents also *reflects* the antinomistic nature of modernity itself. And since culture consists of *meaning-creating* practices, its dualism both expresses this antinomy and endows it with meaning. In particular, since culture's two great domains are constituted as *complementary* opposites, each of them can function as a form of *compensation* for the threatening one-sidedness of the principle raised to an intrinsic value by its other.

The central role played by science in the development of modern societies tends to surround it with a halo of objective necessity and rationality. This is however, only a side-effect of a science that became mono-functional. The importance of science to technical development as an enabling condition

of the whole contradictory dynamics of modernity means that it can also be made responsible for all modernity's defects and ills. Here the *arts* – precisely owing to their defunctionalisation – can take over the general function of compensation. Art is the sphere of compensation *par excellence* in modernity.

In this disenchanted world that has been robbed of the metaphysical dignity of perfection, art offers a counter-world of re-enchantment, of humanly created beauty. When everything has been transformed into an always replaceable, disposable object, works of art offer the encounter with what is unique and irreplaceable in its otherness. Moreover, in a world that has transformed human beings themselves into interchangeable executors of standardised roles, art – freed of predetermined functions – represents the sphere of unrestrained freedom of creativity, or at least of choice. It is here that the individual can experience, in all its diverse modalities, the true enjoyment of the self, an enjoyment that can be pure, since it is only imaginary.

Of course, this notion of compensation hovers somehow between the false surrogate and the genuine remedy. But whatever the evaluation, the ascription of such a function to the arts, or to culture in general, presents them primarily in the role of stabilising, "affirmative" powers, sublimated safety-valves enabling individuals to live somehow with modernity's fundamental contradictions.

There is, however, an elementary objection that all such conceptualisations must face. High culture has always been the culture of a relatively small, usually privileged, minority. How can it play the role of a compensatory safety-valve, when it is irrelevant to the majority which primarily bears the burden of the contradictions and defects of modernity?

I think this is a misplaced objection. It does not take into account the difference between the actual *circle of recipients* of culture, on the one hand, and its *reach and social resonance*, on the other, that is, the difference between its genuine public and its publicity. The latter has always been significantly broader than the former. This presence of a "heroised" culture in broad social consciousness is closely related to its role in the constitution of that other product of modernity, which also performs, among others, a compensatory function in defusing direct social antagonisms: the consciousness of nation as "imagined" community.

It is not accidental that the modern ideas of "culture" and "nation" emerged around the same time. Modern nationalism, especially in its exclusivist forms, is predominantly – the role of racist ideas notwithstanding – a *cultural* nationalism. No doubt, the adjective "cultural" here has no clearly definable sense since the contents of a nationalist imagery are just too heterogeneous. But perhaps the most important constituent of the nation is the construction of a collective historical memory as shared fate. Furthermore, it is not merely the case that the heroes of culture – a Dante, Shakespeare, Galileo, Newton – belong to this form of identity. All the staging and mythologising of heroes ultimately derived, through transformation, their chosen material from high cultural representations: poems and paintings, sculptures and forms of history writing, and so on. Culture played a decisive role in the formation of this content.

At the beginning of this article I referred to our present culture wars. It should be pointed out that they are nothing but the generalisations and globalisations of two centuries of struggles over the one issue: the composition of the canon. Earlier, these struggles took place within each national culture. What are the true treasures of a nation's cultural heritage, who are its genuine heroes, who – whatever their fame – should be excluded? These were matters of passionate disputes, often of direct political import.

Although these disputes proceeded largely independently within each national culture, they manifested a remarkably analogous character. For they were, to a significant extent, informed by two great and quite cosmopolitan ideological tendencies, representing opposed orientations concerning the meaning and role of culture, and fighting each other over the direction of its development – *Enlightenment* and *Romanticism*. In this ideological reflection the relation between the arts and the sciences no longer appears as a static dualism of opposites. It is now transformed into a sharp *competition* for cultural primacy and supremacy.

When religion in modernity loses its central cultural power, culture is deprived of any coherent system of ideas and symbols capable of orienting and regulating directly the conduct of individuals. *Both* Enlightenment and Romanticism shared the intention of regaining for culture this life-orienting role of religion. They have, however, fundamentally opposed ideas regarding the realisation of such an end and the actual cultural powers capable of its realisation.

Both Enlightenment and Romanticism – even when conceived, as they are here, merely as ideal-types – stand for complex trends of thought, in no way reducible to the idea of "science as salvation" versus "religion of art." But the claim to primacy of one of these domains is constitutive for their project. Enlightenment saw in rational-critical thinking, embodied today only in the practice and methods of science, both the means to and also, in its general dissemination, the end of the transformation of society. It aimed at the realisation of a truly democratic public, whose autonomous members would regain control over their lives and could participate equally in decisions concerning the common affairs of their society. Science is the model of such a social organisation, the living proof of its enormous benefits, and scientific progress can contribute substantively to the creation of the conditions of its realisation. The point, of course, is not to make everyone an expert in some kind of science, but to rationalise everyday life and thinking. By making the universal rules and procedures of rational discourse and decision-making also empirically universal in their social spread and practical applicability, each individual will be enabled to think on their own.

For Romanticism, on the other hand, it was the arts alone that could serve as the cultural vehicle and model of the desired transformation. Its project aimed at the willed recreation of the lost organic community which was sustained by the living force of a shared tradition, ungroundable in its uniqueness and capable of conferring meaning upon life. Only as members of such a community can individuals live a self-fulfilling life. Art is the great example of the possibility of such an "original repetition," the creation of a completely new tradition that reconfirms and refounds what has always been valid. The point, of course, is not to make everyone an artist or connoisseur, but to aestheticise everyday life and conduct. The great imaginative and emotional appeal of art makes it also capable of effectively contributing to this end through the creation of a "new mythology."

The dispute and struggles of these two ideological tendencies accompanied and permeated the whole history of cultural modernity. It was primarily the "humanities" that provided the two ideological tendencies with the ever-renewed formulations of their basic ideas – understandably, since one of the basic functions of the humanities is the self-reflexive interpretation of culture itself. And they found their spokespersons in the figure of the "engaged intellectuals," who owed both their autonomy and their public presence to their

recognised achievements in some domain of culture and used it for committed intervention in public affairs.

It was due to such a refraction through opposed ideological prisms that self-reflection upon culture acquired the character of *critique*. Cultural critique was first of all a critique of the depraved state of culture. But it necessarily aimed at a broader target as well: the existing social arrangements. Since both Enlightenment and Romanticism aimed at regaining the life-orienting power of culture, they were necessarily critical of societies whose structuring principles denied culture such a role, simply by virtue of the fact that they restricted its direct reach to a small minority. For Enlightenment the problem lies in the fact that modern societies never truly overcome the past, with which they promised to break. Their functioning and development is still governed by a blind spontaneity, because they re-established – even if through impersonal mechanisms – uncontrollable authorities with a power of decision impacting upon a voiceless majority. The result is the ever growing danger of a loss of freedom. Enlightenment thus sets out to *complete* the project of modernity – and in this attempt it often seems to rely on the very institutions that produced the present impasse.

For Romanticism the roots of the problem lie in modernity's break with the organic continuity of past history. By destroying the binding force of tradition, modernity fragmented the social fabric. It atomised the isolated individuals and transformed them into mere objects of the impersonal machinery called "progress." All this brings us ever closer to an ultimate catastrophe, the danger of which we are unable to perceive, since we have lost all measure and meaning. Romanticism thus demands a *conscious break* with the spontaneous continuity of modernity – because modernity consciously broke with the unconscious continuity of that ground that alone can sustain historical life.

Through these two ideological interpretations – deeply influencing also the cultural practices in their proper domains – culture as a whole acquired, in addition to whatever affirmative role it may fulfil, the function of critique. This means, however, that culture as a critical instance was ultimately entangled in illusions. It is not hard today to perceive the illusory nature of both these grand projects. Radical attempts at their practical realisation – or at least

attempts that claimed such a heritage – radically failed. They resulted in social and human catastrophes. Moreover, they became discredited not only by their failures but by their "successes" as well. For it is evident that *both* scientisation/rationalisation *and* the aestheticisation of everyday life have made significant advances in modernity – with outcomes deeply discordant with the expectations either of Enlightenment or Romanticism. One could say that culture as critique was embedded in a double illusion. Its role was predominantly articulated in terms of opposed, but equally illusory ideologies, and this allowed it to nourish exaggerated ideas about its own social power and effectivity.

Nevertheless, these very illusions gave cultural critique a social impact which was not only negative. If the radicality of its critique of modernity may have contributed to some devastating historical occurrences, this very radicality – inherent in a totalising critique of modernity based on universal value considerations – also allowed it to play a positive role. It made culture not just a shadowy compensation, but also – in intermittent and modest ways – a corrective to spontaneous tendencies of modernity. This universalising radicalism offered ideas – maybe merely as clichés – that made it possible to represent, in the public arena, the particular grievances of particular groups as instances of some general malaise, and hence a matter of common concern. These great ideologies did point to *real* disfunctionalities of modern developments, even if in often exaggerated and overdramatised fashion, in conjunction with false expectations. They provided ideas upon which individuals could draw, especially in times of social crisis; they provided resources for social mobilisation and for a unified search for practical solutions to problems. Intermittently and with various degrees of success, culture as critique helped temporary associations of individuals to assert *their own* autonomy against the spontaneous consequences of the autonomy of the self-steering institutional systems of modern societies.

The great ideologies of Enlightenment and Romanticism seem to be discredited today. The role of their main spokespersons, the "committed" public intellectuals, also seems to be in decline, replaced by media celebrities. If such a diagnosis is true – and this needs to be critically examined – does it also imply that the function of culture as critique is exhausted as well? And more

generally, is it still legitimate to talk about modern culture as a unity in the sense I tried to present? Is our – allegedly post-modern – epoch also a "post-cultural" world, characterised by the power of a much more encompassing unity as is often maintained today: the all-pervading world of simulacra and spectacle, that has dissolved not only the distinction between high and mass culture, but also the distinction between the fictions of imagination and the truth of facts disclosed by the intellect?

Chapter Four

Interpretations of, and Interpretations in, Philosophy

The hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer is often charged, as far as its consequences and implications for a theory of interpretation in the narrower sense are concerned, with a relapse into the morass of an unchecked subjectivism. By rejecting in principle the question about the "correct" interpretation as a misconceived and objectifying methodological ideal, by replacing the problem of how to understand "better" with that of why do we understand the same texts and the same manifestations of cultural life always differently, it represents – it is argued – a self-defeating relativism. Gadamer himself rejects these criticisms as a misunderstanding of the very task, of a philosophical hermeneutics, and of the decidedly anti-subjectivist intentions and implications of his theory. This latter deals with what is common (in the sense of their conditions of possibility) to all modes and ways of understanding, with what happens to, and with, us when we understand; it discloses that understanding is not simply one of the possible cognitive relations of an epistemic subject to some

kinds of objects, but the basic mode of our finite and temporal existence encompassing the whole of our world experience. Such a philosophical investigation certainly has its consequences for a theory and methodology of interpretation proper, since interpretation is the explicit, conscious and self-reflective understanding of tradition under conditions when it became problematic or endangered. But it in no way implies the impossibility of a normatively oriented methodology of interpretation concerned with those rules which – at the present level of learning – should secure its reliability or scientificity.

I would like to suggest in this paper that this happy compromise between the philosophical elucidation of an underlying, fundamental facticity and the secondary, methodological problem of establishing its norms (valid at least for the present) cannot be upheld, and in fact is not upheld by Gadamer himself. But in opposition to critics who find in his theory a limitless relativism, the danger of an "everything goes," I am troubled by the fact that his philosophy at least at some points seems to posit a historically and culturally specific and limited model of interpretation as its universally valid form, while at the same time it suppresses – through its ontologisation as a happening of effective history – the normative force of his claim.

Let me make it clear: I do regard the problem-shift from the question of what we should do when we interpret to the question of what interpretation as historical activity does, as the decisive achievement of philosophical hermeneutics with respect to a theory of interpretation proper. What is involved is the disclosure of the functions of the varying cultural practices of exegesis, historical reconstruction, canon-formation, criticism, and so on, as forms of a "productive" assimilation of tradition, in which they themselves are embedded while mediating it. But the step from here to an "ontological" conception of interpretation which simply by-passes the problem of its normativity (as belonging to another, less fundamental level of analysis) seems to me both illegitimate and a failure. Insofar as it does succeed, it necessarily reduces interpretation to an actually effective mediation between the present and the past, and thereby obliterates its distinction from misinterpretation because this distinction cannot be treated as concerning a merely *post facto* ascertainable pragmatic effectivity. To view interpretation as the conscious actualisation of the very "productivity of time" is to miss its specific productivity, its

character as a cultural performance which is always, at any moment, normatively regulated. Regulated not so much by the methodological rules of an explicit hermeneutics, which a given culture may or may not contain, but by the way its objects, functions and procedures are integrated into the ongoing cultural practices of the time (mostly unreflectively and partly in an institutionalised way).

Fortunately Gadamer does not proceed consistently in the above direction, but he breaks away from it only by positing a definite type of interpretative practice as its structural model in general. And insofar as he interconnects these two divergent lines of thought, he interconnects them in a problematically "Hegelising" manner. He assumes the ultimate identity of "*An-sich*" and "*Für-sich*"; that is, he silently maintains that only interpretations which correctly recognise our own intranscendable temporality, and therefore the inherent embededness of all works of culture in "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), can truly be historically effective, and holds that it alone can truly preserve the continuity of history and "save" a tradition from the danger of "forgetting". From this also follows his effort to uncover an ultimate structural identity between a still pre-historical and "naïve" hermeneutic consciousness and one that is truly historical.

In the following I would like to show that Gadamer is unjustified when he claims universality for this conception of interpretation – that is, for interpretation as an activity in the overarching medium of a tradition in which we participate and which determines our preconceptions, an activity through which a fusion of two historically distinct horizons is accomplished by way of a hermeneutic circle that involves such a dialogical relation between question and answer which ultimately allows the question of the very text to emerge in our language as addressed to us, thereby providing the text with a hermeneutic application. This conception – and the directly regulative principles which follow from it, as, for example, that of the supremacy of the text over the interpreter and so on – can be criticised as to its universality from two, actually opposite but, it seems to me, equally legitimate standpoints.

On the one hand, insofar as this conception underlines participation in a tradition as precondition of its interpretability and treats interpretation as a structural constituent of the very tradition which it develops further by appropriating it consciously, and correspondingly demands the recognition

of the supremacy of the interpretandum over the interpreter and so on, it has been and can be criticised as *archaising and conservative*. This point is usually made by emphasising the role that interpretation can and, at least under modern conditions, actually does play in breaking down the binding force of tradition, in the critical emancipation from a past that has become a fetter for us in some way. Both this criticism and Gadamer's answer to it are well-known and I do not want to dwell on them.

Rather I would mention another point. The aforementioned characterisation of interpretation seems to miss one of its basic cultural functions under conditions of modernity: to *create* tradition in situations where there was none, to transform mere documents of a past, whose cultural significance has been lost or which has been completely alien to our culture, into an effective tradition for ongoing practices. The last hundred years of art history, with its "discovery" of the Romanesque, of Manierism, of the Oriental and the Primitive, can serve here as a telling example. The movement of primitive artifacts from museums of natural history (where they illustrated – mostly for children – the strange livelihood of alien people) to museums of art, physically symbolises this transformation.

No doubt, interpretation is not the demiurge of this process. On the one hand, the documents of an alien past have to be available, and in this respect Gadamer's criticism of "historical consciousness" seems to be rather one-sided – he only underlines its destructive effect upon living tradition which it transforms into a mere otherness, an object, but he fails to appreciate its role in the accumulation of those documents of a truly alien past, upon which the hermeneutic activities of interpretation today feed in their *search* for traditions appropriate to the present. On the other hand, interpretation does not make mere "documents" culturally relevant as tradition by its own power. It does so by linking them up with emerging and ongoing practices that struggle for legitimacy against others, well-embedded in the context of the effectively dominant tradition. So interpretation of this type also is intimately related to the shared effective tradition, but related to it not so much as to its supporting base, but rather as to its protagonist. Its positive content, the character of its selectivity and sensitivity, are essentially determined by that new cultural practice which attempts through it to win a historical legitimacy. The connection between the "discovery" of primitive art and the emergence of

cubism, or, as a matter of fact, between the appreciation of the whole hermeneutic tradition and definite contemporary attempts at the "reform" of philosophy, are obvious and unnecessary to elaborate.

There are, however, other aspects of the Gadamerian theory of hermeneutics which raise questions about its universality from an opposite direction, in the light of which it appears as a *modernising* conception of interpretation. In the following I would like to substantiate this charge in a purely illustrative manner, by pointing to an example of interpretation of philosophy that has been enormously effective historically, although it does not satisfy perhaps any of the conditions and characteristics laid down in general by Gadamer. My direct intent employing this example and contrast is a frankly historicist and relativist one: I would like to indicate through it the dangers inherent in any *general* characterisation of interpretation. The character of interpretation of texts and other cultural objectivations is *historically and culturally specific*, subject to change, and divergent, not only in different *historical* periods but also in the different "*cultural genres*" coexisting at the same time. The ongoing cultural practices of the time to which the interpretandum becomes linked through interpretation always *preform*, essentially in an institutional and nonreflexive way, what kind of interpretative procedures are regarded as appropriate. The question about the methodological correctness of interpretation can be raised meaningfully only in relation to, and on the basis of, this broadly and vaguely outlined normative background.

To illustrate this point, I would like to indicate here some of the characteristic features of interpretation of philosophy in late, declining antiquity. For this I shall turn to a document which constitutes, at least in the given respect, the most extensive testimony available to us – the history of philosophy of Diogenes Laertius. This is certainly both a problematic and perhaps a mischievous choice. For a modern reader who is not a classical philologist, but elementarily acquainted with Greek philosophy (and I myself certainly make claim to nothing more), *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*[1] is a long series of misinterpretations, often verging on the absurd. And many

[1] Diogenes Laertius, *Leben und Meinungen Berühmter Philosophen*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1955.

classical scholars hasten to add that the book is a compilatory work of a rank amateur equally lacking in discrimination and trustworthiness, definitely below the level of ancient scholarship. Nevertheless, the work has a significance beyond its encompassing character and hardly overvaluable historical influence. It is – however mediocre the realisation – an ambitious syncretic attempt at the unification of the three basic ways and procedures in which antiquity dealt with the task of interpreting its philosophical past: the doxographic, biographical and diadochist historiography. In this respect, specifically from a hermeneutic viewpoint it is an important document: all the more so because its most alienating features for us are, I think, demonstrably the consequences not of the foolishness of its author but of the character of the shared and inherited procedures he applies. Therefore it is perhaps appropriate to look at just what is for us the most strange and distorted in Diogenes.

One of the most common derogatory remarks about the work concerns the highly inordinate place occupied in it by *biographies*, containing, as it were, a lot of quite pointless information and anecdotes, a large part of which is also completely unreliable, some of it clearly of folkloric or legendary origin, arbitrarily ascribed to this or that philosopher. All this, however, is not peculiar to Diogenes. Not only does he follow well-established canons of philosophers' biographies, exploiting their materials, but he also acts in their spirit in simply conjoining "lives" to "opinions" as seeming equivalents and parallels. Because the lives of philosophers in antiquity were not conceived as materials or stories of a purely historical character that may have some relevance to the history of *philosophy* only insofar as some of the life experiences of the author can be used as explanations for some of the peculiarities of their doctrines. The relationship between life and work was not conceived as that of a possible causal grounding, but rather as one of normative correspondence. The author's character and conduct were regarded as the decisive *exemplum* that bore testimony to the meaning and validity of their doctrine: biographies were therefore part and parcel of the history of philosophy as such.

This is naturally intimately connected with the very meaning of philosophy as a cultural activity in antiquity. Since in the classical period philosophical knowledge was conceived not merely as an objectified system of true

propositions, but also – and above all – as a *habitus*, a disposition of the soul, philosophy meant not only a doctrine but equally a form of life. It is embeddedness in this tradition that determines the basic structural characteristics of ancient biographies. They are predominantly either of apologetic or polemic character: either they attempt to affirm the validity of a teaching by the moral excellence of its author as disclosed in his conduct and death, and by his various achievements and fame; or else they are intended to disprove a doctrine through sordid details from the life of its creator. In both cases, however, they are conscious *stylisations* of life through which the philosopher becomes transformed into a (positive or negative) "culture-hero." From this follows the very strange and inorganic combination of a wealth of arid data intended to give verisimilitude with certain legendary or purely concocted stories, designed to bring the intended moral characteristics clearly into focus, investing the hagiographically construed figure of the author with an exemplary significance and effectivity.

In all these respects, therefore, Diogenes stands firmly in an unbroken context of tradition-transmission, organically connected with the character of the tradition itself. But it is equally important to see how far he bowdlerises this tradition. Because, even allowing for all that has been said, his biographies seem to be mindless. It is precisely the meaningful, paradigmatic correspondence between lives and opinions that seems to be practically lost with him. Careful philological research can often establish the original "*point*" of a story or anecdote reproduced by him, the way it originally reflected back on the character of the doctrine, but this is never even intimated by Diogenes himself. This, however, is not merely the result of his indiscriminate culling of material from all kinds of sources, perhaps even of opposed intent, but is intimately connected with the basic hermeneutic end of his whole work, which is certainly not atypical of his own epoch. Diogenes Laertius has a generally apologetic, laudatory-eulogist relationship to the *totality* of the Greek philosophical heritage. From this viewpoint, however, the meaning relation which connects life as an *exemplum* with the *specific* character of a doctrine becomes inarticulable. If all philosophers represent a norm of excellence, then their excellence cannot be connected with the characteristic *contents* of their doctrine which makes up their differences. In this respect Diogenes breaks with the basic intent of the tradition in which he stands and which he directly continues.

This same paradox appears if we move to the second and even more alienating feature of his historiography connected with its *doxographic* part. The Laertian descriptions of philosophical doctrines are not only fragmentary and unreliable, reading back ideas arbitrarily into the text, sometimes without any imaginable foundation. He also misrepresents and misinterprets the philosophical tradition in a deeper sense, owing to a seemingly absolute inability to distinguish between the essential and inessential, between what is characteristic of and what is purely accidental in a given philosophy. For the modern reader there is a bewildering arbitrariness in what Diogenes regards as worth mentioning and what he leaves out of his accounts. These later destroy any meaningful unity of the views under discussion; philosophies are transformed by him into a collection of unrelated assertions, a catalogue of diverse opinions. He is interested merely in answers, in the "solutions" that philosophers have given to a seemingly senseless variety of problems, and pays no attention to the *rationale* of these answers, nor, generally, to the method of philosophy. So he actually misses and destroys precisely what is philosophical in the philosophies: their argumentative-demonstrative character. He retransforms rational and justified knowledge into unsupported *doxai* regarded for some reason as authoritative. In this way an antiquarian interest in the preservation of the tradition actually finishes it off.

This almost inescapable impression which the reading of Diogenes evokes is, however, misleading in one respect: his doxographical procedures are certainly not arbitrary. On the contrary, he proceeds on the whole according to a rather rigid method. He has a strict view of what philosophy is, based on its stoic division into three parts, and he has a long, ordered list of questions related to each of these great branches for which he searches for answers in his sources. Views concerning the nature of the universe, attitudes toward the "miraculous", philosophemata relating to elements and principles, then to matter, cause, and motion, lastly to life, soul and body – such is, for example, his basic "catalogue of problems" as far as physics is concerned. The impression of a bewildering arbitrariness emerges because his ultimate sources in the majority of cases do not contain direct answers to all these questions, and certainly none in this sequence – since the questions are not theirs, but those of Diogenes. Therefore, even when he follows an original source relatively closely, for example Plato's *Timaeus*, he quite senselessly "modernises" it; in the given case reads it through stoic spectacles.

But then again, this catalogue of topics and problems is certainly not peculiar to him. The lists with which he operates go back at least two centuries, allegedly to the *Placita* of Aetios. And this latter is related to an even earlier legacy, which it would certainly be senseless to accuse of misrecognition of the basic intentions of classical Greek philosophy: to the immediate followers of Aristotle, and ultimately Aristotle himself. Actually in the above mentioned list of basic questions of natural philosophy, one can readily recognise the basic topics that Theophrastus had allegedly treated in his *Physikon doxai* which directly derives from the famous historiographical parts of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Physics*. At this point it naturally comes to mind that – if one is to believe such philological authorities as Mondolfo, Cherniss, or McDiarmid – there is not much difference between the interpretative methods of Diogenes and Aristotle himself. Aristotle's first "histories of philosophy" were also completely dominated by his own systematic interests. Also he treated all earlier philosophies as if they were attempts to answer his own questions, and he too illegitimately concentrated on separate philosophemata isolated from their context and arbitrarily (often contradictorily) interpreted by him. So it would seem that the loss of the basic philosophical meaning of the tradition, so undeniable in Diogenes, is ultimately not the result of specifically antiquarian attitude to it, but paradoxically of its precise opposite: an essentially ahistorical consciousness allegedly characterising the *whole* of antiquity, that hermeneutic naivety about which Gadamer speaks – a simple inability to conceive any historical distance between the past and the present.

But it is certainly very misleading to speak of a hermeneutic naivety in respect of Aristotle himself. If he "modernises" the views of his predecessors, he does so, not because he is yet unconscious of, but just because he is completely aware of, the problems of historical distance. His first fragmentary overviews of the history of philosophy – which, it should be added, actually consummate and make explicit its differentiation as a cultural activity sui generis and first clearly constitute it as a separate "cultural genre" – are based on clear and sophisticated principles of interpretation which receive justification within the framework of his whole philosophy. Precisely because philosophy for Aristotle is the science of *truth*, understanding of its history cannot be simply a reproduction of earlier *opinions*. To interpret these latter as *philosophies*, one has to relate them to truth, and therefore to go beyond the confused,

obscure language and the partial or mistaken intention of their authors – beyond that "stammer" with which first philosophy begins.[2] One has to relate them to their veritable subject-matter which expressed itself in these opinions often without the knowledge of their authors. To understand an author better than he did or could understand himself is the basic principle of an Aristotelian hermeneutics. And this is accomplished when he discovers the place of a definite view in the logical space of all the possible answers to a problematic – as he does, for example, in his discussion of the question of *archai* in *Physics* 184b.[3] In this way even that which is wholly false can be seen as related and contributing to truth, that is, in its philosophical meaning and significance. As a result of this interpretative method, the past itself is made philosophically productive for the present: history delineates the problem situation, the "difficulty" which contemporary thinking has to solve, and at the same time allows the most elementary truth to emerge, because for Aristotle *consensus gentium et philosophorum* is a reliable index of truth.

Nor is this Aristotelian hermeneutics arbitrary. It is firmly based in the conviction that everyone makes some contribution to truth, that human beings stand to it in an original relation.[4] The ultimate problems which human beings face are eternal and always the same, and essentially the same is the path which leads to their solution, from the simplest questions (like those about the material cause with which philosophical speculation begins) to the most complex and highest ones (as those about the final cause). It is only the cyclically recurring natural cataclysms which again and again make knowledge once acquired lost, though not without confused and enigmatic remnants in myths, proverbs and poetic wisdom, from which philosophy slowly emerges to begin its progress anew.

In this way Aristotle offers a definite method of interpreting the philosophies of the past, by construing the history of philosophy as an approximation to truth, leading from confusion to clarity, and from one-sided and partial views of it to its encompassing totality, represented by his own doctrine as the *telos*

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[2] *Metaphysic*, 993a16, in *The Complete Work of Aristotle*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, vol. 2, p. 1569.

[3] *ibid*., vol. 1, pp. 315–316.

[4] *Eudemian Ethics*, 1216 b30, *ibid*., vol. 2, pp. 1924–1925.

of the whole progress of knowledge. As a result of this totalising effort, history becomes the reproduction of the unchanging configuration of truth and each "opinion" can be understood in its true philosophical meaning through its place in this configuration as a confused, one-sided aspect of its totality.

The beginnings of a doxographical history of philosophy immediately after Aristotle are still firmly rooted in this systematising effort and the conceptual scheme to which it gave rise. The history of ancient doxography is, on the other hand, the history of the dissolution of this framework. The list of questions addressed to past philosophies becomes autonomous, independent from the attempt to discover the unity of truth in the variety and contradictions of doctrines. Now it evokes merely the discord and the irreducible variety of opinions collected according to definite pigeonholes. This makes clear how unjustified is any comparison between Diogenes Laertius, who stands at the end of this process, and Aristotle, although seemingly they may be accused of committing the same hermeneutic sins, and Diogenes clearly follows procedures that can be traced back to Aristotle. But, with him, these procedures have lost both their relevance to, and their justification through the living practice of a philosophy.

It seems relatively easy to explain this whole process of degeneration. The peripatetic synthesis of the history of philosophy simply collapses as a result of the very openness of history. Already one generation after the death of Aristotle, the doctrines of Epicurus and the Stoics emerge and achieve enormous significance. This fact makes the philosophy of Aristotle and his successors simply one among the many diverse schools and refutes in practice their synthesising claim. From their great syncretic effort there remains only a dead, increasingly involuted schema of cataloguing the past according to a list of pre-given questions which themselves now have a merely traditionalistic justification. All this is a typical phenomenon of routinisation of a culture which has lost its original creativity and has become epigonistic and solely emulative.

This explanation, however, fails to explain anything. History itself may have discredited the concrete results and the form of realisation of a peripatetic hermeneutics of philosophy, but it surely has not automatically refuted the validity of its principle: to understand the true meaning of the diversity of past philosophies through their synthesis in the present. As a matter of fact,

such efforts were constantly renewed during late antiquity. Already, in the New Academy, Antiochus of Askalon attempted, through a moralising interpretation of the philosophies of the past, to demonstrate the essential unity of the doctrines of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. And ancient philosophy essentially ends with a final great effort to demonstrate the identity of truth in the aporetic multiplicity of past opinions, with Plotinus, who conceived[5] his own philosophy as mere exegesis of the ancient doctrines, of the "opinion of the ancient sages," and who again disposed of a sophisticated method of interpretation based on a philosophical construal of the very history of philosophy as a dialectical, double-movement of progress in the clarity of exposition and argumentation, on the one hand, accompanied by a substantive regress in the very grasp of the truth, by a process of forgetting its originally given intuition, on the other. The real question is why remained these constantly renewed syncretic attempts, which gave a *philosophical* sense to the past tradition, essentially marginal and sectarian affairs in late antiquity, while the seemingly mindless doxographic compilations enjoyed an uninterrupted continuity and enormous popularity. Routinisation of a culture merely describes this process from the viewpoint of its end as known to us, but it does not answer the question as to what kind of *cultural significance and function* such a transmission and interpretation of the tradition could fulfil in its own time.

It is from the perspective of this question that – I think – the basic hermeneutic attitude to the past embodied in the practice of doxography in general, and in Diogenes Laertius in particular, appears the most puzzling and paradoxical. Diogenes' attitude to the *whole* of Greek philosophy is, as R. Hope has observed, that of a eulogist. He never tires of emphasising the vital importance of philosophy for human life, its superiority to everyday knowledge and to all other forms of cultural activity. The value-character and the validity of the whole of this material, which he attempts to demarcate, preserve and defend, is never in question for him and for this very reason requires no justification at all – at the most, it is clearly attested by the excellence and eminence of the various authors as demonstrated in their biographies. Interpretation is completely uncoupled here from the question of validation

[5] See Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V, 1, London, Penguin, 1991, pp. 347ff.

and relevance, because these latter are posited as self-evident properties of a definite class of texts regarded as intangible authorities.

Such a decidedly dogmatic attitude to the past as authority per se clashes, however, at least in our understanding, with the equally prominent emphasis laid on the irreducible multiplicity of philosophical doctrines and the contradictions between them. Philosophy is for Diogenes a finite set of *controversial dogmas* represented by competing sects. His exposition does not simply lay bare this plurality, the *dissensus philosophorum*, but specifically accentuates it, because he makes the idea of a competitive relation between the various philosophies the basic principle for constructing their history. This is the point where Diogenes follows and incorporates into his work the third and latest tradition of the ancient historiography of philosophy, that of the diadochists. The essence of this latter is a personification of the relation between philosophies which becomes conceived in the complementary terms of a relationship of succession within one school on the one hand, and of rivalry between the different schools on the other (often both bogus and concocted). Diogenes takes over this schema for the organisation of his whole material (allowing him to interconnect at least formally its biographical and doxographical constituents), and he takes it over in its most extreme form initiated perhaps by Sotion. According to this, Greek philosophy has essentially opposed, dual origins, the Ionic and the Italian, giving rise to two separate lines of succession and development. In this way the whole history of philosophy is transformed into a symbolic and unresolved system of competition which constantly takes on ever new forms. Originally, to be sure, there may have been some genuine philosophical intent and justification behind this schema – either a sceptical one, or an atomist, Epicurean view of history as the incessant and accidental creation-process of new material and social organisms fighting with various degrees of success for their self-preservation (on analogy of which the schools of philosophy are conceived). In any case, this background is again certainly lost in Diogenes, since for him the history of philosophy is a story now closed once and for all: philosophy began and has ended with the Greeks.

This last remark, however, perhaps already indicates in what direction to search for the cultural meaning and function of this baffling dogmatism that makes do without dogmas, except the belief in the supreme importance and

validity of a tradition that in its content seems precisely to invalidate itself. The only part of the work where Diogenes develops and argues a view of his own at some length is to be found in its *proëmium* and concerns the question of the origin of philosophy. Here he provides a polemic against the peripatetic view that the beginnings of philosophy are to be found among the barbarians. This conception is far from accidental in Aristotle: it is intimately connected with the way he solves the contradiction between the eternity of truth and historicity of opinion in a conception of a cyclical development of knowledge. Diogenes goes to great length to refute this opinion (accepting, for example, the legendary poets Musaios and Linos, but not the allegedly Thracian Orpheus among the precursors of philosophy); he insists upon the purely Greek character of philosophy. To defend the Greek legacy of philosophy against the admixture of foreign elements of any kind is perhaps the only clear-cut purpose that one can explicitly find in his work. As a whole, it is permeated with a spirit of cultural separatism which, through the fixation of a given tradition, aims to maintain an endangered unity and individuality.

The emergence of this spirit is readily understandable under the conditions of a vast empire whose *de facto* ruling elite has become increasingly heterogeneous in respect of geographic and social origin, actual background and conditions of life. Philosophy is offered and is treated by Diogenes (and in this respect he is certainly not original) as the means and the core element of a cultural unification through which an elite can maintain its self-identity.

This transformation of philosophy into culture-goods to be acquired and possessed, which underlies the whole tradition in which Diogenes Laertius stands, necessarily involves a basic change in its very understanding as against the classical model that this whole practice allegedly attempts to preserve intact. The first element in this transformation is a process of growing "objectivation" of philosophy. From a search for truth about the Being and the Good undertaken in a dialogue of questioning and answering or in an open-ended research by the like-minded, philosophy now becomes a *doctrine* that the teacher transmits to disciples. Already in Alexandrian times, when the relevant terms of *didache* as doctrine and *paideuma* as disciplina also appear, philosophy becomes conceived as a fixed content, articulated through this pedagogical triangle. The original, essentially anthropological concept of knowledge, designating primarily an attitude, a habitus of mind, becomes to

a degree reified. It now means essentially a set of propositions as a possible possession to be transmitted and appropriated, conferring upon its owner practical and spiritual excellence. Hand in hand with this process of "doctrinalisation" of philosophy goes, however, another and, in a sense, an opposite process. As philosophy becomes in practice treated as a means of establishing a secondary, cultural unity, it also becomes increasingly homogenised with respect to other elements of the cultural tradition that also can fulfil similar functions. From the Hellenistic period onward, there is a constantly intensifying trend toward the amalgamation of philosophy with poetry, mythical and proverbial lore, and theosophic speculation – all under the supremacy of rhetoric. As a result of this "re-rhetorisation" of philosophy – the theoretically most influential advocate of which is Cicero – its specificity as a cultural endeavour sui generis becomes increasingly lost. The main hermeneutic instrument of this cultural levelling process is the practice of allegoric interpretation which, first applied to Homer, then to the classical poets in general, is in ascendancy from the first century on and, with the Neo-pythagoreans and Neo-platonists, invades philosophy itself. The distinction between *sensus literalis* and *sensus spiritualis*, which to a large extent determines the later history of hermeneutics, serves in this first historical form of its appearance not only to overcome, or more strongly, to liquidate the historical distance dividing the canonical texts of the past from the present; but also to liquidate the distance between the various cultural genres, to reconcile them all in their ultimate meaning, and thereby to make all of them valid and authoritative sources of a cultivated eloquence.

Now it would seem that Diogenes stands in clear-cut opposition to this trend. Certainly, his aim is precisely to demarcate the tradition of philosophy as such and he constantly reaffirms its distinction from, and its supremacy over poetry, rhetorics, or religious speculation. He also resorts to allegories most sparingly, essentially only in the early parts of Book I. Nevertheless, it is precisely the hermeneutic practice of Diogenes that clearly demonstrates how far the real meaning of this demarcation has already been eroded. This can be seen not only in his concentration on rhetorically employable philosophemata, neglecting their argumentative interconnections, but, even more explicitly, in the way he treats the whole question of argumentation in philosophy. Since dialectic constitutes one of the three recognised subdivisions of philosophy, Diogenes provides cataloguing overviews of the logical views of the

philosophers as well. In addition, he has also a pronounced interest in "famous arguments" attributed to philosophers. These are, however, treated by him again – even in such obvious cases as the Achilles of Zeno – without the slightest attempt to connect them with the character of the doctrine that makes use of these arguments. In other words, in practice Diogenes is interested in philosophical argumentation only insofar as it is a source of rhetorical tropes and treats arguments – to quote Quintilian – as "storehouse of thought," applicable to the most diverse occasions, or as building-blocks for a rhetorical *probatio*. It is therefore not surprising that he himself constantly violates the principle of the cultural demarcation of philosophy which he espouses. As his references demonstrate, he does regard Euripides, Callimachus, minor historians and comic poets, and so on, as completely admissible sources and authorities, even on questions of "physics." In this respect he is a typical example of what Aristotle defined as the want of philosophical culture:[6] the "inability in regard to each matter to distinguish reasonings appropriate to the subject from those foreign to it." For Diogenes the separation of philosophy from other forms of cultural activity does not mean conceiving it as an endeavour with a specific, unique aim and method; it is merely giving prominence to one type of texts against others that can serve the same function, but with less excellence.

All these transformations, one could maintain, actually turn the practical significance to which classical philosophy has aspired into its direct opposite. As an endeavour to shape the soul by reason in search of truth alone, philosophy achieved its constitution as an independent cultural genre *sui generis* through becoming the dominant factor in a new concept and practice of civic education. It was the historically first, and perhaps to this day the most daring, attempt at a purely secular rationalisation of life-conduct (in the Weberian sense). However, with the disappearance of its life-basis, the democratic polis, philosophy first becomes privatised, and then, finally, takes on an opposite meaning. It retains the function of practical rationalisation – if anything, late antiquity overemphasises its edifying role – but rationalisation in the negative sense: mere *post facto* justification and legitimation of already made, given choices and styles of life. Reunified with rhetoric, which equally has

[6] *Eudemian Ethics*, 1217a, *Complete Work of Aristotle*, vol. 2, p. 1926.

lost all its direct, juridico-political relevance, philosophy really becomes a mere rhetoric of reason – a common language of reasonableness through which the actual divergences in life-forms can be brought into the unity of cultivated talk and discussion, which finds for each of them equally valid grounds in a hallowed and unique tradition. The perfect orator is the wise and good man, Quintilian tells us. And it is precisely because philosophy is an irreducible plurality of competing sects, nonetheless unified by the criss-crossing lines of descent and dispute; that it can serve as the paradigmatic element and core content of this cultivated eloquence. The dissension of philosophers does not force one to take an ultimate stand in truth, invalidating all other views as mere opinions in error, and even less does it sceptically disprove the relevance of philosophical doctrines. It is exactly this variety in unity that confers a cultural validity upon philosophy.

In its general cultural context, the most alienating features of the interpretive practice of Diogenes Laertius seem therefore to appear specifically appropriate to that function which interpretation is to fulfil within the framework of the actual cultural practices of the time. It is these latter that determine the specific appropriateness of interpretative practices themselves, forming a normative background that is always silently presupposed by questions about methodological correctness. With respect to this latter, Diogenes is certainly a most unsatisfactory author. But in his own historical context, a "better" interpretation would not have meant one that was more successful in giving a unified sense to the texts (a criterion completely alien to the spirit of doxography), but one which operated with its list of questions in a more systematic way, related the alleged answers to questions in a more motivated manner, elicited more, and more detailed answers from the same texts, and so on.

To emphasise once again: it is not so much the idiosyncratic features of the *Lives and Opinions*, but the generally shared presuppositions of its method, which emerged historically in an uninterrupted process of tradition-transmission, that make the work for us completely unsatisfactory as an interpretation of ancient philosophy. And certainly – I take this as self-evident – these principles and interpretative practices do not exhibit any of the characteristics posited by philosophical hermeneutics as general features and conditions of interpretation. The method applied by Diogenes violently breaks the hermeneutic circle, because it just does not allow any dialogical relation

between questions and answers to develop. By rigidly fixing the anticipatory prejudices of the interpreter in the form of a set of questions quite independent from the concrete character of the doctrine or text under discussion, it permits this latter to speak – or rather to stammer – only to the degree that it can be related to these prejudices directly. No doubt, these prejudices also belong to the effective continuity of the tradition, but in their unreflexive immobility they disrupt its immanent sense-connections. Such interpretative practices do not allow therefore for any fusion of the two historical horizons to be accomplished, since the horizon of the text does not emerge at all – the historical distance between the tradition and the present is not bridged, but coercively abandoned by forcing the former into the mould of the latter.

It would seem, however, that in this way at least that feature of interpretation is preserved which Gadamer explicitly designates as its most fundamental precondition and universal characteristic: the unity of explicative understanding with hermeneutic application. Even this, however, proves to be false – a fact that, incidentally, also demonstrates that to take legal (and biblical) hermeneutics – as Gadamer does – as the paradigmatic cases of interpretation in general, is rather problematic. Legal validity belongs to the very concept of law in a way that cognitive (or practical, or whatever else) validity cannot belong as an unproblematic precondition and simple *datum* to the concept of philosophy – at least as long as this latter encompasses a plurality of possible standpoints and doctrines, and is not assimilated to the concept of religious revelation. Therefore, if application is understood, to quote Gadamer, as "bringing an opinion to validity" with respect to the present concrete situation of the intepreter[7] then the hermeneutic practice of Diogenes is radically non-applicative. The strangest characteristic of his work, from any modern standpoint, is precisely that it completely divorces explication of a doctrine from the question of its cognitive or practical validity. Hermeneutic application is posited here as an act separated from, and subsequent to explication, an act not of the interpreter, but of the recipient, of the reader/listener who chooses from among the variety of philosophical opinions that or those which permit raising his own life-attitudes to the level of a cultivated, and reflexive, articulation and eloquence.

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[7] See H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York, Crossroad 1984, pp. 274–278.

What is, however, the moral of this case? The hermeneutic principles underlying the work of Diogenes, though perhaps appropriate to their own cultural context, do not satisfy any of the allegedly universal characteristics or preconditions of interpretations. So what? Is it not self-evident that they do not satisfy them because any attempt to understand the philosophical legacy of the past in accordance with these principles would necessarily result in its radical misinterpretation? And would it not be an unpermissible, even mindless relativism to say: misinterpretation *for us*, from our own standpoint? No, such a hermeneutics results in misinterpretation *from the viewpoint of philosophy itself*, philosophy as a living, ongoing, continuous cultural activity. That is, one of the basic presuppositions of a hermeneutic of this type is just the effective *end* of philosophy since it is treated as a mere tradition of the *past*. Clearly, someone who understands philosophical texts in the way implied by Diogenes can be a philosophically cultivated person according to cultural criteria valid in a given age, but certainly he or she cannot be a practising philosopher.

The only problem with this remark or objection, however self-evident it seems, is that it is certainly false, *if* interpretation is conceived as an event, a happening (*Geschehen*) in the transmission of tradition as effective history. In its actual historical effect, the work of Diogenes did precisely what it so clearly could not do at all: it contributed most significantly to the *creative* appropriation and assimilation of the legacy of Greek philosophy by the living philosophical practice of the early modern age. The *Lives and Opinions* is – as to its actual influence – in all probability the most important single work of a historic-interpretative type in the whole history of Western philosophy. Knowledge about the Pre-Socratics, the Stoa, and Epicureanism was transmitted to post-fourteenth-century philosophy largely through means of this book; and it is unnecessary to say how much modern philosophy is obliged to the resurrection and revival pf these traditions. (In this respect the publication by Gassendi of the tenth book of Diogenes can be seen almost as an act of symbolic significance.) Furthermore, the work of Diogenes served not only as an absolutely irreplaceable *source* – up to the first half of the eighteenth century, actually till Brucker, it constituted also the *paradigmatic model* for all histories of philosophy. Its disposition and method deeply influenced the first forms, in which post-medieval philosophy has given account of its own historicity.

Now there is no question that this factually fulfilled role is largely a result of accidents, it is due to the chance conservation of manuscripts during the intervening millennium between the third and the thirteenth centuries. Nevertheless, I would like to argue – though certainly in a merely tentative way – that if the question concerns not just the individual peculiarities of the work of Diogenes but the general characteristics of his hermeneutical practices, then these latter, so clearly distortive of the original meaning of the interpreted heritage, were at the same time important factors allowing this legacy being *preserved and saved* in spite of, and throughout processes of enormous socio-cultural dislocation and change. That is, at least a case can be made that the whole grafting of the Greek philosophical legacy onto the body of the Judeo-Christian heritage was partly made possible, or at least was significantly facilitated, by the availability of interpretative methods and more generally cultural attitudes, which – by obliterating the constitutive distinctions between *episteme* and *doxa*, between philosophy and rhetoric – certainly debased philosophy, but at the same time offered a hermeneutic instrumentation that could be employed for the sake of such a reconciliation.

To put the matter bluntly: classical philosophy, with its claim to be the sole way to truth able to make human conduct both right and reasonable, necessarily stood in a relation of irreconcilable competition with any universalist religion of salvation that made the same claim on its own behalf. The development of a cultural attitude which ascribed an enormous prestige to philosophy as a cultural good, but put its original relation to truth, as it were, in parentheses – an attitude which we find embodied in, among others, Diogenes – arguably opened the way toward the possibility of a certain type of reconciliation. In any case, it is a fact that the actual annexation of Greek philosophy to the Scriptures as a propaedeutic to the latter was accomplished through the use of exactly those interpretative methods which were elaborated in late antiquity and which we encounter in Diogenes. Already Alexandrian Judaism (above all Philo) employed them fully, for example by elaborating a typical Bios of Moses which identified him with Musaios and, in this way, in a typically diadochist manner, transformed him into the true archaget of Greek philosophy. And the early Christian apologists and Fathers of the Church, like Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Jerome, used the whole hermeneutic arsenal of late ancient doxography, with all its antiquarianising and allegorising methods of interpretation, applied both to the Bible and to

pagan philosophy, to establish essential correspondences between the two and to transform philosophy into a preparatory introduction to the true doctrine of the Church bestowed by God upon the Greeks.

If there are any conclusions to be drawn from this account, they seem to be rather destructive for hermeneutics as a philosophical enterprise in general. Conceived as a science answering the question of what makes an interpretation true or correct, a general hermeneutics seems to be impossible, since the sought-for criteria are relative and dependent upon a changing cultural framework which ascribes definite functions to interpretation and may ascribe it in radically different ways for different epochs and different cultural genres. But neither does this recognition of the inevitable historical perspectivity, *Standortgebundenheit*, of interpretation open up the way to its ontological understanding as an event in effective history. To the question of what interpretation does in this latter sense, again no general answer is possible. Even such, at the first glance "frighteningly relativist" generalisations, as the Gadamerian "to interpret means to interpret always otherwise," turn out to be not relativist enough. Interpretations are not simply spontaneous outcomes of changing life-situations; they always take place according to culturally defined normative standards, and whether a given culture has one such standard or many, and whether they are posited as stable or changing, all this depends on the character of the historical culture in question. Interpretation of tradition may demonstrate an enormous stability or have the character of pseudo-organic growth over long periods of culture-history as, for example, the Rabbinical interpretation of the Bible in post-exile Jewry, or interpretations of Confucianism during so many centuries of Chinese history. The plausibility of a general, ontologising characterisation of what all interpretations share in common is, it seems to me, based in Gadamer on an implicit identification of the question about the continuity of the transmission of cultural tradition with that of overall historical continuity and social identity. These two, however, are not identical. Precisely because of this fact, because the historical productivity of interpretation is not ontologically fixed, interpretation can do various things with and for us, too. It certainly can be an important element in the maintenance of social identity, but it equally can transmit tradition in spite of significant disruptions in historical continuity, as well as create traditions between historically unrelated cultures, or emancipate from a binding tradition even within processes of an essentially continuous social change.

This purely destructive result in regard to hermeneutics as a philosophical enterprise is, however, perhaps the outcome of the fact that both the methodological and ontological conceptions of hermeneutics seem to mischaracterise the way and the sense in which interpretation becomes a problem for philosophy. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the well-known three stages in the development of a philosophical hermeneutics – the Romantic, the *geisteswissenschaftlich*, and the contemporary – refer to periods when, initially completely independently from any hermeneutic endeavour, the methodology of historiography of philosophy also became quite suddenly a matter of lively discussion (from Garve and Reinhold to Ritter and Ast; with Renouvier, Riehl, Windelband and so on; lastly with Gueroult, Erhardt, J. Passmore and so on). These discussions, moreover, have taken place within an explicitly recognised *crisis in philosophy*. In general, it seems to me, the question of interpretation emerges in philosophy at times, when it becomes deeply and generally problematic whether what we actually do and are able to do in interpreting the cultural legacy of the past, as it is normatively determined by our own contemporary cultural practices, is genuinely able to capture what is truly creative and significant in this legacy. In this sense the philosophical problem of hermeneutics is always related to a critical questioning of the meaningfulness of contemporary cultural life. It is, and ought to be, part and parcel of a critical theory of culture which cannot, however, solve its own problems by merely hermeneutic means.

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Chapter Five

The Ends of Metaphysics

Among the many "post"-isms, through which the thought of the present attempts both to create an orientation in regard to its historical place and possibilities, and simultaneously to express its frustration and anxiety about the lack of such an orientation, there is one – certainly predating all the others – which seems to enjoy, perhaps alone among them, strong consensual acceptance. We live in post-metaphysical times, at the times of, or even after, the end of metaphysics. The relatively broad unanimity with respect to this global description may, of course, be due to the fact that it seems to relate to some internal affair of philosophy – an activity which hardly commands a particularly great interest or respect today. Nevertheless such a consensus of philosophers over the state of philosophy seems to be a remarkable occurrence even in itself, given the ineliminable strife of its sects which characterises its whole history.

So it should not come as a great surprise that even in this case the *concordia philosophorum* proves to be a mere mirage, a purely verbal agreement. For the attribute "post-metaphysical" can be – and is today – understood not

only in different, but in principally opposed ways. On the one hand, it can be conceived as the description of what our epoch actually is as a state of privation and perhaps the root of its malaises: a fact of cultural deficit. And this can be articulated either from the standpoint of a conservative critique of modernity or as an attempt genuinely to think through its ultimate consequences. In the first case it then gives rise to vague hopes or nostalgic desires for an eventual return; in the second, to definite programs of the renewal of metaphysics.

On the other hand, "post-metaphysical" is used also to designate not the actual state of the general consciousness, but precisely the task of thinking to overcome this latter, still bogged down in a particularly thoughtless and virulent form of metaphysics, a remnant or the last consequence of its once grand and fertile project. And post-metaphysical thinking as the task of the day again can be conceived either as the consistent realisation of the demands of modernity (or post-modernity), or as the harbinger of its hoped-for end.

The opposed programs of the renovation of, and the radical break with, metaphysics are, of course, supported by weighty philosophical arguments. It is, however, perhaps not devoid of interest that they were and are, almost from the very beginning of the twentieth century, also regularly accompanied with opposed diagnoses concerning the contemporary state of philosophy. Some perceived in it the unmistakable signs of a renewed, others of an irreversibly declining, theoretical interest in metaphysics. This undercurrent of the relatively recent dispute between Dieter Henrich and Odo Marquard on the one side, and Jürgen Habermas on the other, seems only to repeat a cultural constellation that slowly becomes quite habitual.

More importantly, the intellectual success of both these opposed projects, though they are now of respectable, almost century-long alterity, still seems to be quite questionable – and questionable from the viewpoint of their own standards, expectations and adherents. Calls for the renewal of metaphysics usually remained mere programs. Attempts at its realisation – when not generally judged (as for example in the case of Nicolai Hartmann) simply to revert to a now anachronistic style of thought – often are charged by their own side with the mere usurpation of the elevated name of metaphysics. For are not the various models of an "analytic metaphysics" – to bring up one of the more frequently mentioned examples – not so much the antidotes against,

but rather the positive fulfillments of, the principle which has animated the vicious attacks of logical positivists against metaphysics: the sole way to save some bits and pieces of its tradition from utter meaninglessness is their transposition from the material into the formal mode of speech?

But matters do not necessarily stand better at the other side of the divide, either. The renewed attempts at the "overcoming", "destructing", "deconstructing" of metaphysics seem only to illustrate Kant's warning against the "indifferentists", who "inevitably fall back, in so far as they think at all, into those very metaphysical assertions which they profess so greatly to despise."[1] In any case a similar charge has been repeated with a sequential regularity precisely against, and by, those thinkers who made the above task the central concern of their philosophy: by Heidegger against Nietzsche, by Derrida against Heidegger, and lately by Rorty against Derrida (though elementary justice demands to add that they – especially Heidegger and Derrida – were also those who most clearly recognised and articulated the paradoxical character of the idea of "post-metaphysical" thinking). And if one turns to those larger philosophical movements whose initial emergence was motivated by a strong anti-metaphysical animus – like phenomenology or logical empiricism – it can be observed that their later development led not only to the rehabilitation of metaphysics, but also to some attempts to formulate a kind of metaphysics on their own foundations.

These are, of course, not only superficial observations, but in a sense quite unbecoming ones. For it is unbecoming to take up in respect of what are vital questions for philosophy the attitude of a quasi-neutral referee awarding marks in a competition with a still open outcome. But the task of engaging argumentatively – as a philosopher should – in this dispute at the level where it is vital, that is at the level of its generality, faces formidable difficulties. First of all, that of the indeterminateness of its object. In the ongoing discussions about the fate of metaphysics the abiding essence of the latter has been defined or explicated in so many unconnected and unsystematisable ways that it makes one wonder whether there is at all a common problem in dispute. Is metaphysics onto-theo-logic, or is it primarily concerned with the

[1] I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* AX, Berlin-Leipzig, de Gruyter, 1938. *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* – Akademie Edition (in the following: *KAE*), vol. 3, p. 6.

ultimate preconditions of the applicability of the structure of singular propositions to the description of the world, or perhaps it is the clarification of the implicit premises of the historically changing worldviews? Does it necessarily rest on the dualistic opposition between supra-empirical essence and empirical appearance, or is it in fact motivated by the striving to uncover the unifying principle of conscious life? It would be easy to continue the list of such seemingly quite unrelated descriptions which cannot even be clearly correlated with the ultimate attitude of their authors towards metaphysics.

This uncertainty as to what metaphysics really is, is the more curious because at another level we, of course, know quite well what we understand by it: we mean the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. But it is just this (evidently incomplete) list of paradigmatic names that is at the root of our difficulty. For it is unclear whether the Cartesian *philosophia prima* that deals "with all the first things that can be discovered by philosophising in an orderly way"[2] and contains "the principles of knowledge, including … all the clear and distinct notions that are in us"[3] is even in its basic intention somehow identifiable with the *philosophia prote* of Aristotle. And it is even less clear whether a Kantian "metaphysics of morals" shares anything essentially identical with either of these two. Some topics are undoubtedly common, but a mere collection of themes, independent of the way they are understood and approached, does not provide for the unity of a discipline. Whether there is an unchanging essence of metaphysics, this is itself problematic, and in view of this question any straightforward definition of it inevitably appears arbitrary – the question can only be answered by a conceptualisation of its history.

Such a conceptualisation has been offered relatively recently, for example, by Habermas. He inscribes the fate of metaphysics into the overall course of paradigm-changes in the history of philosophy: from cosmic ontologies of Being through reflection-philosophical theories of consciousness to the contemporary linguistic turn. What is constitutive of all metaphysical thought now emerges out of the reconstruction of the main trend of its change:

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[2] R. Descartes, "Letter to Mersenne," 11 Nov. 1640, *Oeuvres*, Adam-Tannery edn (hereafter *DAT*), Paris, Vrin, 1976, vol. III, p. 239.

[3] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, *DAT*, vol. IXB, p. 14.

the conception of an ideal, mental or spiritual "one and all" as the ultimate, identical ground and principle, in some way underlying all the empirical differences. And in this light the history of philosophy appears as the realisation of a logic of progress: from the idea of transcendence through transcendentalism to the paradigm of language which ushers in post-metaphysical thinking. For language as a "third" category undermines those exclusive and strict oppositions within the framework of which metaphysics alone can be articulated: that between spirit and matter, the one and the many, infinite productivity and the historically conditioned, finite products and accomplishments. Given the impressive achievements of Habermas' own communicative-theoretical project in treating many of the traditional problems of philosophy, this is not only a beguiling scheme in its simplicity, it also possesses considerable enlightening power. But one then is faced immediately with the fact that in contemporary philosophy there are other, both in their character and outcome, sharply differing historical reconstructions, of which no less can or ought to be said. Instead of referring to some other well-known example, let us say to Heidegger's reconstruction of the history of Western metaphysics as *Verfällsgeschichte*, perhaps I can mention a view, less frequently encountered today, but also commanding a degree of plausibility: that of the history of philosophy as the cyclical recurrence of the epochs of metaphysics and those of its critique.

In spite of its embeddedness in a Hegelian teleology of Spirit, it is the doctoral dissertation of Marx which perhaps still best exemplifies the possibility of such a conceptualisation. In this historical reconstruction the essential and common accomplishment of the great systems of metaphysics, the "world philosophies", consists in the total conceptual unification of the Is and the Ought. They are idealisations of a historical world, in the empirical reality of which facts and norms always and by necessity fall apart. And therefore their completion elicits the practical force of critique initially directed against false reality that gives the lie to its own ideals. But critique in its struggle with reality uncovers that the limitations of the latter are in fact undivorceable from the internal limits and contradictions of its philosophical idealisation – by contributing to the actual change of the first it destroys its own metaphysical foundations, and in this way introduces a new epoch in the history of Spirit submitted to the same logic of development.

The philosophical premises of this reconstruction will hardly find much sympathy today. But it offers an articulate vision of the history of Western philosophy as one in which the flowering of metaphysical thought is regularly followed by a wave of its, largely practically motivated, critique: ancient skepticism, late mediaeval nominalism, the struggle of Enlightenment against the "system" and, of course, contemporary thought characterised by the theory of ideology of the later Marx, among others. And if you are enticed by this vision, you can reasonably expect a rebirth of metaphysics which cannot be so far away.

The existence of a number of historical reconstructions, each in a sense illuminating, and each succeeding in giving a clear, but widely different characterisation of the meaning and the fate of metaphysics on the basis of this history, only adds to our present confusion. Their collective impact is therefore just the opposite of what each of them sets out to achieve and in fact does achieve: to ascribe an unambiguous meaning to the tradition of metaphysics and to clarify on this basis its genuine significance for our thought. But perhaps it is just this success that constitutes the inadequacy of these attempts at historical reconstruction – an inadequacy both hermeneutical and practical. A hermeneutical inadequacy, because what demands interpretation and reconstruction from the horizon of the present is precisely our deep-seated and enduring state of confusion about metaphysics and its meaning that they so admirably dispel. It is not the vital need for, or the demise of, metaphysics that requires historical understanding, but the truly ghostly presence of its tradition that neither can be expelled, nor brought back to full life. And also a practical inadequacy, for this state of confusion calls for choice and decision on the part of everyone concerned with philosophy, a decision in the presence of contradictory, but intellectually compelling, or at least forceful, motives. Perhaps we should not burden history with already having made this choice for us, so that we only need to comprehend its lessons and then swim with the tide of the times. Perhaps we should not try to uncover the hidden meaning of the history of metaphysics but instead ought to attempt to understand it just as it appears to us today: in a strange combination of the lack of a single comprehensive essence or meaning with an opaque but undeniably continuing cultural relevance. Permit me to make a few, not only fragmentary and superficial, but no doubt also quite inadequate historical remarks, mere reminders, to illustrate what I mean.

Let us begin with a very general observation. The history of metaphysics is the history of its critique. Each of the great paradigmatic figures in this history began by casting doubt upon the meaningfulness of its inherited tradition, in which fundamental and unavoidable questions and intentions have been overlaid by, and buried under, unjustifiable presuppositions, misleadingly formulated problems and chimerical ends. It was not the representatives but rather the critics of metaphysics, for whom its traditional corpus appeared as a formidable edifice in its coherence, even if built only on sand. And to grasp the history of metaphysics as that of its critique we have to ask about its intentions, its ends – from our own perspective determined by the problem of its alleged end.

For this purpose we have first to turn to Aristotle. For Aristotle, though certainly not the beginning, is the point of origin of our metaphysical tradition. It was the conceptual framework he created, upon which each new great metaphysical effort – at least till the demise of German classical idealism – primarily directed its critical edge and at the same time, through whatever radical modifications, built up its own system of categories.

Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* introduces the necessity of a "first philosophy" (in book Alpha) as that of a fundamental science which is simultaneously the science of ultimate foundations (of the "first principles and highest causes") and the "highest degree of universal knowledge." This goal for science is then defined (in Gamma) as the inquiry that is concerned not with this or that class of beings, but with "being qua being", with what is insofar as it is and with the determinations belonging to it just because it is. And it is through language, in tracks of apophantic speech that he both legitimates the possibility of such a unitary science and develops its content. The basic concepts of the so-conceived metaphysics are arrived at through the analysis of the various senses in which something can be said to be, among which the categorial occupies a privileged place;[4] the categories themselves are characterised both as forms of expressions and as types of being, and Aristotle reaches the notion of substance (*ousia*), the pre-eminent type of being, ensuring the unity of first

[4] Compare Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a33-b4, 1051a33-b2, and so on; *The Complete Works Of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (in the following *CWA*), Princeton University Press, vol. 2, pp. 1620–1621, 1660 and so on.

philosophy, through the investigation of the conditions of predication. Even if the term itself appeared only with Goclenius and Clauberg, metaphysics in this sense is truly onto-logic, the universal science of all that is in respect of its very being disclosed in our always linguistically formed and informed understanding.

But, as is well known, Aristotle also articulates (primarily in books Epsilon and Lambda) another understanding of the task and character of first philosophy. He defines it now as theology: the science of a particular kind or region of being, of the "eternal, immovable and separable" substance,[5] "what the most, and the most perfectly, is," the immovable first mover, the thought that thinks itself (*noesis noeseos*) or God. The necessary existence of such a first substance and essence is demonstrated by him[6] through an ascending overview of the main regions of beings, beginning with the sphere of the sensible and perishable natural substances. God is introduced as the being whose existence as first cause and highest end alone can explain and ontically ground the permanent order of all beings preserved in their unceasing change – of all beings conceived not in their generality, but in their hierarchically structured totality. In this intention and understanding metaphysics is theo-cosmology.

Aristotle unequivocally maintains the unity of these two conceptions of *philosophia prote*, and maintains it as something self-evident. The science of the immovable substance is "universal …, because it is first."[7] Their reconciliation, however, already represented a problem to be solved for Scholastic philosophy, from Thomas to Suarez. And for our times, beginning with Natorp and Jaeger, their relation constitutes perhaps the most fundamental and most hotly debated question concerning the interpretation of his *Metaphysics*.

I have no competence to take part in this dispute. I would like to make in this respect only two general observations.

The first is that for us these two types of metaphysical intentions have irrevocably fallen apart. This is made manifest precisely by those attempts that intend to demonstrate their coherent unity. For me, as a mere reader of

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5 *ibid*., 1026a10f, *CWA*, vol. 2 p. 1620.

6 Compare *ibid*., Book Lambda, 1–5, *CWA*, pp. 1688–1692.

7 *ibid*., 1026a31, *CWA* p. 1620.

Aristotle, the most illuminating among them are those of Patzig, Owens, and Guzzoni, who explicate this unity along the lines of the extended, ontologically conceived understanding of that relation of paronymy (the *pros–hen* relation) that is regularly employed by Aristotle. But for us, the very presupposition articulating and underlying this relation – the identification of the (ontologically and axiologically) paradigmatic case with the general case – represents not only an unsatisfactory theory of meaning, but also a rather strange idea in general. In fact, the stock examples through which Aristotle usually illustrates this relation – that of the hand to tools of all kind, of friendship motivated by the moral value of the friend to all other types of friendship, of substance to all the other categories and, let us say, of the figure Barbara to the remaining forms of syllogistic inference – do not appear in their structure even vaguely analogical.

On the other hand – and this is the second remark I want to make – these two intentions necessarily belong together in Aristotle, because only the particular character of his theo-cosmology, what I would clumsily call its conceptual finitism, makes possible the unrestricted universality-claim of his ontology. By conceptual finitism I mean the presupposition that one can ascend from the lowest to the highest region of beings through an unbroken conceptual transition, since the latter is introduced as the unification and full realisation of those positive characteristics that separately and to a lesser degree are also ascribed to the lower spheres (namely unmovability and independence),[8] while being free of their negative, "privative" properties. Only this ensures that all that is can adequately be described within a single conceptual framework, that it occupies some well-defined place within a homogeneous conceptual space. Aristotelian metaphysics knows only the supra- and extra-mundane but not the transcendent. This is reflected in many of the particular characteristics of his theo-cosmology: in the ascription of divine status also to the heavenly bodies, in the plurality of the unmovable movers, all in some sense encompassed by the indivisible first one, and so on. But it finds the clearest expression in his oft-repeated thesis that God as non-composite substance, pure essence and actuality, is – though the most difficult to think,

[8] Compare *ibid.*, 1026a10-20, *CWA*, p. 1620.

since the furthest from the senses – the most knowable. For it is either not thought at all (albeit accidentally), or it is known in its truth and completely.[9]

It is on the ground of this "finitism" that ontology and cosmology in their assumed unity circumscribe a space for the fulfilment of the third, unstated but no less fundamental, intention of the Aristotelian metaphysics: the anthropological. For if metaphysics as the highest science represents the best and the most desirable form of human knowledge, then it must coincide with self-knowledge, since it is the most desirable and pleasurable to everyone.[10] And if it is, as Aristotle states,[11] also the most authoritative of all sciences, it must also be able to indicate, in all the variety of human ends, that ultimate one to which they are subordinated. In the cosmological hierarchy of beings, man's place is defined by the fact that he is the being in the speech of whom the essential characteristics of beings as beings are disclosed, "asserted," even when what he says, what he "affirms," is false; a being who even in his erroneous statements stands in truth. The participation of the finite human thought in the divine *nous* provides the grounding for the basic presupposition of the ontology, for the ontic validity of human speech and thinking, and thus it reconfirms the necessary unity of ontology and cosmology. At the same time by raising itself to the conscious thought of the essential determinations of all beings as its own self-determinations, the *noesis* as ascension to the sphere of eternal necessity and essentiality constitutes the highest potential and *entelecheia* of human life. Ascertaining what man is, his place in the cosmos, also indicates what he ought to strive for: *theoria*, contemplation as the most apposite way of life, the highest form of *praxis*. Only in this way is metaphysics not only the first science, but also *prote sophia*, the first, highest wisdom: not only the foundation for all theoretical sciences, but equally the orientative guide for practical and poietical philosophy, too.

The Christian idea of transcendence, the notion of God's positive infinity incomprehensible to human reason, necessarily clashed not only with some particular contents of the peripatetic metaphysics, but also transformed its unity into an explicit problem. In principle this still could be solved

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9 Compare *ibid.*, 982a24-b2, 1051b25-1052b3 *CWA* p. 1554 and 1661 and so on.

10 Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, p. 1213a13-15, *CWA* p. 1920.

11 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b6, *CWA*, p. 1554.

(through appropriate conceptual accommodations like the doctrine of superior and inferior causes) as long as it was possible to maintain a concord between the appropriately demarcated *theologia naturalis* and *certitudo fidei*. Nominalism and early humanism, however, shattered this presupposition, attacking it from both sides: on the one hand, by the irrationalisation of theology through the idea of the absolute power of God and the contingency of the world of creation, and, on the other, through the destruction of the ontological dignity of language and the restriction of finite human cognition to, or its redirection towards, the knowledge of the concrete material individuals.

It was Cartesian philosophy which fully faced up to this challenge, in view of which the very task of metaphysics acquired a paradoxical character to bring to clear and distinct understanding (*intelligere*) that which by nature is incomprehensible and cannot be grasped at all (*comprendere* or *capere*). Descartes formally retained the peripatetic characterisation of first philosophy as being both the most universal science and the science of the first causes and principles, both *katholou* and *prote*. But he gave a radically new meaning to both of these determinations. *Philosophia prima* still deals "with all the first things in general"[12], but they are first in the order of knowledge, sharply contrasted with any order of being. This is not an epistemological turn. Metaphysics still primarily queries about existence and the existents, but now it looks for a first in the sense of "a being whose existence is known to us better than that of any other, so that it can serve as a *principle* for discovering them."[13] And this already points to the changed meaning of the supposed universality of metaphysical truths. Thus: the universality of the first things and principles consists not in their ontic generality, but in their productivity as ultimate and irreducible evidences able to generate in a methodical construction all that humanly can be known.

This, first of all, means that Cartesian philosophy is a metaphysics without ontology. The possibility of the latter – as an inquiry into "being qua being" – is in principle excluded once it is accepted that precisely the *ens summe perfectum et infinitum*, God is incomprehensible in its nature for human reason, that it can be known only in, and through, its incomprehensibility, and thus no

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[12] Descartes, "Letter to Mersenne", 11 November 1640, *DAT*, vol. III, p. 239.

[13] Descartes, "Letter to Clerselier", June-July 1646, DAT, vol. IV, p. 444.

predicate can in the strict sense ever be applied in the same meaning to it and to the creatures. By attacking the "categories of the philosophers" as scholastic entities subsisting only in imagination, Descartes systematically destructs and deconstructs those fundamental distinctions upon which classical ontology was based: that between the *potentia* and *actus*, matter and form, substance and attribute.

Instead of an ontology, it is now an anthropology, but a new one, which becomes the starting point and foundation of metaphysics. The being which is best known and the thought of which is the condition of possibility of every thought is my mind, first brought to the clarity of self-evidence in the *cogito*: the mind thought in a radical abstraction from the body and the senses, the mind as pure self-consciousness. But the *cogito* introduces not only a new comprehension of my own nature as theoretical insight – it is also the result of a series of resolutions undertaken in face of existential uncertainty introduced by the possibility of radical deception. It represents both the true answer to the question: what am I, and the rightful exercise of the freedom of my will to be what I ought to be: a being of reason. It is no more the overview of the totality of beings which determines, through his place, man's ontic and normative self-understanding, it is the latter which circumscribes the maximal potential of human world-understanding.

This anthropology serves also as the grounding of Cartesian theology. The only path to the *cogito* leads through the *dubito*, the radical doubt: the existential certainty and the clarity of self-understanding which the *cogito* provides are undivorceable from the recognition of my finitude, the fallibility and dependence of my very nature as a being of reason. The clear idea of the finite Ego always already presupposes the idea of an infinite and omnipotent being, God.

Descartes builds a bridge from the necessary idea of God in me to the idea of its necessary existence through a cosmology of mental representations. He extends the very notion of being, by regarding being represented, in its distinction from the being of the represented and of the representing, the *esse obiectivum* of ideas, as a *sui generis* kind of reality, even if the most minimal (since both formally and causally dependent) one. It is this cosmos of the *cogitata*, the totality of possible representations, to which he then applies the traditional conception of the grades of reality, perfection and causal efficiency,

ordering it into a hierarchy stretching from our most obscure and confused, "materially false" ideas representing nothing, to the idea of God as supreme perfection, omnipotence and *omnitudo realitatis*. But once the existence of God is proved, Descartes introduces as the completion of his metaphysics a second cosmology, the cosmology of the material world which – at least according to his program – demonstrates the principles of his physics. This cosmology of the physical is, however, in all its characteristics opposed to the first, "mental" cosmology: it knows no degrees and gradations of reality, perfection or causal efficacy – it offers a conception of the material universe as the plenum of mere spatial objectivity devoid of all qualities, self-generated movement and even of an inherent temporality (since the very duration of finite substances is explained by the divine activity of continuous creation).

The question about the consistency of the Cartesian metaphysics has been raised from the moment of its presentation and is no less disputed today. But independently of its solution, it seems that even the formal coherence of Descartes' train of thought is ensured only by that ontology that it lacks. For it is precisely not asking the question about the mode of existence of the Ego of the *cogito* – in Heidegger's formulation, the question about "the meaning of the Being of the '*sum*'"[14] – that allowed him to transit from the *cogito ergo sum* to the *sum res cogitans*, transforming a relation, originally introduced as one between an act and the agent, into that between a thing and its properties. And the same opaque and unarticulated ontology of thinghood enters again at another decisive point, too: at the introduction of the concept of the idea as *res repraesentata*, at the transformation of the contents of consciousness into peculiar mental objects. Without this underground and unthought tendency towards reification, that conceives even the nothing as "non-thing" (*non res*)[15], the Cartesian metaphysics would lack elementary consistency.

The double cosmology of Descartes made possible the transformations of his philosophy from the opposed directions of idealism and naturalism. But it was his hidden ontology of thinghood which, in its last consequences, produced a renewed crisis of metaphysics. On the one hand, empiricist analyses

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[14] M. Heidegger, *Sein and Zeit*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1977, §6, p. 24.

[15] Compare Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: Third Meditation*, DAT, vol. VII, p. 43.

of the mind as combination of ultimate mental objects, simple ideas, led, with Hume, to the destruction of the notion of the Cartesian Ego. But the same followed from the other side, too, only negatively: philosophical materialism, conceiving all that is as the infinite congerie of physical things, proved to be incapable of accounting for the phenomenon of self-consciousness. The *fundamentum inconcussum* of the new system of metaphysics was shaken; its whole enterprise again appeared as "the fruitless efforts of human vanity which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to understanding."[16]

Kant's philosophy incorporates the outcomes of this critique. It transposes the paradoxical character of the metaphysical enterprise, as it was already manifest in the Cartesian distinction between *intelligere* and *comprendere*, into the explicit question about its possibility in general. This problematisation of metaphysics is dictated by the open contradiction between the necessary dependence of all theoretical-demonstrative knowledge upon the merely given material of sensibility, with its resulting limitation to the conditions of possible experience, on the one hand, and the inward need of reason, rooted in its very nature to proceed to questions and search for answers that in principle transcend the limits of its empirical employment, on the other hand. This existential problem of metaphysics is answered by transcendental philosophy as the metaphysics of subjectivity which explicitly thematises the question missed by Descartes about the mode of being of the self. Negatively this means the destruction of dogmatism and in particular of the hypostatised understanding of the unity of the subject transforming it into a substantive entity both opposed to and existing alongside other inner-worldly beings. Positively this is a metaphysics of human finitude comprehending the being of subjectivity as the unity of the opposed ontological stands and cognitive perspectives of the knowing and the acting self: the necessarily conditioned character of the human world- and self-knowledge governed by the principle of a thoroughgoing determinism and the unconditional Ought of the moral law, its categorical obligatoriness, independent from all empirical motivations, circumstances and consequences, attesting to the freedom of the acting subject as the fact of reason, not known, but enacted in the moral determination of the will.

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[16] D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Selby-Bigge, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 11.

Thus, while the highest vocation of metaphysics consists in exhibiting the systematic unity of reason in respect of its supreme end, Kant's philosophy results in two special metaphysics which in their very structure are opposed to, and divided by "an immense gulf"[17] from, each other. Metaphysics of nature, the "immanent" metaphysics of knowledge, is the ontology of innerwordly entities as phenomena that excludes the very possibility of a cosmology. Metaphysics of morals, the "transcendent" metaphysics of praxis, posits a theo-cosmology of the supersensible, the ontological status of which, however, must remain undetermined.

The *a priori* forms of sensibility and understanding constitute the horizon within which beings as objects of knowledge and pragmatical-technical action can be encountered. The ontic character of all that can become the object of external and internal experience is pre-fixed by the transcendental constitution of finite subjectivity. Thus all that is accessible to knowledge are phenomena. The world understood as nature in its broad sense is the ever open field of progressing inquiry imposing – according to the a priori rules of understanding – a thoroughgoing connection of empirical laws upon the merely given and, for us, unforeseeable data of experience. Therefore, the effort to grasp the totality of what is, cosmology, represents the meaningless attempt to transform the task of knowledge into some object – ultimately it inevitably produces antinomies because it takes the reifyng perspective of the knowing subject for the sole legitimate and meaningful stand of the self towards reality.

The experience of moral action, on the other hand, as the consciousness of my free and rational self-determination, directly exhibits for me my noumenal being, and together with it my necessary relation and belonging to a world of atemporal and unconditional ends. It confers a practical reality upon "the cosmological idea of an intelligible world and the consciousness of our existence in it"[18] as a perspective that the morally acting subject cannot but undertake. The systematic unity of this kingdom of ends is provided by the *summum bonum* that establishes the connection between natural desires and the moral will: the ideal of a world in which happiness would be dependent upon, and

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[17] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *KAE*, vol. V, p. 175.

[18] Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, *KAE*, vol. V, p. 133

proportionate to, virtue. And to ensure in principle the realisability of this supreme end of moral action, to endow with sense our unceasing struggle against the despotism of natural inclinations, demands the introduction of the practico-theological postulates of immortality and God (the "supreme head" of the realm of ends) as "objects" of rational-moral faith. All this elaborate moral theo-cosmology remains, however, ontologically underdetermined and indeterminable with Kant. We can think the supersensible realm only in the categories of understanding that have a determinate meaning solely through, and due to the schemes of temporality, that is, in application to the objects of experience. "Reality," "causality," "unity," and so on are attributed to the intelligible only in a symbolic sense, in the sense of a nonspecifiable formal analogy with the relations obtaining in the world of phenomena. When Kant in one of his reflections states: "I admit that I do not know what the divine qualities are in themselves, but only that they are thought in the same relation to the world as human qualities to their products,"[19] one can see that his views could well play a role both in the legitimation, and in the anthropological reduction and liquidation, of metaphysical theology.

The two metaphysics of Kant, as two necessary and legitimate perspectival stands of the finite subject towards Being, stay primarily in a relation of compatibility: the opposed legislations of theoretical and practical reason do not contradict each other because, though their "territory" may be the same (appearances and things-in-themselves do not constitute two different classes of objects, but our different relations to the same objects), they legislate over different "domains." This answer, however, is insufficient in respect of the question about the sensefulness of our duty to make the realisation of the *summum bonum* our highest end in our this-worldly activities. To make any sense of our obligation to contribute to the coming of a world of perfect justice, Kant needs and ultimately offers a cosmology of empirical reality as a "transition" from the metaphysics of nature to that of morals. He presents it in the dual forms of a teleology of nature and of history, allowing both to appear as expressions of an inner, immanent, but hidden rationality. He even interconnects these two in a theory of culture as the ultimate end of nature in the third *Critique*. But he resolutely refuses to ascribe any objective-constitutive

[19] Kant, "Reflection 6286", *KAE*, vol. XVIII, p. 555.

role and meaning to the subjectively legitimate perspectives opened up by the aesthetical, natural and historical teleologies – there is no third metaphysics corresponding to the *Critique of Judgment*. The power of judgement does not legislate over any domain of objects, only reflexively over itself, prescribing *a priori* to the subject a rule of comparison between "occurring cases" and concepts given to it "from elsewhere"[20] (the principle of heautonomy). It is only a subjectively necessary way of interpreting the phenomena of nature and history as if they were signs of a free but unconscious rationality. It provides only the subjective ground of hope in the ultimate unity of the supersensible in us and the supersensible underlying nature, hope in the possibility of a world in which "reason alone is to dominate."[21]

Hegel's absolute idealism does not simply and impudently sweeps away the cautions of Kant, to return to a pre-critical metaphysics which, to make matters worse, now encompasses what was always considered its counterpoint, history, this sphere of empirical accidents. His philosophy rests on a two-pronged and closely interrelated critique of all previous forms of metaphysical thought, including that of Kant. On the one hand, his criticism is directed against all the historically proposed systems of categories as necessary determinations of all that is and/or can be thought – on the basis that they are incapable of accounting without contradiction for the possibility of thought itself, for its necessary self-referentiality. On the other hand, he uncovers the inadequacy and insufficiency of the reflection-theoretical comprehension of self-consciousness that played a foundational role in the systems of modern philosophy – it is not only viciously circular, but makes it impossible to understand that unity of the necessary universality and factical singularity of the Ego which constitutes the essence of conscious self-relation. And he also introduces history into metaphysics on these two fronts. On the one hand, in a purely logicised form, insofar as he bases dialectics, as the method of category-construction, on the model of the progressing rational resolutions of conflicting (practical and epistemic) claims, which he also takes for the hidden logic of historical evolution. And he introduces it also in its material content, insofar as his theory of the intersubjective constitution of

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[20] Kant, "Erste Einleitung," *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *KAE*, vol. XX, p. 225.

[21] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *KAE*, vol. V, p. 433.

self-consciousness directly leads to the recognition of the necessary embeddedness of all concrete forms of theoretical and practical self-relation in the historical substance of Spirit. In this way he also ushers into metaphysics a new world-concept: the conception of historical worlds (formations of objective and absolute Spirit) that – behind the back of the individuals – circumscribe the possibilities of their practical world- and self-attitudes and their theoretical world- and self-understanding.

On the basis of these transformations Hegel succeeds, perhaps for the first time since Aristotle, in fulfilling all the original intentions and promises of metaphysics: to unify into a coherent conceptual framework and through a single method ontology, cosmology, theology and anthropology. But he succeeds only through a finitist understanding of history that acts as the medium and glue of this unification. Hegel's historical finitism cannot be reduced to some particular thesis of his system like the "end of history." It is a metaphysical presupposition about the character of finite subjectivity, about the exhaustibility and perspicuity of its theoretical and practical possibilities. All that is, is intelligible in its unity and totality – because there are no more alternative possibilities for us to contemplate.

The working of this principle and its paradoxical consequences can well be seen, for example, in the case of one of the central and most influential ideas of Hegel: the intersubjective constitution of self-conscious subjectivity. In the *Phenomenology*, where this is represented in the greatest depth and detail, it is introduced by an analysis of the necessary conditions of the possibility of conscious self-relation in general – an analysis explicitly presented "for us" phenomenological observers, that is, relating to the *An-sich* of self-consciousness. It demonstrates that self-relation is made possible only through a particular relation of the subject to another subject: recognition characterised by complete reversibility and mutuality. "They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another."[22] This is then followed by the presentation of a sequence of forms in which self-consciousness empirically appears. These forms, however, do not satisfy at all the earlier established general conditions

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[22] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes,* ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, Meiner, 1952, p. 142.

of the possibility of self-relation. When Hegel describes Lordship and Bondage as a form of "one-sided and unequal recognition," in which one of the parties is only recognising, while the other is only recognised,[23] he uses an unclarified notion of "recognition" that simply contradicts its earlier explication. This is, however, not a case of confusion or inconsistency. For what was formulated as the universal condition of the possibility of self-consciousness, was in fact and quite deliberately its exemplary case, the case of its full correspondence to its notion at the end of its – and our – history. The paradox of full-fledged metaphysical thought which we have encountered already with Aristotle, the equation of the paradigmatically "first" with the universal, returns also in Hegel, and in a particularly enigmatic form, since what is the "first" as exemplary is with him also the historically "last."

These anecdotal snippets from the history of metaphysics, fragments of a possible story about it, are intended only to illustrate one point: metaphysics is a continuous effort to unify a number of intellectual intentions and interests that in the course of its history repeatedly fell apart, perhaps never were quite successfully brought to a completely coherent unity, but nevertheless again and again – and often in unintended ways – manifested a particular affinity. It would seem that today this cohesion, and even the striving for it, has finally disappeared. But this hardly means that many of the basic questions metaphysics has traditionally asked have ceased to be matters of philosophical interest and fertile, ongoing speculative inquiry. They only became separated from each other, no longer thought to be encompassable by a single conceptual framework or discussed with the help of a single method. But the basic problem-complexes that metaphysics vainly attempted to interconnect in one organic whole of meaning are still, even if in much altered form, actual for us, each on its own and perhaps each pursued within distinct and differentiated approaches to philosophy. Metaphysics in its traditional understanding as a unitary discipline is dead, but the metaphysical in the sense of a sum-total of problems and concerns still lives on.

In some sense this is not an unfair description of the contemporary state of philosophy. If one disregards metaphysical theology that has been transformed into one of the few genuinely specialised disciplines of philosophy

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

standing aside the main trends of its development, "ontology," "cosmology," and "anthropology," still in some sense designate areas and approaches where much of what attracts and deserves interest in philosophy happens today.

"Ontology," rather evidently, is primarily represented by inquiries that ask: what are the minimal presuppositions we have to make about the world and ourselves to account for some essential features of our ordinary talk or thought about them, for its meaningfulness and/or truth? Or, to use Davidson's stronger formulation: what can be concluded from the most general aspects of language to the most general aspects of reality?

The continuity of a "cosmological" problematics may be less evident given the fact that the empirical sciences have divided among themselves – or at least so they claim – all that exists. But since the unity of sciences is at best a problematic claim, there still remains for philosophy a set of somewhat disjointed questions concerning the totality of existents. Here belong problems concerning the most general, non-empirical presuppositions of the sciences, first of all of physics as the basic science, exemplified for example by the "probabilistic metaphysics" of quantum mechanics. More straightforwardly one should mention here the whole problematic associated with the relations among the sciences dealing with different levels of organisation and structure of natural entities – like questions of reduction and emergence. And the most prominent place among these latter is still occupied by the question that from the seventeenth century on has dominated metaphysical cosmologies: the mind–body problem.

It belongs today to the tone of philosophy that inquiries of both these types usually openly acknowledge their metaphysical heritage. Nevertheless, in spite of this obvious and recognised connection, one does hesitate – as I already indicated – to accept them as legitimate, even if partial, heirs of that which metaphysics was really about, and for two reasons.

"Analytic ontologies" "deserve" the name of ontology in its traditional sense only if it can be demonstrated that they depart not only from some universal feature of language, which in itself is often a matter of dispute, but also from what is the essential function and accomplishment of its use. In fact the rather sharp differences among their varieties seem to be at least partly dependent

upon what pragmatic characterisation of language has been initially accepted: as expression of belief, or statement of facts, or intersubjective identification of things, and so on. These choices of a pragmatics are, however, usually not justifiable by their prevalently semantic methods of analysis – ultimately this would demand an "anthropological" perspective to articulate the role of linguistic communication in the totality of human attitudes to the world.

Something similar can be said about the contemporary discussions of "cosmological" problems, too. They are contributions to what was a part of the traditional interests of metaphysics, if one accepts their premise: empirical sciences represent the privileged, best available form of objective knowledge about all that is. But the justification of this premise is beyond their own conceptual resources and interests, and therefore they are also always open to a criticism that denies them precisely any metaphysical significance, since it ascribes, on the basis of "anthropological" arguments, a more restricted epistemic function to science.

And this brings up the second, more general point: whatever the diversity of the original intellectual concerns and interests of metaphysics, and the difficulty of their unification, they were dictated by a unique and unitary motive accounting for their affinity. Whether it departed from the generality and totality of the world to define those attitudes of human beings towards this latter which can provide a higher and stable meaning to life, or took its starting point from some privileged attitude of the subject, deemed to constitute the essence of subjectivity, to outline how the world can and ought be handled and understood, metaphysics always strove to create such a connection between our world- and our self-understanding that would disclose our "true" self-identity, which would be unshakable by the vagaries and accidents of life because it would be based on knowledge alone. When the various components of metaphysics become independent problem-complexes, they can no longer serve this ultimate motivation – precisely in this sense they lose their "metaphysical" significance.

In this respect, however, those contemporary philosophies which primarily inherited the "anthropological" concerns of the metaphysical tradition are in a paradoxical position. They are still the closest to it precisely in respect of its ultimate motivation – and the most opposed to it in the character and way of its realisation.

For such philosophies cannot fail to ask the question how is it possible to reconcile the subjective perspectivicity of our world-relations as a practical potential in principle allowing some distance from our natural and social environment, in order to make it the object of our intentional actions, and in some degree to form and choose our identities, on the one hand, with the recognition of the impersonal, indisposable power of natural and social objectivity largely conditioning what and who we are. Such philosophies attempt to inscribe the conflicts and tensions of contemporaneity into the polarity of these opposed determinations with the end: to provide an orientation amidst the antinomies of the present on the basis of some general characterisation of the human situation as an overarching facticity, within the framework of some conceptually articulated paradigm of the relations between humans and their world. Whatever the differences between them, whether their effort is directed primarily at enlightening the dilemmas of individual life-conduct or collective alternatives, philosophies of this type still try to create some meaningful connection between our situated forms of self- and world-understanding that offers not only insight, but some practical orientation as well.

But if these philosophies still retain a contact with the deeper motivation of the metaphysical tradition, the way they realise it is fundamentally opposed to its very idea. The claim of metaphysics to be the foundation of all sciences is certainly a thing of the past. But contemporary "ontologies" and "cosmologies" still retain an essential affinity with the scientific style of thinking: they offer – or at least usually claim to offer – refutable analyses and explanations. The logic of "anthropologically" oriented philosophies is, however, ultimately non-explanatory. The connection they establish between some paradigm characterising a universal human facticity and our present situation has only the character of a meaningful and enlightening narrative. The first provides the general conceptual framework, in terms of which the present can be interpreted by throwing light on the roots of its malaises and potentialities through a meaningful selection of some facticities of the past, through some "history" of its genesis. This does not mean, at least not necessarily, an "aestheticisation" of philosophy. It remains a conceptual narrative, still open to rational critique according to the demands of conceptual clarity, meaning-consistency, and even empirical justifiability of all that it assumes to be facts. But its essential accomplishment (and criterion of significance) ultimately consists in its

relevance and enlightening power as interpretation of our present concerns, dilemmas, and alternatives.

But it is also only through this "narrativisation," by renouncing the most elemental claim of metaphysics to be explanatory knowledge, that philosophies of this type can remain faithful to its animating motive. A philosophy which undertakes today the task of "orientation in thought", accepts thereby not only the responsibility for interpretative insight, but also for some, however general, guidance in respect of an appropriate, inevitably value-based practical attitude towards the conflicts and paradoxes of our epochal present. And personally, I do not think it any more possible to infer from, or theoretically construct out of, some facts – be they the most universal – the binding character of some values. Philosophies today, so it seems, can create a connection between facts and values only by suggesting a "story", which illuminates our history and which, though it cannot endow it with an ultimate sense, still can make it less anxiety-generating, conflict-ridden, and more meaningful if we, here and now, take upon ourselves the responsibility to continue it in a definite way and direction marked out by some reflexively chosen values.

The end or the revival of metaphysics – perhaps this is, in our intellectual situation, a false alternative. The tradition of metaphysics is very much with us today, and not only as the dead weight of the past, a pile of old concepts which we cannot get rid of, since we have no others with which to think philosophically. It is with us as a whole series of problems that still engage us, together with some paradigmatic, alternative schemes of their possible solution or dissolution. But this does not mean that contemporary philosophy, in some of its undertakings and tendencies, essentially continues, at least in part, the enterprise of metaphysics, only in a modified, more modest or meaningful form, giving a new, more befitting garb to some of its old contents. For the only way to continue this tradition meaningfully is to renounce something basic and essential to it. When philosophy today keeps on raising, and dealing with, old metaphysical problems and concerns, it also puts them into contexts which, in one way or another, are quite alien to, or even irreconcilable with, some of the basic ends and motives of metaphysical thought. And the "one way or another" is of import here. For which problems and concerns of the tradition are seen as still deserving attention largely determines in what sense and respects one also breaks with it; there is not a single, pre-established

way to do so meaningfully. It is a matter of intellectual choice – no doubt, first of all dictated by one's conception of what philosophy can and ought to do today, to whom it speaks, and for what ends.

Modernity, in the course of its historical unfolding, has eroded the normative substance of cultural traditions: their orienting force for, and their binding claim upon, the present. No doubt this process has occurred in the various fields of basic cultural activities in different, in some cases even contrasting, forms. In the "hard" sciences the effectively mobilisable and cognitively employable past has been reduced to the instant of the historical present called the "current state of research" and in practice encompassing the last few decades. In the arts, on the contrary, the scope of the aesthetically relevant tradition has been boundlessly extended to comprise not only a whole series of historically opposed styles, but also creations and artifacts of distant and unrelated cultures. In philosophy the same outcome has largely been the result of an antagonisitic cultural organisation and comprehension of its past as well as its present. From the time of the Kantian problematisation of its cognitive status, philosophy became perceived as the locus of an ongoing struggle between its irreconcilable "sects." But the principle of division between them has also undergone a constant change: dogmatism versus scepticism, materialism against idealism, rationalism or irrationalism, philosophies of subject and those of intersubjectivity, anti-foundationalism opposed to foundationalism – these are some of the paradigmatic examples, each differently articulating what is really at stake in the disputes among philosophers. For usually, each new division declared the previous dichotomies to be merely ephemeral, still sharing a common ground that itself must be problematised and challenged. Thus, in the very process of this constant reconceptualisation the original belief motivating this agnostic construction of history, the belief in the possibility of creating a higher, ultimate synthesis, has been undermined and eliminated. The "strife of the systems" could not be resolved – instead it dissolved the very idea of the "system," the general cultural form, through which philosophies of early modernity articulated their particular epistemic claim and modality of meaning, legitimated their cultural function, and created a unity among their variegated problem-complexes or disciplinary endeavours. (And again: this phenomenon of the dissolution of the predominant form-complexes of cultural modernity is not restricted to philosophy alone: analogical observations can be made in respect to the novel or the classical forms of "absolute" music as well.)

But the erosion of tradition qua tradition occurred in circumstances when philosophy, like some other disciplines, have lost their explicit and explicitly recognised social function. In contrast with the "hard" sciences that, confident of the indispensability of their technico-pragmatic contributions, could safely transform the works of their own historical past into hagiographic memorabilia, these forms of cultural creativity to a large extent derive not only their legitimation, but also their identity as specific forms of cultural practice, through allusions to their past, the works of which played a constitutive role in the formation and still contribute to the maintenance of the very consciousness of modernity. The rejection of tradition as a normatively binding instance therefore still goes together with a reference to it as the factual condition of present intelligibility and significance. The erosion of tradition as something endowed with normative validity is accompanied with the renewed evocations or constructions of some tradition as a power of determination, be it conceived as unfortunately spent and to be revived, or still disastrously efficacious, to be resisted and put to rest.

Metaphysics has been, throughout its long history, the foundational branch or discipline of philosophy. Its crisis therefore involves not only some particular problems internal to philosophical discourse, but equally the "external" question about the possible role and significance of philosophy under the conditions of late modernity, a question that theoretically cannot be divorced from the more general problem concerning the fate of "high culture" in contemporaneity, and which practically raises the issue of our responsibility as philosophers. This definitely does not mean that the answer to this crisis is to be sought in some general sociology of culture or in fuzzy references to "commitments:" cultural function and cognitive content are not separable from each other. But it means that to answer it philosophy must situate its own problems as philosophical problems within the broader historico-cultural context of our epoch as one of the ways of the problematising and (perhaps) rationalisation of its dilemmas and alternatives.

This paper certainly did not attempt to accomplish such a task. It basically confined itself to a superficial description of that which we philosophers actually happen to do in the present situation of our discipline: it dealt with trivia. But it is perhaps not completely useless to remind ourselves from time to time about some quite trivial truths – not the least for enabling us to ask more searching and more vital questions.

Chapter Six

Changing Images of Science

Science is a self-reflexive activity. I do not intend by this remark to confer some specific dignity, the privilege of heightened critical self-awareness, upon scientific practice. I merely intend to draw attention to the fact that we are inclined to characterise some institutionalised kinds of knowing in a culture as constituting, in a sense, "science" only when they are, in this culture itself, explicitly distinguished from common, everyday cognitive activities as a specific sphere of "learning," and are so distinguished by legitimated claims to a priorised access to truth. This obviously does not constitute a sufficient criterion for the recognition of some cultural practices as "scientific," but it is – I think – a necessary condition of it. This means that science encompasses not only a body of propositions claiming to be true of some segment of reality or area of inquiry, but constitutes also a more or less elaborated view of this kind of knowledge as definite *images of science*.[1] These images fulfil a double role,

[1] The importance of this notion for the history of science has been emphasised by Y. Elkana. See for example "A Programmatic Attempt at an Anthropology of Knowledge" in E. Mendelsohn and Y. Elkana (eds), *Sciences and Cultures*, Dordrecht,

both "external" and "internal." On the one hand, they serve to ensure a legitimate place for some specialised practices of acquiring knowledge in the hierarchy, or otherwise organised multitude of culturally codified "higher" activities; that is, they *demarcate and legitimate* specific cognitive activities. Actually their content is to a large degree determined by what constitutes science in the given cultural context, and what constitutes its main competitor in respect of privileged access to truth. In this way images of science also confer an epistemic authority upon some social or professional groups who are the customary agents of these practices, and exclude others from this authority. On the other hand, they fulfil an *orientative* function in respect of on-going scientific practice, both subjectively and objectively. By situating "science" among the various intentional human activities they orient its practitioners in the sense of affirming and sanctioning some specific motives, attitudes and values which ought to guide their conduct. At the same time they also provide a framework within which a tradition for their activity is selectively organised, and simultaneously influences the choice of preferred methods, styles of thinking and priorised problem-fields; that is, the direction of present, on-going inquiry.

It follows that images of science are never merely descriptive: they inevitably contain, explicitly or implicitly, prescriptive-normative elements. By articulating what science *is*, they also fix what kind of knowledge has a *right* to specific epistemic authority. And while it is obvious that no effective image of science can be independent from what has already been accepted and codified in a culture as scientific tradition, neither does it simply reflect this facticity, but is co-determined by that broader social-cultural context in which this body of knowledge is put to variegated uses and by the divergent social attitudes towards them. So images of science change historically, depending both on the body and character of scientific knowledge and the encompassing social matrix of its application and development.

Reidel 1981, esp. pp. 13–27. My use of the term, however, somewhat differs from his. Elkana distinguishes "images" and "ideologies" of science, the latter being constituted by the norms of scientific thinking and conduct. In my understanding the very images of science always have a prescriptive-normative force.

Any attempt, however, to overview such a process of historical change faces the considerable difficulty that there is not only a diachronic, but also a synchronic plurality of such images, and in two different respects. On the one hand, images of science are usually articulated in a number of differing cultural genres: in works of science themselves, in philosophy (insofar as it is distinguished from "positive" science), in "folk" culture, often in literature, theology, and sometimes even in the iconographic conventions of painting. In view of the fact that these may well be cultural forms which at the given time compete for the supreme cognitive authority, it is not surprising that the respective views of science often sharply differ in their content and are, of course, articulated by different means and to different degrees. Since, however, the task of cultural self-reflection has been, under conditions of modernity, specifically allocated to philosophy (and to some human and social scientific disciplines), the most elaborate images are usually to be found in works which we today consider as properly philosophical – and I shall deal basically with them. But even with this restriction there is at any time a simultaneous multiplicity of quite divergent images of science in philosophy itself – simply because these images are elements of on-going cultural struggles and vehicles of formulation of discrepant, or even opposed, ideological tendencies.

Given this complexity, an attempt to cover in a single paper even the broad outlines of the historical change images of science have undergone in our culture, may well be not so much an ambitious as a foolhardy enterprise. To simplify my task I shall focus on the change of a single aspect of these images: the categorical characterisation; if you like, the general definition of the very concept of science. I must immediately add: this is not only a single, but also a quite marginal element in those philosophical oeuvres I shall deal with. As a rule not only creative scientists, but also philosophers are not especially keen to provide formal definitions for concepts whose meaning can be presupposed. Perversely, this is the very reason I have chosen this focus. My hope is to be able to indicate through it some basic shifts in the usually unthematised pre-understandings of science, in those epochal pre-judgements, which even philosophical adversaries unconsciously share. Of course, I am cognisant of the danger of such an approach; concentrating on what is in this sense marginal, one can easily end up with either what is purely accidental, or with the trivial. To lessen the danger of such an outcome I shall at least try to connect

this subject at various points with some more emphatic and important elements in the respective images of science. In any case what I am to present is merely a very rudimentary and fragmentary narrative, a "story." It makes no claims other than the ones apposite to a story of this kind.

I would like to begin this story with what we usually regard as the birth of "our," that is, of modern Western science, and equally of the modern conceptions of science: from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, in particular with Bacon and Descartes. And I would like primarily to draw attention to the fact that these two philosophies, usually regarded as the respective source of two opposed traditions in the philosophy of science, share a common feature: a deep-seated *ambiguity* in respect of the categorical characterisation of science itself, a constant vacillation between a *subjectivist* and an *objectified* understanding. To explain more clearly what I mean, it is perhaps useful to refer to those traditions upon which they could draw for articulating, and to which they had to counterpose, their new understanding, and "definition," of science.

There were actually two such traditions. The dominant, in fact the only explicitly articulated one, derived from Aristotle. He defined scientific knowledge, *episteme* (invariably translated in both Roman and medieval times as *scientia*) in *subjective-psychological* terms. This was so, in part, because he, like Plato, primarily intended to demarcate science from everyday knowledge as mere "opinion" (*doxa*), including beliefs based upon apparent similarities (*emperia*) and the recording of particular facts (*historia*). He conceived *episteme* as the superior way in which an individual can hold something to be true, a way through which one can acquire knowledge of objects of another, higher kind (of that which cannot be otherwise) in contradistinction to the everyday things and facts of opinion.[2] So together with other forms of intellectual knowledge, science is regarded by Aristotle as a state by virtue of which the soul possesses truths of a definite, superior kind. More precisely it is defined

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[2] See for example *Posterior Analytics* II, 88b30-89b9. *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (abbreviated as *CWA*). Ed. by J. Barnes. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1984. Vol. I, pp. 146–147. See also Plato, *Philebus*, 58a-59c. *The Collected Dialogues* (abbreviated as *PCD*). Ed. by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1982, pp. 1140–41.

as *heksis*, that is, as an acquired, but lasting and firm aptitude or, to use its usual translation, as a mental *habitus*. It is distinguished from other forms of intellectual knowledge by being specifically the habitus of demonstration ("a state of capacity to demonstrate"), that is, the aptitude of possessing and assenting to knowledge which is, on the one hand, *mediated*, that is, derived from principles which do not belong to science, but constitute wisdom (*nous*), and which, on the other hand, is universal, necessary and concerns the cause of things.[3]

This subjectivist understanding of scientific knowledge does not mean, however, that its Aristotelian conception is individualistic and monological. Rather the opposite is true, and in respect of the entirety of the classical heritage. Plato, counterposing the rhetoric-persuasion of the many to dialectic, as the method of discovery of scientific truth nevertheless also conceives this latter as a process of dialogic interaction able to produce true consensus: the agreement of the very man whose ideas are under examination.[4] True, Aristotle does contrast dialectic (in his understanding of this term) with philosophy (that is, with theoretical science) in one text,[5] by maintaining that the former is always concerned with another party, while the philosopher investigates by himself. But then, according to him, the starting points and transdisciplinary principles of scientific demonstration are acquired through the dialectic investigation of commonly held, "reputable opinions,"[6] and he usually envisages argumentation itself as a joint enterprise. And intersubjective transmissibility, teachability, is for him a definition of science: he denies the possibility of a science of the accidental by arguing that it would not be teachable and learnable.[7]

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[3] See esp. *The Nichomachean Ethics*, VI, 1139b14-36. *CWA*. Vol.II, p. 1799.

[4] "… if I cannot produce in you yourself a single witness in agreement with my views, I consider that I have accomplished nothing worth speaking of in the matter under debate, and the same, I think, is true for you also, if I, one solitary witness, do not testify for you and if you do not leave all these others out of account" (*Gorgias*, 472bc) *PCD*, p. 254.

[5] *Topics*, 155b7 ff. *CWA*. Vol. I, p. 261–3.

[6] *ibid*, 101a36-b4, p. 168.

[7] See *Metaphysics*, VI, 1027a20-23. *CWA*. Vol. II, p. 1622.

So *episteme*, as an acquired aptitude, is seen, in spite of its subjectivist definition, in the context of interaction between humans. But the intersubjective context into which science is inserted, and in terms of its acquisition and exercise, is one *from person to person*. This explains the highly suspicious, if not outrightly hostile, attitude of the classics toward the objectivation of philosophy in writing, pronounced in Plato, and also, to a degree, resounding in Aristotle.[8] The various types of knowledge, and here we touch upon the root meaning of the "subjectivisation" of the science-concept, primarily had for classical philosophy the significance of divergent mental attitudes towards the world in the sense of different ways of integrating oneself intellectually into the order of the cosmos. Their function was primarily *edificatory*, having an intimate relation to the character, possible meaning, and excellence of life. Science is understood in this, not individualistic, but *personalistic* sense by Aristotle.

The schools of High Scolasticism inherited this Aristotelian conception and definition of science as *habitus demonstrandi*. It is repeated with some variations by most of its representatives.[9] However, in spite of the formal constancy of this definition, the Aristotelian conception of "science" had already become inadequate to actual cultural practices. With the epoch of Hellenism, and with the collapse of the *polis* and the disappearance of conditions under which philosophy or science[10] could creatively exercise its genuinely

[8] See Plato, *Protagoras*; 329a, *Phaedrus*; 274b ff., *Letter VII*, 341c ff. The distinction Aristotle draws in *Eudemonic Ethics* (1217b22) between "popular" and "philosophical" discussions clearly relates to this problem, the latter refers to his lectures in the circle of friends and disciples which, though written down, were never intended for an anonymous reading public.

[9] For the sake of illustration see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 14.1.ob.1; *Summa contra Gentiles*. II, 73; *Questiones Disputatae: De Veritate*, XII, 1.c.; Pseudo-Grosseteste, *Summa Philosophiae*., III, 4; Duns Scotus; *De Primo Principia*. (*Philosophical Writings*, trans. A. Wolter, Indianapolis, Franciscan Herald Press 1964, p. 10); William Ockham, *Expositio super VIII libros Physicorum, Prologus* (*Philosophical Writings*, ed. P. Boehner, Edinburgh, Nelson 1957, pp. 3–6); Buridan, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Questiones,* proëmium etc.

[10] For the classical period *philosophia* simply means scientific knowledge including what we today understand by philosophy. With Aristotle *philosophia* equals *episteme*

personality-forming function, it increasingly acquired the character of a fixed tradition which the individual faced as something to be mastered and appropriated for gaining entrance into the cultural-social elite, or, in the later Middle Ages, access to a vocational carrier. But just the very traditionalism of this cultural practice and attitude excluded the possibility of providing an explicit articulation to the new understanding of "science" which it actually involved. This latter, therefore, found its expression primarily in the use of a set of new terms in which scientific knowledge now became described and characterised. In this instance, I am concerned with the terms *doctrina* and *disciplina* (with their Hellenistic predecessors of *didache* or *didagma* and *mathema* or *paideuma*). Originally they designated only the process and result of teaching and learning some knowledge, and their "official" definition through all these times retained this meaning. So one can read in Pseudo-Grosseteste: "Science is properly called in the person teaching, *doctrine*; in the person learning, *disciline*."[11] But by pre-Christian Rome, these terms, the distinction between which became slowly eroded over time, began to designate the *content* of what can be taught/learned as it is reposited in authoritative texts already given to the context of teaching. This tendency has been further enhanced in the Middle Ages since the Scriptures, with its authoritative interpretation by the Church, became regarded as the highest and most exalted

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theoretike and is divided (see *Metaphysics*, VI, 1026a18 and XI, 1064b1) into mathematics, physics and theology; the latter often called philosophy (metaphysics). In later imperial Rome, the meaning of the term is extended further and becomes even more undetermined due to the amalgamation of philosophy with rhetoric (and this latter, one ought to remember, included poetry). This process continues unabated in the early Middle Ages; *philosophia* becomes the synonym for any and every kind of non-pragmatic learning. Only High Scolasticism re-establishes the classical (Aristotelian) meaning of the word as theoretical science. On this question see J. E. Heyde, "Das Bedeutungsverhältnis zwischen *philosophia* und 'Philosophie'," *Philosophia Naturalis*, 7 (1961), pp. 144–155; and E. R. Curtius, "Zur Geschichte des Wortes Philosophie im Mittelalter," *Romanische Forschungen*, LVII (1943), pp. 290–303.

[11] *Summa philosophiae*, II, 4. See also Domenicus Gundissalinus: "one speaks properly of *discipline* in respect of the disciple, insofar as it is learned, but of *science* when it is retained in the soul." *De divisione philosophiae*. Quoted by A. Diemer in *Beitrage zur Entwicklung de Wissenschaftstheorie im 19Jahrhundert*, Meisenheim, Hain 1968), p. 20.

science – hence such notions as *doctrina* (or *disciplina*) *Christiana* (Augustine, Eriugena), *doctrina Dei* (Augustine), *sacra doctrina* (Thomas). Of course, it would be absurd to conceive doctrine-science, in this sense, in terms of a mental habitus. Furthermore there was a tendency to distinguish, again dictated by the theological need to reconcile texts of different degrees of authority through distinctions in their levels and ways of meaning, "doctrine" as ideal content, and objective meaning, from its immediate textual fixation. Already Tertullian speaks of sacred books as *instruments* of doctrine.[12] So there exists in fact, through the whole medieval period, a non-psychological understanding of "science" (in the sense of the higher type of intellectual learning) as an *ideal meaning-content* which is *textually objectified*. But it is organically interwoven with a static and dogmatic traditionalist-authoritative understanding of knowledge, in which the very understanding of its creation, that is, the concept of authorship, became inextricably interwoven with the notion of past authority.[13] Not by chance does *disciplina* also mean authority, an imposed order and rule.

It is understandable that the great propagators and protagonists of the "new" science, with their polemical zeal against all forms of "book-learning," could have nothing in common with this second tradition in the conceptualisation of science. So it is not surprising that they return to its subjectivist understanding. [14] This is clearly the case with Descartes. He defines science outright as "certain and evident cognition."[15] It "consists uniquely in our achieving a distinct perception" of a definite type,[16] or, in another formulation, in clearly

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[12] *De preascr: haeret*., 38, quoted in H.-I. Marrou, " 'Doctrina' et 'disciplina' dans la langue des Peres de l'Eglise," *Bulletin du Cange*, IX (1934), p. 14.

[13] See A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2.ed. Aldershot, Scolar 1988, pp. 5–14.

[14] Their direct source in this, it seems to me, is, however, not the Aristotelian tradition but the Ramist psychologisation of logic.

[15] Descartes, *Regulae*, X, p. 362; *PW*, I, p. 10. References are first to the revised Adam-Tannery edition of *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Paris, Vrin/CNRS 1964–1976, then, after the semicolon, when it is appropriate, they are followed by reference to the English translation of *Philosophical Writings* (abbreviated as *PW*) by J. Cottingham et al., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1985–1991.

[16] Descartes, *Regulae*, X, p. 427; *PW*, I, p. 49.

distinguishing and correctly attaching the primitive notions to the appropriate things.[17] The point may be less obvious with Bacon. But his general definition of science is equally in subjective-psychological terms: "For under philosophy I include all arts and sciences, and, in a word, whatever has been from the occurrence of individual objects collected and digested by the mind into general notions."[18] Accordingly, true philosophy depends on the "closer and purer league" between two faculties, the experimental and the rational, allowing "to lay up" the matters gathered from observation and experiment "in the understanding altered and digested."[19] Bacon's often disparagingly quoted remark about mathematics as "the remedy and cure of many defects in the wit and faculties intellectual"[20] does not particularly signal its undervaluation, it is simply in accord with his view that the true methods of science are to "equip the intellect" for a "better and more perfect use of human reason."[21] In this respect, it is characteristic that both Bacon and Descartes are not only hostile to bookish learning, but definitely suspicious of the linguistic formulation and objectivation of scientific results. For them in its genuine, pristine form, science exists only in the mind, more exactly in the creative abilities of the scientist.

One could, of course, suppose that all these formulations merely reflect the retention of a long-standing dominant tradition. In fact, however, they point towards a new understanding of science and have far-reaching consequences. Among this latter understanding I would refer to two developments. Firstly, the intellectual organisation of the body of knowledge and the placing of science within it, and secondly, the conception of scientific method.

The first problem preoccupied Bacon. His highly influential classification of all existing and possible forms of learning, the "mappemonde" of the intellectual globe, derived the main branches of knowledge from the basic faculties

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[17] Descartes, *Letters to Elizabeth, 21 May 1643*, III, p. 665; *PW* III, p. 218.

[18] *A Description of the Intellectual Globe*, V, 504. References are to the Spedding et al. edition of *The Works of Francis Bacon*, London, Longman 1857–1874, except the *Novum Organum* (*NO*) to which I refer by citing the numeration of the quoted aphorism.

[19] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, p. 95.

[20] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, III, p. 360.

[21] Bacon, *Preface to the Great Instauration*, III, p. 22.

of the rational soul. History, poetry and philosophy, expressly equated with the sciences, are, as he says, respective "emanations" of memory, imagination and reason.[22] This classification is very strange since it seems to be at cross-purposes with the fundamental ideas of Bacon in respect of science. It sharply divorces natural history, that is, the systematic record of observations and experiments, from science proper (philosophy), and organises the two into distinct intellectual enterprises and bodies of tradition. The alienating consequences of such a classification can be clearly seen in the tree of knowledge presented, under conditions of an already greatly expanded scope of scientific research, in the Great French Encyclopedia which completely followed the Baconian principles. Here you find, for example, under the great branch of *history*, the natural history of meteors, of the earth and the sea; then under a quite separate subdivision of the same branch, the history of celestial wonders, unusual meteors and the wonders of the earth and sea. Separately from all this, under the great branch of science/philosophy you then encounter geometric astronomy belonging to applied mathematics, and again divorced from it, physical astronomy and cosmology as parts of "particular physics." It is without doubt that this classification could retain its effectivity and popularity for two centuries because it had no relevance to the practical organisation of scientific activities. Early modern science was simply not specialised. In respect of the usual research interests of the individual scientist, the scope was determined only biographically, not institutionally, since academic carriers very often involved promotion from the "lower" to some "higher" faculty, that is, successive changes of "speciality." But the popularity of this classification had quite rational grounds. And here we encounter the first paradox of this early modern conception of science, which from our standpoint seems to be just an arbitrary dismembering of unified object-fields of research. In its own historical context this was actually a decisive attempt at the unification

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[22] Bacon, *De Augmentis*, IV, p. 293. Bacon's faculty of psychology itself is based on (largely unexplicated) principles which are opposed to the traditional doctrine about the "parts" of the soul. This latter primarily distinguished its various functions according to the difference among their appropriate formal objects. The Baconian faculties are, on the other hand, distinguished according to the various ways the mind produces its object out of the identical material of past impressions (see for example *De Augmentis*, IV, pp. 292–293; *A Description of the Intellectual Globe*, V, 503–504 etc.).

of all knowledge. On the one hand, this classification demolished the fundamental Aristotelian–Scholastic division, usually hierarchically understood, the division between theoretical and practical knowledge, and thereby made possible a new conception of the *function* of science. On the other hand, and even more importantly, the derivation of all branches of knowledge from the fundamental mental faculties conveyed upon the entirety of possible knowledge an architectonic unity, immanently determined by the nature of the human mind alone, which then conceived it as a single, consistent and self-sustaining *system*. I shall return in the following to both of these points.

First, however, I have to touch upon another problem: the way the subjectivist understanding of science interlinked with a new idea of *scientific method*. The well-known prominence of this problem in philosophy of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century is to be explained by the fact that the demarcation of science from everyday cognition is now usually realised through the claim to the possession of a method in science which ensures the *certainty* of acquired knowledge. The dividing line between the two is now drawn, indicating the special way scientific knowledge is attained, and enabling it to *produce* ever *new* results.

The differences between the Baconian and Cartesian traditions, between the empiricist and rationalist conceptions of method, constitute the staple of introductory courses in the history of philosophy. But what these two conceptions of the method share is of no less import.[23] Both Bacon and Descartes offer a *method of discovery*, ultimately a heuristic of truth which they both oppose to the method of exposition or presentation under which they essentially subsume both traditional logic and rhetoric. From our present perspective, their respective methods consist in a combination of psychological advices, methodological precepts and logical rules. These are, however, unified and homogenised by being formulated, and with an equal normative force, in terms of some allegedly elemental mental operations upon some

[23] I cannot discuss here, of course, all the basic similarities involved. Epistemologically the most important among them is the presupposition that the whole of scientific knowledge constitutes a combinatory construction out of a finite system of ultimate elements to the list of which we have some simple access: to the "forms" or "simple natures" of Bacon and the "primary" or "common notions" of Descartes.

ultimate psychological data. The method is, in this way, a "due aid to the mind"[24] or, as the subtitle of the *Discours* states, the direction "of rightly conducting one's reason." Its end and promise is to make the individuals able to discover on their own all the truths of science which they take the trouble to look for[25] "without calling in any of the ancients to our aid and support, but relying on our own strength[26] to *produce* them through the correctly guided actions of our intellect alone. Science is "the intellectual aptitude to solve any given problem."[27] It becomes identified with the productive ability of the individual mind to unveil the new, and new truths, through rational procedures of investigation.

And this is where the two subjectivist conceptualisations of science, the classical and the modern, fundamentally differ. The latter is genuinely individualistic, based on a monological conception of knowledge. The polemic, so vehemently conducted by Bacon and Descartes against the "old" logic and dialectic, is directed not only against a method which addresses its questions to texts, and not to nature, and is fruitful in words, not works; it is, at the same time, the critique of a view of knowledge which sees the finding of truth necessarily embedded in a collective process of disputation in encounter with the transmitted traditions and in the clash of opposed arguments, which it therefore takes as its primary object language and not processes of thought. The new subjectivist conception of science understands it not as a *sum of truths* reposited as safe possession in the soul through its participation in this process of conversation of the minds over the distance of time, but as a practice of *intellectual production*, undertaken by the solitary heroic individual, the creative scientist. This view is, of course, inseparable from the fact that the

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[24] More particularly, the three stages in the Baconian "interpretation of nature" are "ministrations" to the sense, memory and reason, respectively (see *NO*, Bk. II, 10). As L. Jardine comments: "every stage [of the method] mimics the operation on immediate sense perceptions of a faculty of the mind, and corrects its inherent and acquired defects:" *Francis Bacon, Discovery and the Art* of *Discourse*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1974, pp. 71–72.

[25] See for example Descartes' formulations in the *Recherche*, X, pp. 496 and p. 503; *PW*, II, pp. 400 and 404, or in the *Treatise on Light*, XI, p. 48.

[26] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 122.

[27] Descartes, *Regulae*, X, p. 367; *PW*, I, p. 13.

great initiators of modern science were intellectual adventurers, with a genuinely religious faith in their own calling to find a new Archimedean point for knowledge, facing in this undertaking not merely intellectual risks. Our distance from them is graphically illustrated by the metaphors routinely applied to characterise scientific activity. From Bacon to Kant, the scientist is compared to the daring pioneer opening up untried and unknown paths, or to the pilot guiding the ship on uncharted waters towards new continents. Puzzle-solving (à la Kuhn), so popular today, and which characterises what scientists "normally" do, was the very word of condemnation by which Descartes dismissed traditional arithmetic and geometry as not deserving the name of genuine science.[28]

This rhetoric of the solitary hero of the intellect is, however, constantly accompanied with an equally emphatic rhetoric of humility. Both Bacon and Descartes again and again emphasise the ordinariness of their minds, their lack of superior intellectual abilities. They raise their voices in the name of the average man of "good sense."[29] And this is not merely a conventional sop to Christian virtue. For paradoxically, it is the individualistic conception of science which allows its "epistemological democratisation," at least in principle. Participation in the conversation of minds has always been regarded as, either on principled grounds or as an obvious socio-cultural fact, open only to an elite. In the medieval period the very idea of a cognitively higher type of knowledge and learning acquired a directly status-bound sense. Linguistically this found its expression in the fact that in the High Middle Ages, both in English and French vernacular, the term most commonly used in the meaning of "scholar" originally designated a member of the estate of the clergy: "clerk/*clerc*." It regularly became applied to ancient or Arab pagan philosophers, to Jewish prophets and so on. In this process it lost its ecclesiastical meaning.[30] But it clearly retained its connotation of a status: the practitioners

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[28] Descartes, *Regulae*, X, p. 374; *PW*, I, p. 17.

[29] See Bacon, IV, pp. 12 and 41; *NO*, Bk. I, 122; *Descartes*, VI, pp. 1–3, and X, pp. 395–396, 496–498, etc.

[30] So Chaucer calls (in *House of Fame*) Platon, Aristotle, Theophraste, Roman historians "clerks," Langland (*Piers the Plowman* C) speaks even of Muhammed as "a great clerk" – for these and further quotes see K. Krebs, *Das Bedeutungswandel von me clerk*

of medicine and law could not be called "clerks" (scholars) since they used their "art" for earning a living. In opposition, the new notion of science as the individual's ability to produce new truths on their own by the help of a reliable method, implied, in principle, that scientific activity is open to all men of good sense. For the method was formulated in terms of the most fundamental intellectual capacities and operations shared by every normal human being (or at least, given the usual psychological presuppositions of the epoch, every male). This ensured both the intersubjective validity of its results and their availability, once discovered, for everyone at every time. This is the point where both Bacon and Descartes consciously counterpose the new science not only to scholastic learning, but also to the hermetico-magical tradition. Science demands not so much exceptional intellectual abilities to grasp the esoteric *arcana* of nature, but rare (and certainly "manly") moral virtues: independence of mind, selfless love of humanity and truth, tenacity and patience in its search and so on. "For my way of discovering sciences goes far to level men's wit and leaves but little to individual excellence, because it performs everything by the surest rules and demonstrations;"[31] it does its business "as if by machinery."[32] Accordingly the new science also has another addressee; it is no longer directed to the circumscribed group of the "learned,"[33] but, at least rhetorically, to all the upright men of open mind and unprejudiced judgement: the *l'homme honneste et curieux*. "A good man (*honneste homme*) is not required to have read every book or diligently mastered everything taught in the Schools. It would, indeed, be a kind of defect in his education if he had spent too much time on book-learning."[34]

But these two tendencies, heroising individualism and "epistemological democratism" in the understanding of science, remain essentially unreconciled

und damit zusammenhängende Probleme, Bonn 1933, pp. 31–40. Concerning the French use of "clerc" see U. Ricken, *"Gelehrter" und "Wissenschaft" im Französischen*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag 1961.

[31] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 122; see also Bk. I, 61.

[32] *ibid.*, Author's Preface.

[33] Descartes, for example, uses the expression *docte* ironically. see Ricken, *"Gelehrter" und "Wissenschaft"*, pp. 160–165.

[34] Descartes, *Recherche*, X, p. 495; *PW*, II, p. 400.

in both Bacon and Descartes. At the most abstract conceptual level this is reflected in the fact that neither of them is able to consistently sustain the subjectivist understanding of science as the methodologically guided creative abilities of the individual to produce new truths of a definite kind, or of the cognitions so acquired. They constantly use this term in the "obvious" sense of the objective-objectified body of knowledge independent of individuals, without, however, clearly establishing its meaning. It has to be added, that both of them make inconsistent attempts to terminologically distinguish these two senses. Bacon in the second context sometimes uses the expression "works, or, productions of the mind," while Descartes employs the more traditional expressions of "doctrine" or "*corps des sciences*."[35] On the whole, however, their use of the term "science" remains ambiguous.

As we have seen, the subjectivist understanding of science was connected, both in Bacon and Descartes, with fundamental aspects of their conceptions. But the considerations which, largely in an unreflexive way, pushed them towards an objectivist conceptualisation were not less integral or important to their view of the "new" science. First of all, the idea of science, as intellectual production of new truths and inventions, is bound in their work to the notion of a *progress* of knowledge which is beyond the undertaking of a single individual, and necessarily links successive generations in a common, cooperative, superpersonal enterprise. Beyond this rather obvious point, one which is certainly much more emphatic in Bacon than in Descartes, neither their view of the *function* of science, not its normative comprehension as a *system* could be reconciled with its subjectivist definition. These two latter points I would like to discuss further, even if in a very schematic way.

The question about the *function of science* would have been meaningless for classical antiquity. The quest for theoretical knowledge was generally regarded as fundamental, the highest human desire. "All men by nature desire to know," is the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,[36] which is followed by the demonstration that only its satisfaction brings complete happiness. Science is therefore pursued for no other end, but is desirable for its

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[35] Descartes, VI, p. B; X, pp. 374, 513 etc.

[36] *Metaphysics*, I, 980a22; *CWA*. Vol. II p. 1552.

own sake, it is self-sufficient and an end-in-itself.[37] It is just this view which constitutes the basis for what I earlier described as the "personalistic" understanding of science, and which demarcates it from all forms of knowledge that aim at the orientation and direction of human actions and conduct (*techne* and *phronesis*). The object of science is that which necessarily exists, and therefore cannot be influenced by human activity, but it is also beyond the scope of ever-changing practical human interests.

It is only when man's true happiness as salvation becomes relocated in the realm of transcendence and is made dependent upon grace and faith, that the question about the function and specific legitimation of science emerges as such. The quest for knowledge as an end-in-itself now acquires the meaning of idle curiosity as a cardinal sin. It is legitimate only insofar as it acquires an instrumental function: that is, it serves the ultimate end of salvation.[38] So science retains its primarily personal significance and its association with the unchangeable transcending human might,[39] but only at the price of its subordination to, and restriction by, institutionalised religion, as preparatory and auxiliary to faith.

Early modern images of science were primarily directed at the demarcation of science from religion in ways which ensured the *autonomy* of the inquiry into the causal processes of nature. Both Bacon and Descartes, in similar ways and certainly moved by sincerely religious motives, reject the Scholastic instrumentalisation of science as the handmaiden of theology; that is, as the illegitimate intrusion of reason into the mysteries of faith. At the same time,

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[37] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 982a3-983a10; *The Nicomachean Ethics*; X, 1177a11-1178a8. *CWA*. Vol. II, pp. 1553–1555 and 1860–1862.

[38] This whole process has been analysed convincingly and in detail by H. Blumenberg, in the third part of his *Die Legitimität de Neuzeit: De Prozess der theoretischen Neugierde*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp 1973. My disagreement with his treatment of early modern conceptions of science – with his underestimation of the significance of their "realist" turn against nominalist conventionalism – will become clear in the following.

[39] Thomas Aquinas defines science in its proper sense as that habitus of the speculative intellect which – in contradistinction to the arts – is "not ordered to any work (*opus*)" either of the body or the mind (see *Summa Theologiae*, II.I.57.3.ad.3).

they retain the traditional Christian condemnation of "idle curiosity." They *invent* a new instrumental function for science "to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe,"[40] "to make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature."[41] In other words, they articulate the technical mastery over nature for the sake of the amelioration of the conditions of this-worldly life. They posit and forge a necessary link between science and the despised, "servile" mechanical arts.

I consciously use the expression "invent." True, this new definition of the function of science certainly was not arbitrary: it "reflected" a complex process of social transformation which resulted in a changed attitude toward mechanical arts and, in general, toward occupations concerned with material livelihood. It "reflected" the enormous impression that accelerating technical development, and especially some of the new inventions made upon the minds, such as the growth of technical literacy and the transformation of some tradition-bound artisanal activities into engineering "constructions," the diminishing gap between the technical and the traditional intellectual endeavours and so on. But it certainly did not reflect the actual, or even the potential, social role of science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Actually, up to the nineteenth century the impact is primarily from technique, whose main source of development still remains the accumulation of artisanal skills, now greatly accelerated due primarily to new economic rewards, upon science, and not the reverse. Whatever role one has to ascribe in technical development to the new scientific spirit, to the role of an elementary scientific literacy among highly skilled artisans and engineers, to the contact between them and some academic scientists, the fact remains that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries conscious attempts at the direct technical application of the newly acquired scientific knowledge, in spite of many ambitious projects undertaken or at least envisaged, usually ended in fiasco, or at least did not produce technically significant achievements. The single most important contribution of the nascent "new science" to technical development consisted in the fact that its propagators successfully created an atmosphere of cultural interest in, and social recognition for, innovations in

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[40] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 129.

[41] Descartes, *Discours*, VI, p. 62; *PW*, I, pp. 142–143.

this field. And the claim to technical mastery was made equally emphatically and with equal philosophical generality also by those, like Campanella, whose understanding of science was situated squarely within the hermetico-magical tradition.[42] Though the new intellectual enterprise of modern science legitimated its claim to authority with reference to its "contribution to the comforts of life," it was its destructive-critical and systematic-argumentative power in respect of dominant traditions which conferred credibility upon this claim rather than the reverse. The assignation of the function of securing man's dominion over nature to science was originally an ideological move; the filling of a space created by theology to wrench an intellectual terrain from theology. Here is an ideology which historically *made* itself true.

The direct result of this construction, however, is that science, which in its cognitive character had been understood as the productive activity and possession of the *individual,* in regard to its function is now firmly located in a supraindividual, strictly *social* realm. The adequate *motives* of scientific activity now also become divorced from the personality forming life-interests of the individual. Both Bacon and Descartes are hostile not only to the pursuit of science for such lowly ends as gain, ambition or pride, but they also condemn the autotelic pursuit of truth as an end-in-itself; that is, scientific activity

[42] The ascription to science of the function of technical mastery can be linked not only to the hermetico-magical tradition. It can be argued (as it was by such diversely motivated authors as M.-D. Chenu, Lynn White Jr or Robert Spaemann) that this idea is directly connected with the transformation of the classical conception of an immanent teleology of nature (expressed in the peripatetic notion of *entelecheia*) into an anthropocentric teleology implicitly accomplished by Scholasticism, and with the related notion of man – being the image of God-Creator – as *homo artifex*. No doubt, especially in Bacon, one can find direct traces of both of these traditions. It would be, however, mistaken to regard the new conception of the function of science as a mere "secularisation" or disenchantment of pre-given religious or occult ideas. Its elaboration involved a fundamental conceptual (and more generally: socio-cultural) reorientation – first of all a radically novel understanding of human pragmatico-technical activities no longer conceived – as they were according to the classical and medieval notion of "arts" – as *imitation* of nature, but as *production* of new forms and entities out of its neutral and "inert" material by operationally mastering its laws as merely factual necessities.

undertaken for the intellectual and emotional gratification which is immanent to it. Bacon even argues that this "misplaced end and goal of the sciences" is the primary cause of their stagnation.[43] "[K]nowledge that tendeth but to satisfaction is but a courtesan which is for pleasure and not for fruit or generation."[44] Character and motive of activity are now in sharp contrast. The genuine scientist is moved neither by individual-personal interests, nor by disinterested curiosity. No wonder he is a solitary hero: he is the moral virtuoso who acts as the embodiment of "everyman", who is motivated by the sheer universality of human interests as the representative of mankind itself.[45] Even Bacon, with all his emphasis on the necessity of collaboration in science, is primarily interested in the creation of a social patronage to secure the education, and support the activity, of such a few. In the utopia of *New Atlantis*, scientists constitute a hierarchically organised, quasi-religious order at its top with the three Interpreters of Nature, alone called upon to raise experiments into "greater axioms and aphorisms": the secular priesthood of *philantropia*.

This curious blend of what can be called "depersonalised individualism" in the understanding of science as productive activity has, however, further characteristics which again militate against its primary, subjectivist-individualist definition. Earlier, writing about the "invention" of a new function for science, I did not make sufficiently clear what it was that was genuinely new in this conception. It was not the assignation of a pragmatic function to science which constituted the genuine novelty of this view: from the thirteenth

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[43] See Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 81–82.

[44] Bacon, *Valerias Terminus*, III, p. 222.

[45] Here is, for example, Leibniz's portrait of the ideal scientist: "men must be chosen and placed at the head of this business who not only are outstanding in ability, judgement, and learning but also are endowed with a unique goodness of mind; in whom rivalry and jealousy are wanting; who will not use despicable devices to appropriate for themselves the labours of others; who are not factious and have no wish to be regarded as the founders of sects; who labour for love of learning itself and not for ambition or sordid pay. Such men will certainly become friends and will push *forward* the laudable undertakings of others, thus deserving much from mankind. The great Mersenne was a man of this kind long ago, and I should prefer that these men today should fall behind him a little in science rather than in probity": *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. L. B. Loemker, Dordrecht, Reidel 1969, p. 282.

century on, Ptolemeian, and later, of course also Copernican, astronomy was quite usually regarded and legitimated as a useful tool for predictive computations alone, and some of the nominalists seemed ready to extend such a view to physics in general. But in these cases the vindication of some forms of knowledge through their pragmatic function was accompanied with the reduction of their status and claim to truth. They were conceived as useful fictions, or at best plausible hypotheses for "saving the phenomena." For the standpoint of utility and the standpoint of scientific truth in its classical, Aristotelian sense, seem to be irreconcilable. The latter is concerned with what is universal, necessary and eternal in things, while the former treats them from the viewpoint of particular, accidental and transient human material interests. Though it is quite alienating to our post-Kantian thinking, utility, both in antiquity, and the Middle Ages, is regularly associated not with truth, but with (sensuous and impermanent) beauty understood as the well-made, the thing which perfectly fits its purpose. "The useful is beautiful in respect of that for which it is useful," writes Xenophon.

So it genuinely amounts to a major conceptual revolution when Bacon and Descartes (certainly not independently of that "realist turn" which took place in contemporary astronomy and physics) made practical utilisability an *immanent consequence* and, at the same time, a "sign" of scientific truth in its full-blooded, Aristotelian sense. Both of them criticise the "overhasty and unreasonable eagerness to practice."[46] Science is "a true model of the world in human understanding."[47] It offers, for each individual, the true, adequate intellectual orientation in the totality of the world of creation as an enormous casual mechanism and in this way has also a religious significance. It opens up an independent path to the comprehension and admiration of the power and wisdom of the Creator, and only therefore can it not be of some particular and restricted use, but rather the vehicle of man's rightful dominion over the whole of nature.

This, of course, means that the prophetically modern proclamation of the function of science by Bacon and Descartes is ultimately connected with the

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[46] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 70, see also pp. 99, 107 etc. and compare Descartes, *Regulae* X, p. 361; *PW*, I, p. 10.

[47] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 124.

most strikingly anti-modern feature of their views: the retention of the Aristotelian conception of scientific knowledge as comprising only strictly apodeictic, necessary truths and, therefore, the denial of the legitimate role of hypotheses in science. This seems to be an enormous step backwards against the "probabilism" of late medieval nominalists, a step even less understandable, because as practising scientists, which they both were, however unequal the significance of their work in this respect, they were well aware of the actual role of hypotheses in research. Descartes, for example, is definitely troubled, hesitant, not to say cagey, when it comes to the characterisation of the exact epistemological status and claim of his own physics, and not only in public, namely the concluding paragraphs of *Principia*, but also in his private correspondence.[48] However, when they articulate their *general* image and conception of science, they inevitably insist upon the non-probabilistic, strictly necessary and certain character of scientific truth.

One of the reasons for this apparent relapse into dogmatism, so alien to our viewpoint of the scientific spirit, is to be sought in the inadequacy of the inherited discourses concerning knowledge and belief for the formulation of a hypothetico-fallibilistic conception of scientific theories. As Ian Hacking has shown,[49] up to the last decades of the seventeenth century "probable" means not that which has evidential support, but that which is approved by reliable authorities, or at least worthy of approval by men of intelligence. It is the attribute of sound opinion, as opposed to knowledge. So the protagonists of the new science who fought against these very authorities and accepted opinions could hardly characterise it as probable.

But this explanation, though sound, does not seem to be sufficient. For the characterisation of "science proper" by the apodeictic necessity and certainty of its truth is widely retained even after the modern notion of probability had been elaborated and became available. Leibniz, whom one can hardly accuse

[48] See for example the letter to Mersenne, 27 May 1638 and to Morin, 13 July 1638 (II, pp. 142–144 and 198–200; *PW*, III, pp. 102–105 and 106–111). For a detailed discussion of Descartes' view of hypotheses in science see R. M. Blake, C. J. Ducasse and E. H. Madden, *Theories of Scientific Method*, Seattle, New Impression 1966, pp. 79–99.

[49] See *The Emergence of Probability*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1975, esp. ch. 3.

of missing the role of hypotheses in science, nevertheless repeats its traditional definition as knowledge by certain demonstrations.[50] The same is present in Locke[51] and in Chr. Wolff.[52] In fact, as we shall see, it is in a sense still retained by Kant. This lasting "dogmatism of science" has to be seen, however, in its proper cultural context – it was a necessary presupposition to establish the autonomy and supremacy of scientific research.[53] As long as science stands in competition with religion as to the description and explanation of what the world is, the acceptance of the probable and fallible character of scientific theories can only subordinate science to the authority of institutionalised faith by contrasting the frailty of human reason with the certainty of revelation. Such a view can legitimate particular theories in regard to their direct pragmatic usefulness (and at this stage very few do satisfy such a criterion), but it cannot ensure for science an independent domain over which it would have ultimate authority. Only the insistence upon the rationally indubitable and strictly necessary character of scientific truth, concerning what the things of nature, and their causes are, while remaining completely silent about their meaning and the ultimate end of their existence, can radically demarcate science and religion as two compatible but independent forms of epistemological authority. Only when religion itself culturally retreats from the task of explaining the phenomena of the world into the sphere of subjective attitudes and meanings, so that it no longer stands, at least as a cultural norm, in competition with science, does the idea of the latter's fallibility lose the character of the renunciation of its cognitive autonomy.

The demarcation between science and religion indicated above at the same time presupposes that the notions of "meaning" and "end" are radically

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[50] Compare *Opuscules et fragments inedits*., ed. L. Couturat, Hildesheim, Olms 1961, p. 496.

[51] Compare *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. by P.H. Nidditch . Oxford, Oxford University Press 1975. Book IV, chapter 3, section 26.

[52] Compare *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General*. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill 1963, p. 17.

[53] A similar point was made in a number of papers by Benjamin Nelson. See for example "Sources of 'Probabilism' and 'Anti-Probabilism' in 16th and 17th Century Science" and "The Early Modern Revolution in Science and Philosophy," both republished in his volume *On the Roads to Modernity*, Totowa, Rowman & Littlefield 1981.

removed from the explanation of nature, insofar as it constitutes the object of science. The connection between the new understanding of the latter's function as "mastery," on the one hand, and the conceptualisation of its subject-matter as the neutral locus of causally connected events, the regularities of which are determined by laws devoid of inner meaning and immanent necessity, on the other, is regarded today as commonplace. It is therefore perhaps of some interest to indicate that, even in this respect, early modern images of science are less clear-cut and unambiguous than it is usually assumed.

E. Fox Keller has drawn attention[54] to the contradictory, or dialectical, character of that sexual imaginary in which Bacon often articulates his conception of the relation between nature and the human mind as the repository of science. This constantly oscillates between metaphors of violent aggressivity (subduing nature and making "her" our slave) and emphatic responsivity (winning nature over for a chaste and lawful marriage). Accordingly, the "feminine" role of submissive receptivity in one type of context is also ascribed to nature, in others to the mind. These observations, however, can, so it seems to me, be generalised beyond the realm of the sexual. On the whole, there is in Bacon a dual conceptualisation of nature as the mere object of *manipulation and control*, on the one hand, and as the subject, partner of *communication*, on the other. Nature is to be shaped "as on an anvil,"[55] it is to be dissected,[56] to be put "under pressure and vexed," "squeezed and moulded."[57] On the other hand, however, man is only "the servant and interpreter of Nature:[58] "true philosophy … echoes most faithfully the voices of the world itself, and is

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[54] See *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1985, pp. 33–40.

[55] Bacon, IV, p. 343.

[56] *NO*, Bk. II, 52.

[57] It may be mere accident, nevertheless it is rather startling how often experimentation is associated with vexation and torture in the Western heritage. In fact what seems to be the first explicit reference to experiments in our tradition, Plato's discussion of the Pythagorean investigations into the acoustic, immediately invokes this image: they "vex and torture the strings and rack them on the pegs" (*Republic*, VII 53lb).

[58] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 1.

written as it were at the world's own dictation.[59] Moreover, one should approach nature "with humility and veneration, to unroll the volume of Creation, to linger and meditate there … For this is that sound and language which went forth into all lands, and did not incur the confusion of Babel …"[60] Once stated in these terms, one can immediately recognise the recurrence of this dual imaginary in Descartes, to whom any sexual metaphor is also profoundly alien. Nevertheless, and in spite of his thoroughly mechanical conception of nature, it appears again as a partner in communicative intercourse: nature teaches us,[61] but it can also deceive,[62] since it commits errors,[63] though it alone can untangle the confusion.[64]

A long time ago Lukács indicated that the idea of a meaningful and harmonic cosmic or divine order is not simply replaced by the understanding of the universe as the sum-total of law-regulated events, but its dissolution results in a split conception of nature: firstly, as a mere object, the resource and instrument of human actions; and secondly, as a value-accentuated subject. In early modern images of science both conceptions can still be found together (and in the metaphysics of Spinoza and Leibniz we encounter conscious efforts at their theoretical reconciliation). And their often uneasy coexistence cannot be regarded merely as the remnant of a former view of nature which had not been completely overcome; it was, at least in its effects, not without purpose. In its very ambiguity it provided a framework within which one could attempt to draw closer together demonstrative science proper and such "lower" intellectual or professional enterprises as medicine or "chemistry," which relied primarily on the notions of "natural signs" and "signatures of things" in the role of evidence. Most importantly, however, this duality was in accord with the very character of the cultural practice and type of knowing that these early "images of science" attempted to articulate and legitimate. For this was not natural science in our sense, but "*natural*

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[59] Bacon, *De Augmentis*, IV, p. 327.

[60] *ibid.*, V, pp. 132–137.

[61] Descartes, *Meditiationes,* VII, pp. 38, 76 etc. ; *PW*, II, pp. 26, 53 etc.

[62] *ibid.*, VII, p. 85; *PW*, II, p. 59

[63] *ibid.*

[64] Descartes, *The World*, X, p. 36; *PW,* I p. 92.

philosophy." It claimed to represent the knowledge of the causal mechanism of the world *as* expressing and demonstrating the wisdom and power of God, thereby not merely providing a neutral instrument of human power, but also an edifying force illuminating the rational use of power. Only the idea of nature as the "second book" of God could conceive autonomous science not as indifferent or hostile, but as genuinely complementary and supplementary to true religion, and at the same time to contrast, intentionally or unintentionally, its unambiguous interpretation of God's work (language which "did not incur the confusion of Babel") to the struggle with religious sects around the interpretation of his words, and so to lay the foundations for science's later claim of an intellectual and cultural supremacy.

Nevertheless, though the dual image of nature is integral to the very idea of "natural philosophy," there is no doubt as to which of the two conceptions dominates: the view of nature as mere object of control not only prevails in the relevant texts, but is the dominant one in respect of its internal consistency. It gradually drives out the image of nature as an "understandable" and responsive co-subject from science. This does not mean that this latter disappears – it is equally immanent in the culture of modernity. But it is relocated, as the demarcation between these two spheres becomes more pronounced, from the sciences to the arts. Art is now seen as the locus of the exercise of our "mimetic" capacities, and which allows us to encounter a nature that in unenforced cooperation "answers" to our needs. The beginning of this development can be traced back to Bacon. He already defined the function of "poesy" as compensation for the accidents of "ill-proportionality" in the order of nature and conceived the task of art in "accommodating the show of things to the desires of the mind."[65] Though the idea of a "communicative" relation to nature, the demand of its "understanding," as distinct from its explanation, never completely disappears from natural science,[66] especially from its relatively "younger" branches, this conception, once integral to the very image of science, progressively becomes one of the vehicles of its cultural critique.

With the changed understanding of its object, there also occurs a change in the *cultural form* of "natural philosophy." When the unity of reality is

[65] *De Augmentis*, IV, p. 316.

[66] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 112.

comprehended as the hierarchical order and harmony among the plurality of the essential forms and ends of its entities, ensured through the existence of imaginatively or allegorically presentable "correspondences" between them, this always presupposes a substantive cultural background, a belief and classification-system taken-for-granted which alone allows these non-sensuous relations to be formulated and grasped intellectually. If, on the other hand, this unity is conceived as the unitary way of explanation of all the phenomena through the *discovery* of some coherent set of laws governing their change, this implies, whatever its own unexamined premises, the element of suspension of belief in the validity of the pre-given, common forms of their conceptualisation. This finds its expression in the way this new outlook is thought to be realisable: its bearer, philosophy/science ideally acquiring with its early protagonists the form of *system*,[67] (and with this, after some detour, we return to the question concerning the subjectivist *versus* objectified understanding of science).

The notion of system ought not be confused either with attempts at ordered, encyclopedic summation of the existing body of knowledge, or with a definite literary form of its exposition, or even with the existence of some

[67] To ascribe to Bacon an understanding of philosophy/science as system may seem to be completely arbitrary and distortive, given his constant attacks against the "perilous influence" and "mischievous authority" of philosophical systems which also motivates his very deliberate preference of, and option for, an aphoristic form of presentation. This critique, however, concerns not the understanding of science as one system, but its over-hasty, artificial and subjective ("according to private fancy") construction which therefore misses the "natural system" of knowledge, that is, the one reflecting that of nature. For, in spite of all this inveighing, Bacon at the same time considers it possible (and necessary) to offer "a general and faithful perambulation of learning" containing not only the sciences "already invented and known," but also those "omitted which ought to be there." And this is necessary since the "disincorporation" of particular sciences from general knowledge constitutes one of the great impediments of their advancement (*Valerius Terminus*, III, p. 228), partly because the "force" of a scientific proposition depends upon its fitness with others, each supporting the other and so contributing to the proof of the whole (see *Cogitata et visa*, III, p. 286). Furthermore, one has to keep in mind that the very applicability of Bacon's method depends on the possibility to present at least an ordered list of all simple natures – a fact of

unchanged principles of its logical construction.[68] System is the dominant, though certainly not uncontested, *cultural form* of philosophy as long as science is not demarcated from it, from the early seventeenth to late nineteenth centuries. That is, it is rather to be comprehended as a set of fundamental normative requirements or culturally pre-given expectations, which works of this genre are supposed to satisfy, determining the way their meaning and claim to truth is conceived, the manner they are to be understood, evaluated and criticised.

The conception of system is of theological origin: it emerged in the Protestant theology of the late sixteenth century out of its insistence upon the unitary and self-explanatory sense of the Bible itself.[69] Transferred to philosophy/science, this idea meant that texts of this type ought to be regarded not as transient mediators in a communicative interaction but, at least ideally, as self-enclosed and self-explanatory meaning-complexes whose truth is

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which he is not completely unaware, since at some points he promises to provide just such a "Synopsis of all Natures in the Universe" (*De Augmentis*, IV, pp. 149 and 155). On this latter question see M. Hesse, "Francis Bacon's Philosophy of Science" in B. Vickers (ed.), *Essential Articles for the Study of Francis Bacon*, London, Sidgwick, 1972, esp. pp 123–131. Lastly the supreme end of Bacon's science is the summary philosophy as the system of most general axioms which is "the mother of the rest" (*De Augmentis*, IV, p. 337).

[68] The various system-forms – the axiomatico-deductive, genetical, transcendental and dialectical (to name only the most important ones) – whose sequence constitutes an important aspect of the history of early modern philosophy, differ from each other in respect of the basic logical and epistemological principles of their construction. So the very notion of system in philosophy cannot be defined in terms of some logical structure.

[69] Concerning the origin and development of the idea of system the most comprehensive philological overview remains O. Rietschl, *System und systematische Methode in der Geschichte des wissenschaftlichen Sprachgebrauchs und der philosophischen Methodologie*, Bonn, 1906. Some important corrections and additions to Rietschl can be found in the paper of A. von der Stein, "Der Systembegriff in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung" in A. Diemer (ed.), *System unde KIassifikation in Wissenschaft und Dokumentation*, Meisenheim, Hain, 1968. About the theological origin of the system-idea see also H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 4th edn, Tübingen, Mohr, 1975, pp. 162–164.

available to every solitary recipient who undertakes the appropriate rational labour to understand them. This involved, on the one hand, the idea of presuppositionless knowledge, not a common-shared cultural background, but insights open to reason which constitute the sole conditions of. understandability. This demanded that, not only the answers, but also the questions themselves and the way they are posed, be rationally justified. The *questio*, the basic unit out of which the great *Summas* of Scholasticism are organised, is actually a proposition, or two contradictory propositions, mostly taken from some traditional authority, whose truth or falsity is not evident and which therefore is made the object of disputation through the method of *sic et non*. Now questions are transformed into *problems*. Whether they are correctly formulated and whether they make sense at all, is one of the fundamental viewpoints and objects of critique. Conceiving philosophico-scientific knowledge as a system presupposes, and this is the second point to be made, that by departing from some ultimate certainties, be they of sense or of reason, and by proceeding methodically, one can always determine and justify which questions make, or do not make, sense at the given stage of inquiry; to demarcate sharply and unambiguously between meaningfulness and meaninglessness relative to the order of knowledge. This, of course, also conferred a definite place upon every possible true answer in the architectonic totality of scientific knowledge: a place which predetermines its cognitive significance, the weight of its contribution to the whole of knowledge.

It was ultimately this idea of the system, by guaranteeing that scientific method is able to produce not only isolated and particular certainties, but a coherent, integral and self-sustaining knowledge of the world capable of answering all meaningful questions about nature as a mere object, that allowed the radical proclamation of the autonomy of science and a universalistic formulation of its function as technical mastery. Of course, concerning that which we now consider to be natural science proper, the implied image remained only the vague ideal of future perfection (in respect of philosophy, on the other hand, it had a directly text-organising and interpretation-orienting force). This does not mean, however, that it did not have effects. For example, the strong cultural resistance against specialisation in the natural sciences, already very clearly voiced by Bacon and Descartes, which was to become a major issue of practical struggles within science in the first half of the nineteenth century, was all the time motivated by this ideal; that is, the

actual outcome of these struggles, the thoroughgoing specialisation (and professionalisation) of natural scientific inquiry and its posited public, will also invalidate and destroy this image of sciences as, in their totality, potentially constituting a single system.[70]

Nor does the fact that philosophy/science, as a system, could only be understood as the ideal of a future perfection mean that it is unachievable. The idea of an unlimited scientific progress, which can always only approximate towards systematic completion, first clearly emerges in the French and German Enlightenment (and even then it is mostly understood in the sense of a limitless *extensive* growth). Both Bacon and Descartes conceive the advancement of science as a finite progression towards a perfection which is not far from reach. Bacon, though his views in this respect are ambiguous, in fact, repeatedly claims that were all the necessary observations and experiments collected, through the application of his method by a sufficient number of trained people, "the discovery of all causes and sciences would be but the work of a few years."[71] Nevertheless they both recognise that philosophy/science, as a completed system, is not achievable not only by them, but is beyond the productive, or receptive, capacities of any single individual. In general, once the system becomes firmly established as the adequate cultural form and ideal of scientific knowledge, the definition of this latter, in terms of the subjective productive capacities of the individual mind, is growingly rendered untenable.[72]

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[70] The great interest towards, and proliferation of, various classifications of sciences, in the nineteenth century can be explained as an attempt to maintain this idea in the face, and in spite, of the more and more rapidly progressing process of specialisation. The complete disappearance of these endeavours from the beginning of the twentieth century signals the disintegration of this conception. Now even those who emphatically want to maintain the idea of the unity of all sciences reject the idea of a systemic-architectonic unity – so, for example, the representatives of the Vienna Circle will base their argumentation on the unity of the language of science.

[71] Bacon, *NO*, Bk. I, 112.

[72] In fact in the theological discussions about the concept of system Keckermann already distinguishes science as habitus from science as system understood as the methodically articulated totality (*Inbegriff*) of truths (compare Rietschl, *System und systematische Methode*).

So the ambiguities and hesitations of Bacon and Descartes, between a "subjectivist" and an "objectified" understanding of science, are far from being accidental. Both conceptualisations are linked to the recognition of some basic aspects of the cultural process through which modern science acquired its autonomy. Changes in the image of science will resolve this ambiguity: its objectified conception becomes culturally self-evident. But the original ambiguities do not simply disappear, they recur in changed forms to result ultimately in opposed and antinomic understandings that seem to question both the fact and the meaning of the autonomy of science.

The shift towards an objectified understanding occurs first at the level of an unreflexive semantic change[73] and as part of a broader process of transformation of meanings. Though I have indicated a number of specific conceptual and cultural motives making the prevalent subjectivist understanding of science no more tenable, the change in its meaning completely parallels analogical semantic transformations in the use of all the principal terms through which we designate the main branches of high culture; transformations occurring between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. *Art* originally meant any kind of skill, *literature*, the ability to read, or more narrowly the possession of polite learning, *culture* itself, the process of forming higher intellectual and moral abilities and its result, the state of the cultivated mind. The shift from connoting subjective abilities or states to that of "works," as objectivations with supraindividual sense and significance, certainly reflects one of the fundamental processes in the formation of Western modernity: the social emergence of *high culture* in its specifically modern sense. That is, the social constitution of a realm of practices which are posited to produce *ideal* objects embodying, as meaning-complexes, atemporal and universal values, but being, at the same time, ideal *objects*, that is, human works among which the individual can have, according to their personal interests, abilities and

[73] A. Diemer – the only one who has discussed this process in some detail – refers to the definition of science in Watts' *Logick* (1725) as the first clear formulation of this objectified sense so natural for us. "The word science is usually applied to a whole body of regular or methodical observations or propositions concerning any subject of speculations" (*System unde KIassifikation*, p. 23). The same example is given in R. Williams' *Keyword. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London, Croom Helm, 1976, p. 233.

so on, a free choice. This culture is "high" in the sense that it is thought to represent the treasury of the greatest human achievements possessing a general human significance, and accordingly, its objectivations are in principle addressed to everyone; to a sociologically unspecified and anonymous public. But it is "high" culture simultaneously in the sense that it can be opposed to what is common and vulgar, for its works demand from the individual that they "raise" themselves to their level, to understand them in the light of those norms and criteria which are immanent to these, usually professionalised practices and which are divorced from everyday life and public understanding.

The meaning-drift towards an objectified understanding does not result, however, in a new image of science as long as it is not problematised. This occurs only when the ambiguous comixture of the two definitions and the understandings of science are directly challenged, and not in the name of logical clarity, but through a critique of the fundamental presuppositions that provided legitimation for autonomous science. This is the deed of Rousseau. What Rousseau directly denies is the connection between the progress of science as the growth of accumulated knowledge and the development of genuinely useful individual abilities and personal insights into the true and good. Beyond that which the "seasoned, but limited understanding" of the average man can learn from, and can use in, his practical encounter with the things of his environment, the physics learnt by Emile, science is useless for the well-being of the individual and, by "unsettling all the axioms of simple and primitive reason,"[74] it is destructive and deadly for the morals. Rousseau reverses the classical conception of *episteme*: "In general science is not suited to men. Man ceaselessly goes only astray in its search; and even when sometimes obtains it, it is almost always to his prejudice. Man is born to act and to think, not to reflect. Reflection serves only to make him unhappy without making him either better or more wise."[75] The development of sciences and arts have always been accompanied by the decline of communal morality and the dissolution of ties of social solidarity. Because science, promising us the chimera

[74] My references to Rousseau are to the four volumes of the Gallimard edition (Paris, 1959–1969) of *Oeuvres Completes* (*ROC*).

[75] *Preface à Narcisse*, *ROC*, II, p. 970.

of a domination over eternal and unchangeable nature, only distorts our human nature and creates a world where each man vies for domination over all the others, everyone is actually dominated by a system of merely apparent, false self-interests. Here interests have nothing in common with real needs, but are shaped by anonymous social pressures and "opinions." To the grievious and fatiguing labour of the chemist and physicist in their grim laboratories, a labour resulting not in the knowledge of the great operations of nature, but in the senseless pride over the small combinations of the art, Rousseau counterposes the pure and innocent pleasures, a regained feeling of oneness with our surroundings and internal peace which the "botanist" finds in the aimless, asystematic and nonmethodic, minute observation of unspoiled nature in the individual variety and beauty of plants.[76] This "conversation with plants" is the solace and recompensation for "the vain attempt to converse with humans."[77]

It was in answer to Rousseau's critique of science that its objectified conception received its first paradigmatic formulations; new images of science were born. One of them in a sense "looked backward" and today unjustly forgotten, gave the ultimate, theoretically highest formulation to the "utopia of science" in the Enlightenment. The other, equally defending the positions of Enlightenment, represented the great attempt to face up to, and draw the consequences from, its crisis. The first was the work of *Condorcet*, the second that of *Kant*.

Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*,[78] written while the author was in hiding from the warrant of arrest, is an act of public vindication of a life spent equally in the pursuit and defence of science and of democratic freedoms. The whole of human history is called upon to bear witness against the criminal, self-destructive folly of Jacobin politics, and against the "false philosophy" and "brilliant paradoxes"[79] of its theoretical

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[76] Compare *Les Reveries du Promeneur Solitaire, ROC*, I, pp. 1067–1070.

[77] *Rousseau juge de Jean Jacques*, *ROC*, I, p. 794.

[78] I refer to the works of Condorcet on the basis of *Oeuvres de Condorcet* (*OC*), ed. A. C. O'Connor and M. F. Arago, Paris, Didot, 1847–1849. The quotation from the *Sketch* follows its English translation (abbreviated as *Sketch*) by J. Barraclough, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1956.

[79] *OC*, VI, p. 195; *Sketch*, p. 142.

source, Rousseau. The *Sketch*, in its entirety, represents a sustained argument for the organic, indissoluble *unity of science and radical democracy*,[80] the only social order able to realise in practice the eternal laws of morality. It is within this framework that Condorcet develops his historical theory of science as a specific form of social organisation and objectified intellectual and communicative practice.[81]

The point of departure for Condorcet's theory, concerning the role of science in history, is an anthropology derived from a naturalistically interpreted Locke. The only principled difference between humans and animals consists in the fact that, due to a number of fortuitous biological characteristics originally ensuring a merely quantitative superiority in psychological capacities,[82] human beings, as opposed to animals, are "no longer confined … to a *purely individual* perfection."[83] Since *social learning* constitutes the distinguishing mark of man, making possible *history* itself as the process of the progressing perfectioning of the species, it is understandable that, for Condorcet, the fundamental turning points in the history of humankind are revolutions in *communication*, that is, in the ways knowledge can be socially accumulated and transmitted through a progression of the forms of objectivation of ideas

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[80] Condorcet, with his struggle against racism and colonialism, for the complete political, social and educational equality of the sexes, is among the very few intellectuals and politicians of the French Revolution who can be called a radical democrat. He reached this standpoint (which finds its consistent formulation only in the *Sketch*) as the result of a long development, under the influence of the Revolution itself. His earlier, pronouncedly elitist conception of science and its social role has been analysed in detail by K. M. Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1975. About the evolution of his political views see the excellent essay of M. Ludassy, "Condorcet, avagy az emberi értelem eszkatologiája," *Világosság*, 7 and 9, 1972.

[81] Within this paper I have to completely neglected Condorcet's equally interesting ideas concerning scientific method, and the relation between mathematics, physics and social science.

[82] "[T]he principle of sensation and thought is of the same nature in man and in the animals, they possess the same faculties, only in unequal degrees …," *Fragment de l'histoire de la IVe époque*, *OC*, VI, p. 448.

[83] *ibid*., p. 16; *Sketch*, p. 6, my emphasis.

as subjective-psychological contents. Three such great revolutions determined the path of human progress.

The first was the development of an articulate conventional *language* which is synonymous with the rise of mankind from the animal kingdom.[84] Because of this individuals became able to learn from the experience of each other, and a stable body of tradition, that is, a repository of social knowledge, could be formed. But oral communication is restricted, and not only by the narrow range of personal contacts and the limited extent of individual memory. It also lacks the means of precision and analysis and has an overall affective character.[85]

These limits are overcome by the second great revolution in history: the invention of *writing*, "the only method of establishing and maintaining a tradition, of communicating and transmitting knowledge *as it grows*."[86] At this point there emerges the only alternative in history recognised by Condorcet, the temporary, for him, bifurcation into the Oriental and Occidental paths of development, depending primarily on the *social uses* of writing. In the great empires of the Orient the new method of objectivation and communication of knowledge becomes monopolised by the priests (the eternal antagonists of the progress of the mind) and the "teaching-classes," and is transformed into the instrument of domination.[87] Usually it also becomes frozen at an early, hieroglyphic stage of its development, the complexity of which makes the general

[84] In the very impressive, more detailed elaboration of his anthropology in the *Fragment de l'histoire de Ia premiere époque*, Condorcet indicates three concurrent achievements constitutive to the formation of the human race: the making of tools, the development of language and the emergence of the first forms of social organisation based on rudimentary ideas of right and wrong; see *OC*, VI, esp. pp. 305–322.

[85] Compare *OC*, VI, p. 16; *Sketch*, pp. 6–7. The limits of orality are a recurrent theme in the *Sketch* and in the accompanying fragments: the question has a political importance for Condorcet. He opposes, as anti-democratic, the Jacobin method of oratorical-demagogic mobilisation of urban crowds (constituting an insignificant fraction of citizenry) and counterposes to it the method of political propaganda and argumentation through which the printed word addressed the reason of each and every citizen.

[86] *OC*, IV, p. 54; *Sketch*, p. 36, my emphasis.

[87] Compare *OC*, VI, pp. 54–58; *Sketch*, pp. 36–39.

acquisition of literacy impossible. Great artistic and intellectual achievements can be reached on this basis, but knowledge made into the exclusive property of a caste inevitably becomes ossified, and the path of the Orient leads to stagnation. Only when the most developed and simplest, and therefore most "democratic" form, that is, *alphabetic* writing, meets with appropriate social circumstances, for example, a number of small competing "republics" without centralised political authority and without a unified priesthood, in contact with many foreign centres of culture, do the potentials of the new form of communication become genuinely realised. This is the Greek miracle: the creation of *philosophy as rational and critical discourse* in which everyone can participate as an equal to communicate the truth freely found with everyone.[88]

But Greek philosophy was still not science in its full sense. Among its several inadequacies, the list of which partly echoes the usual critique of speculative systems in the Enlightenment, Condorcet specifically mentions some connected with the characteristics of a manuscript culture. On the one hand, the rarity of manuscripts made the formation of a widely spread, homogeneous public impossible; ancient philosophy was a matter of "sects and schools." On the other hand, the fragility of such a culture made possible that long cultural decline which followed when the political conditions of freedom of thought and discussion, through which it flourished, were gone. Science proper is born only when, after the rebirth of learning, the newly found experimental method and a new means of communicating ideas become unified. *Printing*, which remained culturally sterile in China,[89] amounts to the third revolution in human history.[90] This "means of communicating with people all over the world"[91] confers upon thought, on the one hand, a power (by creating public opinion, as a "tribunal, independent of all human coercion, which favours reason and justice") and, on the other, an enduring continuity which now renders progress irreversible and uninterruptable.[92]

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[88] Compare *OC*, IV, pp. 59–63; *Sketch*, pp. 39–43; further, *OC*, IV, pp. 384–388 and 402–405.

[89] Compare *OC*, IV, p. 58; *Sketch*, p. 38.

[90] Compare *OC*, VI, pp. 137–143; *Sketch*, pp. 98–103.

[91] *OC*, VI, p. 139; *Sketch*, p. 100.

[92] Compare *OC*, VI, pp. 141–143, 191–192, 243; *Sketch*, pp. 102–103, 140, 178.

The close link which Condorcet establishes between the emergence and development of science, on the one hand, and the historically changing forms of objectivation and communication of knowledge[93] is the consequence of his radicalisation of the modern notion of science as the *progressing production* of new truths. Science is not a doctrine, a set of established truths which could be stored in the mind, but the uninterrupted social process of critical, methodical and experimental inquiry into the laws of infinite and inexhaustible nature. And from this, he draws a further conclusion. As a self-propelling social practice, science can exist only within a definite form of *social organisation* which ensures the conditions of its continuity and which creates a framework for the exchange and confrontation of ideas beyond sectarian and national boundaries, and renders impossible the suppression of facts and the transformation of theories into indisputable dogmas and so on. Only if these norms of an "ethics of truth" are institutionally enforced does science have a stable existence: it really *is* only a *scientific community*, "the general union of the scientists of the globe in one universal republic of the sciences."[94]

A scientific community is, however, a social organisation of the most peculiar type: it is a voluntary association of individuals as equals "in which neither birth, nor profession, nor position are thought to confer on one the right to judge what one is not in a condition to understand."[95] At the same time it is open to all who have the requisite understanding and submit themselves to its norms and to the rules of scientific method. These stipulations ensure that in its disputes and debates a consensus concerning truth emerges and so, in spite of the perhaps divergent individual motivations and rivalries, the universal interest of science always prevails.[96] In short, this is a community formed by, and based on, rational discourse and argumentation, and not on relations of power and submission. Such a community, even if without a

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[93] Condorcet also projects this link into the future. He connects a further, radical acceleration of scientific progress in his utopia of the tenth epoch with the creation of an international, ideal logical language reserved exclusively for the sciences. See *OC*, VI, pp. 17–18, 89, 261, 269–272; *Sketch*, pp. 7–8, 62, 191, 197–199 etc.

[94] *Fragment sur l'Atlantide*, *OC*, VI, p. 603.

[95] *OC*, VI, p. 224; *Sketch*, p. 164.

[96] See especially the characterisation of the scientific community in the *Fragment sur l'Atlantide*, *OC*, VI, pp. 603–612 and 653–660.

formal organisational framework, has essentially been formed in the physical sciences, and it represents "a model to emulate"[97] not only for the other sciences, but for society at large: it is the paradigm of democratic organisation.

Science, however, represents not only the model example of democracy, it is also one of the fundamental causal factors in the progression towards a society based on freedom, equality and universal well-being. The sciences of nature, in their applications to arts, create conditions under which "everyone will have less work to do, will produce more, and satisfy his/her wants more fully."[98] The application of the calculus of probability to social economics provides the theoretical tool for the institution of a system of social insurance that can genuinely eradicate those economic inequalities which condemn some people to misery and suffering. A "social mathematics," this main scientific interest of Condorcet, will also render public affairs in the future simple and understandable to the common man. It will allow for each individual to form rational expectations as to the consequences of their action, and so to recognise what are their genuine, long-term interests. Lastly, scientific philosophy, analysing the constitution of human nature and its faculties and discovering in this way the true rights of man and the fundamental laws of morality and politics based upon them, has already become the great edifying force, liberating the mind of people from those prejudices that supported despotism and oppression. What is needed to accelerate and enhance these technical, social and cultural effects of scientific enlightenment, is to assume a conscious and rational control over the direction of the development of science itself, to literally "plan" science, by creating an appropriate, voluntary, democratic and international, organisational form for a scientific community: a project which continued to occupy Condorcet till the very end of his life.

The connection between science and democratic society is, however, mutual. If the first fosters the second, it is only the second, the coming into being of a genuinely democratic society and its ultimate triumph all over the globe, which can create the conditions which *guarantee* the irrevocable and uninterrupted character of the future progress of sciences. For Condorcet, this follows from both the methodological and the social characteristics of

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[97] *OC*, VI, pp. 224 and 164.

[98] *OC*, VI, p. 256; *Sketch*, p. 188.

scientific inquiry. As to the first, the essential feature of scientific method consists in a constant interaction between observation and experimentation on the one hand, and, on the other, theoretical hypotheses, themselves suggesting, and leading to, new experiments. But theory is abstract, it contains "inevitable inexactitudes," there are "a great number of conditions, relating to needs, methods, time, expense, which are necessarily neglected in theory" and which will only "enter into the problem when it is a question of a real and immediate practical application."[99] Being "stimulated by these practical needs" is therefore a condition of theoretical development itself. Without it, theory is always susceptible to dogmatisation, to a restriction of the experimental basis to confirmatory instances alone. Such a constant nexus, however, demands that the scientific community itself is embedded in a much broader stratum not actively pursuing and creating science, but which is able to understand its principles and apply its results.

Even more important, however, are the considerations bearing upon the role of science in society. Science is not only free critical discourse among equals but also a discourse *in principle* open to everyone. Of course, it is open to everyone who "understands it": Condorcet not only accepts, but consistently defends the specialisation and growing professionalisation of scientific activities. But if access to scientific understanding is in fact available only to members of a definite social group or class and, if knowledge again can be monopolised, then its transformation into a power against others, and its consequent degradation and decline, always remains an actual danger. Only a free, thoroughly meritocratic and anti-authoritarian educational system[100]

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[99] *OC*, VI, pp. 217–218; *Sketch*, p. 159.

[100] The right to free education, offering equal chances for every person independently of their sex, social standing or economic situation is, for Condorcet, one of the basic democratic rights. Educational privilege is for him the most important source of rigid social and economic inequalities. His ideas of educational reform have been fully elaborated in his five *Mémoires sur l'instruction publique*, which constituted the basis for his *Rapport et projet de decret sur l'organization générale de l'instruction publique* presented to the National Assembly in 1792 (see *OC*, VII, pp. 167–576) to be ultimately rejected by the Jacobin majority. On Condorcet's educational ideas see the papers of R. Waldinger and M. Albertone in *Condorcet Studies*, I, ed. L. C. Rosenfield, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1984.

that alone a democratic society can create, is able to ensure that "the boundary between the cultivated and the uncultivated [will be] almost entirely effaced, leaving an insensible gradation between the two extremes of genius and stupidity,"[101] thereby providing the ultimate guarantee that a scientific community, as the voluntary organisation of experts, pursues not its own, but the universal interests of truth, which is the interest of mankind itself. The progress of science therefore, is to be measured not only "by the number of known truths," but also "in terms of the number of people who are familiar with the more obvious and more important truths."[102]

With this, Condorcet's case against Rousseau is complete. Only a basic misunderstanding of science could counterpose its progress to that of morality. The two are undivorceable. And Condorcet, in a sense quite legitimately, can characterise his own *Sketch* of human progress, the most narrowly intellectualistic treatment of human history ever written, as a genuinely "philosophical history" whose subjects are not a few chosen individuals, the leaders and the geniuses, but the always neglected common people, the "greater mass of the human race."[103]

In answering the challenge of Rousseau, Condorcet has drawn the most radical consequences concerning science from the project of Enlightenment. His image of science is not *demarcated* from religion. The latter ensured the autonomy of science through the *pragmatic* function of world-mastery and at the

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[101] *OC*, VI, p. 192; *Sketch*, p. 14. Condorcet's anthropology ensures that such an envisaged socio-cultural situation is possible. The ability to create new combinations of ideas (the proper meaning of the term *genie* in philosophy) is a basic, common trait of human mind, even though only a few are ever able to produce knowledge which is new, and useful, from the viewpoint of the whole of the human race (the everyday meaning of *genie*). "One should not regard the gift of inventions as a particular faculty, as a present nature confers upon some privileged beings, but as a common faculty which is distributed unequally": *Fragment de l'histoire de la Ve époque*, *OC*, VI, p. 476. It is again history which is called upon to demonstrate empirically the truth of this fundamental psychological presupposition. It shows that "we pass by insensible gradations from the brute to savage man, from savage man to Euler and Newton": *ibid.*, p. 346.

[102] *OC*, VI, p. 166; *Sketch*, p. 120.

[103] Compare *OC*, VI, pp. 232–235; *Sketch*, pp. 170–172.

same time sharply divorced this latter from that of ultimate *practical-moral* orientation which is to be provided by religious faith (as was the case with Bacon and in the last instance, also with Descartes). In his understanding, science *takes over* all the socially useful functions which, in the epochs of superstition, have been fulfilled by religion. Science, in its interaction with society, is the vehicle not only of intellectual and technical advancement, but also of moral and social advancement. It ensures not only the domination of humankind over nature, but also the domination of people over their individual and collective historical fate. And the historical picture of human perfecting, this final legacy of Condorcet, then serves not only theoretical ends, it also provides the "first foundation" for a coming "*science* of predicting the progress of human species, of *directing and accelerating it*."[104]

This magnificent utopia of science is purchased, however, at a heavy theoretical price. The *Sketch* is a philosophically naive work.[105] Condorcet simply confuses the fact that science itself is an "ethically" regulated social activity with the scientific demonstrability of moral norms. In general his views on the nature and progress of morality are just incoherent. His rigid intellectualisation of history makes him insensitive (in opposition to his much admired paternal friend and precursor, Turgot) toward the differences in the character and mechanisms of change in the various branches of culture. His picture of artistic development, for example, turns upon the most conservative form of an ahistorical classicist and cognitivist aesthetics already atypical in the late Enlightenment.[106] And most importantly, his whole argument depends on an unshakable conviction in the power of truth to conquer all minds and on the completely rational character of human nature as present in each individual which also provides the basis for the ultimate identity and harmony of

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[104] As Condorcet states in one of the last paragraphs of the *Sketch*. Quoted in Baker, *Condorcet*, p. 252, my emphasis.

[105] On the unexamined theoretical presuppositions of Condorcet's theory of progress in a more general way see J. Habermas, *Theories des kommunikativen Handels*, vol. I, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1981, pp. 214–218.

[106] For example: "The Art of letters, eloquence, poetry can therefore be regarded as pertaining to the metaphysical sciences, as an application of their principles to the immediate end of acting upon the mind and the soul of other people, of convincing, moving or pleasing them": *Fragment de l'histoire de la Ve époque*, *OC*, VI, p. 499.

human interests. In one of his last journal articles[107] Condorcet sets out to prove that only the existence of "unjust laws" and "corrupting institutions" can create a lasting conflict of interests among members of society – if this is not true, he tells us in conclusion, the re-establishment of the "tyranny of one or a few," that is, the failure of the Revolution, is inevitable.

Just this philosophical naivety makes it a strange, if not perverse, enterprise to put a Kant alongside Condorcet. But the indubitable difference in philosophical depth and sophistication should not blind us to some, not insignificant, similarities. Kant also developed his own philosophical standpoint partly in answering the same challenge[108] – he too defended science against the critique of Rousseau. The development of knowledge belongs to the "proper destination" of mankind, and attempts to stop it are "a crime against human nature."[109] Furthermore, for Kant, science exists only as a collective[110] and continuous historical process, the bearer of which is the human race.[111] The "intellectual revolutions" (*Revolutionen der Denkart*) with which the history of each science begins are characterised precisely by the fact that they

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[107] "*Que toutes les classes de la société n'ont qu'un même interest*": *OC*, XII, pp. 645–650.

[108] Of course, the fact that Kant had simultaneously faced up to Hume's scepticism made impossible the retention of a Lockean empiricism as an adequate epistemology (and anthropology).

[109] I refer to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*KrV*) – using the English translation of N. Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan, 1978 – in the usually accepted way by indicating the pagination of the second (*B*) or the first (*A*) edition. All other writings of Kant are quoted from the Cassirer edition (Berlin, Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1912–1922) of *Werke*. For the indication of the English translations used, which always (when appropriate) follows the semicolon, I use the following abbreviations: *CPR – Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1956; *CJ – Critque of Judgment*, trans. W. S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1987; *Pr – Prolegomena*, trans. P. Carus and J. W. Ellington and *PMN – Philosophy of Material Nature*, trans. J. W. Ellington, published together, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1985; *FMM – Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans L. W. Beck, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1959; *History – On History*, trans. L. W. Beck, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1963.

[110] Demanding the collaboration of persons with various talents, see VIII, pp. 117–118.

[111] VIII, p. 220.

render possible the "endless expansion" of knowledge ensuring at the same time the unanimity of the convictions of all participants.[112] In all this, science seems to be not only the highest fulfilment of the maxims of common human understanding, the principles of an unprejudiced, broadened and consistent way of thinking,[113] but it also appears to constitute the prototypical ideal of that civil order the realisation of which is the destination and end of the human race on the Earth. For the creation of lawful agreement, harmony and eternal peace among men, precisely for Kant, the definitory characteristic of scientific community,[114] this "cosmopolitan condition" is the ultimate purpose of Nature with humankind.[115] And at some points Kant himself makes full use of this idea, at least as a metaphor; for example, he characterises his own Copernican revolution in metaphysics and its transformation into science as securing the "eternal peace" of a "legal order" in philosophy through the self-legislation of reason alone.[116]

Why is Kant then not proceeding in this direction of making science, in its interaction with society, the normative ideal, and intellectual force, of progressive *moral and social* transformation,[117] but instead actually closing this path in the most decisive way, by drawing a line of strict divide between the theoretical and the practical employment of reason, between science and morality? This question is all the more legitimate, since Kant, radicalising the modern conception of science as the "production" of truth, conceives all

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[112] As opposed to "random groupings" and "the conflict of opposing arguments" characterising the pre-scientific state of knowledge, compare *B*, pp. xi–xv.

[113] Compare V, pp. 368–369; *CJ*, pp. 160–161.

[114] Compare VIII, p. 13.

[115] IV, pp 161-163; VI, pp. 446-449; *History*, pp. 21-23 and 106-108 etc.

[116] *B*, p. 779; see also pp. 451–452.

[117] That such a line of argumentation is not irreconcilable with Kant's fundamental *epistemological* insights has been proved by Pierce, whose idea of the "indefinite community of investigators" in a sense resurrects the Condorcetian utopia of science on the basis of a theory of language and knowledge that retains the fundamental principles of Kant's critical philosophy. On this point see K. O. Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1976, vol. 2, pp. 164–177 and 188-198. More recently, Apel's, and to some degree also Habermas' attempts at a "discourse-ethics" point in the same direction.

theoretical knowledge as the result of the active and spontaneous labour of reason (as understanding) upon the data received in intuition. This seems to open the possibility to apply the notion of freedom to the theoretical exercise of reason.[118] When an appearance is given us, we are still quite free as to how we should judge the matter.[119] In the realm of theoretical knowledge we legislate a priori over, and prescribe laws to, nature, in the realm of morality we legislate a priori over ourselves. Why then set up an opposition of principles between the two?

Part of the answer undoubtedly lies in what Kant has *learned* from Rousseau: it is *inadmissible* to make morality a function of learning, cultivation or specific cognitive abilities, since this would deny the equal moral worth and dignity of every human being in respect of which the scientist has no supremacy whatever over the common man. Kant's deep *ethical democratism* made it impossible for him to accept a standpoint akin to Condorcet's socially and politically much more radical utopia. This idea has certainly strongly motivated Kant, but can hardly constitute his whole answer to the question posed, since it represents a postulate, not an argument. One should also not forget that in an imaginary dialogue Condorcet could have answered that the presupposition of "insensible gradations" between science and common sense allows, at least for the future, a spread "downwards," not of scientific knowledge, but of critical thinking, which would make ethical equality between human individuals a reality. And as an empirical fact, Kant did not deny the existence of the pedagogical and historical effects of a "moral cultivation."

The answer lies partly, since the problem involves the whole architectonic unity and content of Kant's philosophy, in his *image of science*. Kant defines science in its broadest sense in the following way: "every doctrine, if it is to be a system, that is, a whole of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) ordered according to

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[118] That Kant, at the time of working out his critical standpoint, did take up the idea of somehow "deducing" moral autonomy from theoretical spontaneity has been pointed out by G. Prauss, *Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1983, pp. 116–120. Echoes of this attempt are still present in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

[119] VI, p. 40; *Pr*, p. 34.

principles, is called science."[120] He then narrows this definition, first by excluding the merely classificatory systematisation of facts (natural history) from science in the strong sense: science is the rational, that is, explanatory systematisation of "cognitions," a "coherence of grounds and consequents,"[121] to arrive at last at the notion of "science proper": a system in which the ultimate explanatory grounds and principles are not empirical generalisations (as it is, according to Kant, the case, for example, in chemistry which should be called systematic art rather than science), but apodeictically necessary (a priori) principles. This, of course, does not mean that "sciences proper" consist only of a priori truths: empirical sciences of nature, like physics, completely qualify, because their ultimate principles of explanation, with which all their empirical laws must be in accord, are a priori. And it is precisely having such ultimate principles, together with definite maxims of investigation, which allows them to have empirical *laws* at all. In other words, propositions which are "derived" from experience and therefore contingent, are merely probable hypotheses or conjectures, but nevertheless have a *necessitarian* character and are not thought of as merely inductive generalisations of observed facts.[122]

Nevertheless, even with this proviso, the Kantian understanding of science seems to represent little improvement upon that of Descartes: it may appear as the same unstable and ambiguous combination of a subjectivist definition with characteristics that it cannot support. This is, however, a misunderstanding of its meaning which is partly enhanced by the difficulties of translation. The definition quoted speaks about the "whole of *cognition*" where Kant used the term *Erkenntnis*. The primary meaning of this term, however, is not subjective-psychological in Kant. As he explains in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*,[123]

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[120] IV, p. 369; *PMN*, p. 3.

[121] IV, p. 370; *PMN*, p. 4.

[122] Compare *B*, p. 198; IV, pp. 378–379 and 391–394; V, pp. 248–255; *CJ*, pp. 18–25 etc. Undoubtedly Kant among others has difficulties in the articulation of the idea of the simultaneously contingent and necessitarian character of empirical laws of nature – even in the *Opus Postumum* he is concerned with this problem. In the formulation of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* such a law is in itself (that is, objectively) contingent, but must be regarded "as a need of our understanding" (that is, subjectively) as necessary, V, p. 252; *CJ*, p. 23.

[123] V, p. 309; *CJ*, p. 88.

a mental state (*Gemütszustand*) constitutes only the subjective condition, the "effect" (*Wirkung*) of which is *Erkenntnis* (cognition, knowledge) if and when the former is *universally communicable*. Similarly, the distinction which Kant draws in the *Prolegomena* between judgements of perception and judgements of experience (only these latter constituting *Erkenntnis*, knowledge) is based upon the fact that, in contradistinction to the former, the validity of the latter "is not limited to the subject or to its state at a particular time." For "objective validity and necessary universal validity (for everybody) are equivalent concepts …".[124] And in his *Lectures on Logic* (*Logik Poelitz*), the only place where he systematically discusses the attributive characteristics of *Erkenntnis*, he strictly and consistently distinguishes the objective meaning of this term from its derivative, subjective sense as cognition: knowledge produced, acquired, or learned by someone (*meine Erkenntnis, Erkenntnis in mir*). So in the sense of the above definition, science is "objective knowledge," produced by minds, but not reducible to what actually resides at some point of time in the mind of the individuals. This, of course, presupposes that it is in some form made objective, that is, communicatively objectified. The transcendental possibility of this is ensured by the necessarily propositional structure (*Form des Urteils*)

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[124] IV, pp. 49–50; *Pr*, pp. 42–43. Compare also the Kantian discussion in *KrV* of the distinction between knowing and believing and, accordingly, between conviction and persuasion: "Persuasion is a mere illusion, because the ground of the judgement, which lies solely in the subject, is regarded as objective. Such a judgement has only private validity, and the holding of it to be true does not allow of it being communicated. But truth depends upon agreement with the object, and in respect of it the judgements of each and every understanding must therefore be in agreement with each other … The touchstone whereby we decide whether our holding a thing to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore external, namely, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for all human reason" (*B*, p. 848). It is, however, conspicuous that here Kant treats intersubjective communicability and the possibility of consensus only as the external (and presumptive) *mark* of objective validity, while in the above invoked quotations, from *later* writings, the *two* are stated to be synonymous, that is, intersubjectivity is regarded as the constitutive, definitory characteristic of knowledge in general. Kant's vacillations concerning this question certainly reflect the difficulty of accounting for a concept of intersubjective validity within a monologic theory of knowledge. His intentions, however, of linking the very notion of *Erkenntnis* with that of intersubjective validity are beyond doubt.

of all that can claim to be knowledge. How this possibility is realised, and how the "experiences" are communicated, does not interest Kant at all. Partly this is, for him, a question of empirical anthropology and history and not of a philosophy of knowledge and science, and more importantly, partly because science is certainly not identical with the concrete forms of its objectivation, either. The science of physics is not the sum-total of books on physics, most of which will in any case become obsolete with its development,[125] and the knowledge of which does not yet ensure the knowledge of physics.[126] When in the *Prolegomena* Kant tells us that pure mathematics and pure physics are "actual and given," that they without doubt exist as sciences proper, he does not make a statement about what is in some minds, nor does he refer to the existence of some books; rather he asserts the existence of a definite kind of knowledge, as (one could say) "ideal objectivity." Kant's philosophy of consciousness certainly does not allow any closer characterisation of the sort of objectivity involved, though one has to add that he often speaks about science "containing propositions" (*enthalt Satze*), a terminology much more familiar to us than the talk about *Erkenntnisse*. (How far this terminological change helps to clarify the issue itself, given all the difficulties concerning the status of propositions, is another question.)

This conception of "ideal of objectivity" has to be connected with another characteristic feature of the Kantian understanding of science: that is, its being posited within a necessary normative context. Scientific knowledge, as we have seen, is primarily distinguished from all other forms of theoretical knowing (common sense, "historical" knowledge, learning (*Gelehrtsamkeit*) and so on – all representing mere "aggregates" of cognitions) through the notion of "system." Only systematic unity ensures for each science an appropriate *object*, that is, a unified field of research, without which it would be impossible to judge not only what belongs to the interest and competence of one science, but also whether a given proposition genuinely represents new

[125] VIII, p. 359.

[126] Having merely learnt what is in the books is constituted subjectively only as "historical" knowledge, even if the books contain "rational" knowledge: *B*, p. 864; VIII, pp. 341 and 344.

knowledge, or otherwise merely states what is already known.[127] System, however, means "the unity of the manifold modes of knowledge *under one idea*,"[128] that is, under a merely heuristic, and not "ostensive," concept of reason which formulates a necessary, but never completely realisable, end and goal for the extension of empirical knowledge. Science as a system is "only a projected unity, to be regarded not as given in itself, but as a problem only."[129] System, insofar as the empirical sciences of nature are concerned, is not identical either with some fixed, external form of logical organisation,[130] nor can it be conceived as the final state of knowledge achievable in the future. It is an infinite task toward the solution of which science can only "asymptotically" approximate by new efforts at each stage in its development. That this growth of knowledge can have a determinate direction, that it can be judged as progress, is ensured by the "maxims of reason" which are the methodological, regulative postulates of scientific inquiry guiding its course; those principles of homogeneity, specification and continuity of phenomena of nature.[131] In its continuity, the development of science has, therefore, a goal-directed rationality – but a supraindividual and apersonal one. The a priori principles of understanding ensure the lawlikeliness of nature, but they do not guarantee the unconditional possibility of discovering the concrete laws governing some class of phenomena. The maxims of reason indicate in what direction to search for the unification of already discovered empirical laws, but they do not make it possible to foresee, and even less (as envisaged by Condorcet) to plan the course of further scientific advance. There is no logic of discovery, some infallible scientific method,[132] in natural science "there is endless

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[127] These points are specifically emphasised and elaborated in the *Opus Postumum*. In respect of them see H. Hoppe, *Kant's Theorie der Physik*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1969, pp. 72–81.

[128] *B*, p. 860, my emphasis.

[129] *B*, p. 675.

[130] Usually representing a merely technical, but not architectonic unity; compare *B*, p. 861.

[131] Compare *B*, pp. 538–548; V, pp. 251–253; *CJ*, pp. 21–23.

[132] "… an organon for the actual production … of objective assertions" (*B*, p. 85); compare also his critique of Bacon, VIII, p. 113.

conjecture"[133] and the indefinite progress towards systematic unification in science is the mailer of quasi-organic, spontaneous growth in the everyday sense of this word. "Systems seem to be formed in the manner of lowly organisms, through a *generatio aequivoca* from the mere confluence of assembled concepts, at first imperfect, and only gradually attaining to completeness …"[134] To characterise some proposition or cognition as scientific means to posit it projectively into this normatively regulated domain, which is independent from the process of personal insights and decisions of the further long-term development of knowledge.

Up to this point I have dealt primarily with the *formal* aspect of the Kantian understanding of science. What has been found, however – the independence of science both as to the mode of its "existence" and as to the character of its development from the individual subjects of knowledge, its "depersonalised" character – is in complete accord with how Kant conceives the cognitive *content* of the sciences of nature. Nature as their object is, in a sense, "our construct," merely the world of phenomena. We legislate over its domain according to the a priori principles of our understanding. But the "we" who legislates, the subject of science, is a subject without subjectivity and individuality, it is consciousness in general, "the transcendental subject of the thought = X"[135] which is *not a self*, neither empirical (that of self-preservation), nor noumenal (that of self-determination). Our theoretical legislation over nature, as opposed to moral *self*-legislation[136] excludes all conscious decision and choice through which we enact ourselves as real selves: "the understanding proceeds by these laws [governed by the categories] unintentionally, by the necessity of its own nature."[137] One could say: insofar as we legislate over

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[133] *B*, p. 508.

[134] *B*, p. 863.

[135] *B*, p. 404.

[136] Morality represents the legislation of *freedom*, theoretical science is made possible by the legislation of necessity. The moral law is addressed to the subject as an Ought, that is, it obligates and demands the subject to *choose* the maxim of his willing in accordance with the objective principle of morality. In morality the empirically conditioned will of the individual is freely raised to the universality of objective will (the law), scientific universality obliterates individuality.

[137] V, p. 256; *CJ*, p. 27.

nature, we are not free; and insofar as we are free in the theoretical employment of reason (as we certainly are in our generalisations, hypotheses and conjectures), we do not legislate at all, but must "learn" from nature.[138] And what this legislation ensures, a definite way of selection and rule-governed interconnection of our subjective intuitions into an order of objective nature in general, implies precisely that nothing having a *meaningful* relation to the real selves as individuals, and to their ends, can enter the scientific understanding and explanation of nature. The work of categories consists precisely in eliminating from our representations what is "merely subjective," that is, dependent upon the empirical characteristics and states of the knowing subject, and only science consistently *continues and consummates* this objectifying tendency of everyday experience, progressively emancipating knowledge from socio-historical and anthropological particularities as well. According to the a priori principles of understanding, only what is exactly localisable in space and time, measurable and quantifiable, regular and strictly reproducible and so on can become an element in the scientific conceptualisation of nature – all that makes nature controllable by, but having no sense for, us.[139] In Kant's formulation, all that which belongs solely to the constituted realm of nature has no inner value, only a relative worth as means.[140] So Kant draws the ultimate conclusion from the dissolution of the conception of nature as cosmos: the nature to which we have a rational-scientific access is a nature emptied by "us" of all human significance and sense. And therefore natural science can give us neither a general intellectual orientation in the world of creation (which would be the world of things-in-themselves),[141] nor a pragmatic life-orientation (*Weltkenntnis*) in the world as our "domicile", the environment of our life.

It may seem, however, that, in spite of all the novelty of his argumentation, Kant merely recreates and legitimates the old, already encountered, demarcation between science on the one hand, and religious morality on the other.

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[138] *B*, p. xiv.

[139] See O. Marquard, *Skeptische Methode im Blick auf Kant*, Freiburg, Alber, 1958, esp. pp. 57–73.

[140] IV, pp. 286–287; *FMM*, p. 46.

[141] Compare V, pp. 111–112; *CPR*, p. 106.

Nothing is farther from the truth. Firstly, religion in the sense of a positive, institutionalised system of dogmas in itself has no rational authority for Kant. It is not morality which is based upon, and justified by, religious faith, but on the contrary, a secular morality of pure practical reason constitutes the only foundation for rational faith, a "religion within the limits of reason alone." Secondly, Kant's aim is not to demarcate the positive sciences (mathematics and the sciences of nature) in such a way that ensures them an independent realm over which they alone have a cognitive authority. The autonomy of these sciences is for him a well-accepted *fact*; they are "actual and given" and, as he explicitly states,[142] in themselves ("for their own safety and certainty"). Kant's intention is to *limit* the legitimate authority and competence of these sciences for the sake of *other forms of rationality*, primarily concerned with the positing of *ends and meanings* by finite, human subjects (including forms of non-theoretical subject-attitudes to nature as well). The gravest obstacle on the path of enlightenment does not consist in our lack of scientific knowledge or even the ability of critical thinking, but in the inclination to transgress the limits of the former.[143] In the realisation of the above task then Kant firmly draws the boundaries of the horizon and legitimate interest of scientific rationality (in the above sense) against that of philosophy,[144] morality, religion, the aesthetic attitude, the teleological view of nature and the *humaniora*.[145] In this way, for the first time in history, Kant essentially

[142] VI, p. 79; *Pr*, p. 69.

[143] Compare V, p. 368; *CJ*, p. 161.

[144] Whether philosophy is identical for Kant with metaphysics, or this latter constitutes only its main and crowning part, is a question to which his texts do not give an unambiguous answer. In any case philosophy/metaphysics is for Kant a rational a priori *science*, that is, a system of apodeictic theoretical cognitions, but a science principally and fundamentally different, both in its immanent end and in its method, from mathematics and from the sciences of nature. To prove the possibility of metaphysics as science (and its impossibility *when* modelled upon the positive sciences) is the primary task (the "main transcendental question") of the first *Critique*. "The transcendental philosophy, that is the doctrine about the possibility of all a priori knowledge in general which is the critique of pure reason … has as its end the foundation of a metaphysics …": VIII, p. 251. On this problem see Marquard, *Skeptische Methode*.

[145] The last rather in *passim*, but see for example V, pp. 431–433; *CJ*, pp. 230–232; VIII, p. 361.

maps out the architectonic; the essential interrelations between the main spheres of the autonomous high culture of modernity.

As a result Kant's views about the role of positive sciences differ significantly from those usually encountered in the Enlightenment. The idea of an "insensible gradation" between science and common sense is alien to him, not because of his increasingly resigned and sceptical attitude towards the perspective of a rapid spread and early victory of enlightenment, but rather, on principled grounds. The emergence of science is always the result of a revolution in the very way of thinking, of a break with "ordinary consciousness,[146] since the very "cognitive horizons" of science and common sense are principally different.[147] Science is by necessity a specialised activity of the few. And its agent, the scientist, as distinct from the philosopher, is not the moral hero of the early modern conceptions of science, nor the genius of the Enlightenment: "the mathematician, the natural philosopher (*Naturkündiger*), and the logician, however successful the former two may have been in their advances in the field of rational knowledge, and the latter two more especially in philosophical knowledge, are yet only *artifiers in the field of reason* (*Vernunftkünstler*: artisans of reason)."[148] The scientist as scientist with more or less skill and talent executes tasks set by (theoretical) reason and, in this, acts as a member of the (non-existent) "society of world citizens" (*Weltbürgerschaft*). In this "public use of his reason," addressed to an anonymous reading public, he ought to be absolutely free.[149] Critical scientific discourse must in principle be open to everybody – and it may be allowed (politically) to be free without restrictions, since in fact, by its very character, it is narrowly exclusive.[150] On the other hand, insofar as the scientist acts in some public social role ("civil post") within a concrete real community, in the "private use of his reason," he is

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[146] *B*, p. xi.

[147] On this see esp. F. Kaulbach, "Weltorientierung: Weltkenntnis und pragmatische Vernunft bei Kant" in *Kritik und Metaphysik* (Heimsoeth-Festschrift), Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1966.

[148] *B*, p. 867, my emphasis; see also VII, p. 343.

[149] VI, p. 171; *History*, p. 5.

[150] Compare also Kant's remarks about the relation of common people (*Volk*) to science in the *Streit der Fakultäten*, VII, pp. 340–342.

legitimately subject to all the restrictions the state may impose upon the exercise of such functions.

This strange terminology, in which what is directly public and social is called "private," is not accidental. In respect to the function of science every concrete social function is merely particular, "private." For the exclusivity of science as a specialised activity follows not from the *fact* that it serves some special interests, but precisely from serving the general interests of the human race. The positive sciences are important factors in the process of historical *cultivation* of mankind. They constitute the decisive element in what Kant calls the "culture of skill": the development of the "subjective condition for an aptitude to promote purposes generally":[151] arbitrary (*beliebige*) purposes. They are the neutral instrument allowing mankind to enlarge both the scope of conceivable ends (right and wrong) to be posited and to enhance the power and security of their realisation. Quite consistently therefore, Kant does not draw any principled distinction between the theoretical propositions of a science and the productive rules of a related technique. The *content* of both is the same, and the latter, as "precepts of skill belong, as consequences … to our theoretical knowledge of nature."[152] But this cultivation is that of the human race and not of the majority of individuals. "It is hard to develop skill in the human species except by means of inequality among people."[153] Kant reverses Rousseau's critique of cultural development; for Rousseau, the progress of some individuals has been achieved at the price of the decline and deprivation of the species; for Kant, the progress of humankind as species can be achieved only at the cost of the suffering and misery of the majority of the individuals. In spite of its antagonistic and tragic character, this is, however, genuine progress which slowly, and with many reverses, moves toward the liquidation of this very antagonism, and toward the society of "perfect republican constitution;" an end which perhaps never can be realised completely, but can be approximated. The sciences are constituents of this antagonistic cultural progress. By constantly enhancing the scope and power of human purposive activity in general, they serve "the happiness of all mankind,"[154]

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[151] V, p. 511; *CJ*, p. 319.

[152] V, pp. 183–184; see also pp. 29, 240–242; *CJ*, pp. 390 and 10–12; *CPR*, p. 25.

[153] V, p. 512; *CJ*, p. 319.

[154] *B*, p. 879.

even if in themselves they can in no way guarantee, nay even influence, those purposes for which they are used, and which are good and right ones.

True, Kant regards the positive sciences not only as cultivating, but potentially also as civilising (though not moralising) factors *if* they are "aided by … methaphysics,"[155] of course, scientific metaphysics. Philosophy, in its "cosmical" sense (*Weltbegriff*), as the organ of *wisdom*[156] "is the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason."[157] Illuminated by philosophy, the positive sciences themselves contribute to the recognition of the power *and* the limits of reason, to the determination "of the ultimate boundary of the capacity given to [reason],"[158] and in this way they promote the advancement of that process of rational self-knowledge and self-discipline which prepares man "for a sovereignty in which reason alone is to dominate."[159]

It is not only this conception of philosophy as the "science of wisdom" which demonstrates the deep embeddedness of Kant's thought in the ideas of Enlightenment, and his unwavering commitment to its project. With all his emphasis on the irreducible plurality of the forms of rationality, and the diversity of the so-generated "interests," the ultimate *unity of reason* remains one of the leading ideas of Kant's philosophy. The transcendental faculties, whose interplay comprises finite human rationality, are, in the end, in a "free accord." They are in a harmony with each other *if* the limit of each, and the

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[155] *B*, p. 878.

[156] Understood in this sense, philosophy is the sole science "in which *everyone* necessarily has an interest" (*B*, p. 867, my emphasis). But in this sense philosophy is only a regulative idea: "the archetype … to serve for the estimation of each subjective philosophy the structure of which is often so diverse and liable to alteration. Thus regarded, philosophy is the mere idea of a possible science which nowhere exists *in concreto*, but to which, by many paths, we endeavour to approximate, until the one true path … has at least been discovered, and the image, hitherto so abortive, has achieved likeness to the archetype, so far as this is granted to [mortal] man": *B*, p. 866.

[157] *B*, p. 867, compare VIII, pp. 342–345.

[158] IV, p. 478; *PMN*, p. 134.

[159] V, p. 513; *CJ*, p. 321.

hierarchy among them, is observed. And even their discord, the constant struggles of demarcation between them, the "dispute of faculties," which is a fact of history, in the end only contributed to human progress which, though no longer thought to be leading to universal happiness, continues to offer the promises of a more meaningful and more rational and, at least externally (legally and political) more free, and perhaps even more virtuous human life.

The oeuvre of *Max Weber* graphically demonstrates how an image of science, essentially derived from Kant, becomes transformed when these fundamental presuppositions of the Enlightenment are shattered, and are no longer taken-for-granted. Weber's diagnosis of the cultural crisis of modernity departs precisely from the observation of a situation in which "demarcation disputes" turn perennial and, for structural reasons, are in principle unresolvable. In an ironic "dialectic of Enlightenment," it is the practical *universalisation* of reason, that is, the thoroughgoing rationalisation and intellectualisation of all the action and symbolic systems of society, as the characteristic feature of Western modernity, which leads to the *fragmentation* of reason and destroys its unity.

> For the rationalisation and the conscious sublimation of man's relation to the various spheres of values, external and internal, as well as religious and secular, have then pressed towards making conscious the internal and lawful autonomy of the individual spheres: thereby letting them drift into those tensions which remain hidden to the originally naive relation with the external world.[160]

The emergence of an *autonomous* culture, which is one of the results of this historical process of rationalisation, endows each branch of it with an intrinsic,

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[160] I quote Weber on the basis of the following English translations: *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (*FMW*), ed. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958; Weber, *Selections in Translation* (*ST*), ed. W. C. Runciman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978; Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (*MSS*), ed. E. A. Ehils and H. A. Finch, New York, Free Press, 1949; Weber, *Scribner,* 1984. To untranslated texts of Weber I refer on the basis of the fourth edition of *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (*WL*), Tübingen, Mohr, 1973.

impersonal and universal value generating its own unconditional norms and demands. But "the different domains of value are *entwined and entangled* in virtually every single important attitude which real men adopt."[161] The claim to universality of each of these value-spheres (science, arts, religion and so on), and the unconditionality of their norms, however, now render it impossible to make a principled compromise between them and to restrict each of them to a well-circumscribed domain, while the impersonal, "disenchanted" character of their values robs them of that "inwardly genuine plasticity" through which the ancient polytheistic religions could at least confer a cosmic sense upon the value-conflicts experienced by the individuals. So, "the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other… If anything, we realise again today that something can be sacred not only in spite of its not being beautiful, but rather because and insofar as it is not beautiful… And, since Nietzsche, we realise that something can be beautiful not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect. It is commonplace to observe that something may be true although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good. Indeed it may be true in precisely those aspects."[162]

Science, as an element of this culture, is driven to assert its claim to universality by striving to achieve cultural supremacy, and by proclaiming itself the sole possessor of an intellectually legitimate world-interpretation: "science, in the name of intellectual integrity, has come forward with the claim of representing the only possible form of a reasoned view of the world."[163] If this claim, however, is granted, if science genuinely attempts to answer all the questions we can, nay are forced to, address to the world, it ceases to be empirical science and becomes transformed into a "scientific worldview," a particularly unappealing and unsatisfactory form of *ersatz*-religion.

The perception of this contradictory position of science within the conflict- and crisis-ridden totality of modern culture cannot but deeply influence the very understanding of science. Weber no longer finds it possible to articulate a *unitary* image of science: its understanding as *objectified knowledge* claiming

[161] *ST*, p. 84, my emphasis.

[162] *FMW*, pp. 147–148.

[163] *ibid.*, p. 355.

empirically verifiable, intersubjectively valid truth, and its understanding as a particular form of *socially organised activity*, become divorced from each other. Both are seen as necessary outcomes of its defining feature of autonomy, but they become conceptually dissociated, demanding quite disparate theoretical frameworks of interpretation, because they can no longer be conceived as naturally and harmoniously presupposing and supplementing each other. The comprehension of science as knowledge, and as a form of social practice, now appears as, at least potentially, conflictual.

Science is, on the one hand, a separate and distinct value-sphere (*Wertsphere*),[164] this is the meaning of its autonomy. It is a system of concepts and propositions ("judgements" – *Urteile*) allowing the intellectual (*denkend*) ordering of empirical reality in a manner which lays claim to objective and empirical, intersubjectively verifiable truth.[165] That such truths (as opposed to truths justified by revelation; by particular cultural traditions; by mystical illumination; or truths based on practical know-how; on empathy and so on) are "worth being known" and are valuable in themselves independently of the uses we may derive from them is the ultimate value postulate of autonomous science which, as value postulates in general, can never be proved or legitimated by scientific means.[166] Scientific activity, aiming at enlarging the scope of such truths as an end in itself, makes sense only under the presupposition of this ultimate and irreducible value – in this sense it is a clear example of *value-rational* activity.

More particularly, the natural sciences[167] aim at the intellectual ordering and explanation of the events of empirical reality through a system ever more

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[164] Compare *ibid*., p. 154.

[165] Compare *MSS*, pp. 58–59 and 111; *WL*, pp. 4, 89.

[166] Compare *FMW*, pp. 143 and 152–153; *MSS*, pp. 110–111.

[167] I restrict my discussion – in accordance with the aim and topic of this paper – to Weber's undoubtedly sparse and fragmentary remarks about natural science, completely neglecting his much more complex and detailed treatment of social and human sciences with the associated problems of value-freedom, value-relation and value-interpretation in these sciences. These latter, however, do not impinge upon the validity of those (rather elemental) observations relating to the Weberian "image of science" with which I am alone concerned here.

general, exact and empirically verifiable causal laws formulated in terms of universal concepts of relations. From their viewpoint individual events are "worth being known" (scientifically relevant) only insofar as they can be regarded as members of an open class which stand in some such quantifiable causal relationship with some members of another such class. The ultimate "logical ideal" of these sciences, which directs their development, is the transformation of the world into a "cosmos of natural causality" expressed in a "system of absolute universally valid *formulas*" making all future events calculable and predictable.[168] As Weber indicates, these sciences have been formed due to a historical conjuncture which allowed the "association" of the practical orientation toward the immediately and technically useful with the hope (connected with the heritage of antiquity, but also having a religious motivation) of attaining a purely "objective" and monistic knowledge of the totality of reality.[169] It was this conjuncture which effected the "virtualisation" of the directly pragmatico-technical interests: that is, their transformation into an overall intellectual attitude of searching for general and exact, as well as calculable and controllable, causal relations among recurrent events through methodologically fixed procedures of data-selection, concept-formation and theory-verification which are now posited as producing valid and valuable knowledge irrespective of its immediate usefulness. In this way the theoretical sciences of nature achieved their autonomy, while their extension remained "closely associated and identical with the extension of technical-practical *possibilities*."[170] "Natural sciences gives us an answer to the question of what we must do if we wish to technically master life. It leaves quite aside, or assumes for its purposes, whether we should and do wish to master life technically and whether it ultimately makes sense to do so."[171]

This is, without doubt, an essentially Kantian image of science. This understanding of it as a system of objective and objectified knowledge ideally embodying the value of strictly impersonal and intersubjective truth is, however, in Weber "supplemented" by a decidedly non-Kantian conception of

[168] Compare *WL*, pp. 4–5 and 12–13; *FMW*, pp. 350, 355.

[169] Compare *MSS*, p. 85; *FMW*, pp. 141–142.

[170] *MSS*, p. 86.

[171] *FMW*, p. 144.

science as institutionally organised social activity. As a result of its autonomisation (and its now indubitably effective, and not merely proclaimed, role in technical development) scientific activity became strictly specialised[172] and professionally organised within particular institutions. Its organisation can no longer be conceived as the voluntary and open, informal association of equals in a *republique des lèttres* or an intellectual *Weltbürgertum*. Weber, primarily on the basis of American experience, characterises this process of the transformation of the institutional structure of science, as research which becomes organised on the principles of "state capitalist enterprise."[173] This involves the growing "separation" of the scientist from the intellectual, experimental means of their labour, the economic organisation of scientific activity according to the principle of wage labour, and the bureaucratisation of the direct institutions of research with all its attendant features: formally defined (educationally certified) specialisation, orientation of activity according to unreflexively accepted rules ("proven" methods of research), impersonal character of tasks, and hierarchical ordering of authority and competencies.[174] In the most general terms, this means a socially fixed, structurally determined divorce of the direction of scientific progress (following an institutionalised logic of its own) from the motivations and rational decisions of the participating and contributing individuals.

These two conceptualisations of science in Weber, the epistemological and the sociological, are not merely disparate, they stand in potential conflict: the first unambiguously requires a *value-rational* orientation, the second presupposes

[172] "[Science] has entered a phase of specialisation previously unknown and this will forever remain the case … Only by strict specialisation can the scientific worker become fully conscious for once and perhaps never again in his lifetime, that he has achieved something that will endure": *FMW*, pp. 134–135.

[173] Compare *ibid*., pp. 131 and 223–224.

[174] The perceived changes in the character of scientific activity, the course of which I tried roughly to track in this paper, are reflected even at the semantic level, in the change of the usual designation of the agents of these activities: from *scholar* (*Gelehrter*, *savant*) to *scientists* (*Wissenschaftler*, *homme de science*) and then to *researcher* (*Forscher*, *chercheur scientifique*). About the earlier phases of this linguistic development (in English) see S. Ross, "*Scientist:* The Story of a Word," *Annals of Science*, 18 (1962), pp. 65–85.

a *goal-rational* orientation of scientific activities.[175] Unwavering personal commitment to the quest for objective truth stands opposed to routinised technical solutions of impersonally posited tasks without reflection upon their significance.[176] Weber is certainly aware of this conflict potential: his remarks about the struggle between the vocational orientation of the cultivated man (*Kulturmensch*) and the mere expertise of the specialist (*Fachmensch*), which "intrudes into all intimate cultural questions,"[177] clearly point in this direction. Nevertheless, this topic remains undeveloped in his writings. What is more, he attempts to mediate between the two images, to interlink them, both practically and theoretically. Weber locates the fundamental crisis-phenomena of modern culture essentially in the antagonistic interrelation *between* the various cultural value-spheres, in the irreconcilable "struggle of gods of the various orders" and its direct consequences.[178] The universality-claim of *each* of these cultural value-spheres, taken in itself, is for Weber, although "irrational," *internally unproblematic*, at least in the sense of being a complete *coherent* expression of some "ultimately possible attitude toward life."[179]

For this reason Weber's efforts are primarily directed at interconnecting the two disparate images of science, at demonstrating the possibility of their junction. At the practical level this is achieved by his understanding of "science as vocation" and by his normative image of the scientist.[180] For Weber,

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[175] Compare S. N. Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change and Modernity*, New York, 1973, pp. 253–259.

[176] "Specialized science (*Fachwissenschaft*) is technique," writes Weber: Letter to E. Jaffe, 13 September 1907, quoted in E. Baumgarten, *Max Weber: Werk und Person*, Tubingen, 1964, p. 647.

[177] *ibid.*, p. 243.

[178] In respect of science, the waves of popular disenchantment with science fuelled the anti-intellectualism of "literary" and "cafe-house" intellectuals.

[179] *FMW*, p. 152.

[180] In some respects this latter point seems to be strangely anachronistic, or at least at odds with his characterisation of science as "enterprise." In talking about the vocation of the scientist, Weber's language sometimes takes on quaintly pseudoreligious overtones. He speaks of waging "the fate of one's soul" upon the correctness of a conjecture, about "intoxication," "frenzy," and "inner devotion," about self-imposed "blinders," "destinies" and the demon holding the fibre of one's life. See *ibid.*, pp. 134–137, 156, 355–356; *ST*, p. 73.

the scientist is a moral virtuoso independently "of all personal ethical qualities,[181] and "an irreligious ascetic of the one truth."[182] What is central to this idea of science as "inner vocation" is the combination of a complete, passionate self- identification with an intellectual task as the sole motiving interest of life. A task which is self-chosen only to a limited extent and the ultimate significance of which can never be rationally judged together with the ability to spend one's time on "quite trivial computations," on following "firm and reliable work procedures," and whatever is required by the "intrinsic logic" of the task by science as "technique": a combination of the two opposed forms of value-orientation in one "vocational workaday life."

Of greater interest and import are the considerations of Weber that establish a theoretical connection between the two images of science. His great, though fragmentary, reconstruction of the historical conditions of the emergence and the typological specificity of modern Western society and culture indicates (at least) two different processes of rationalisation which, stemming from disparate sources, at a definite point interlock and determine the logic of Occidental rationalism. On the one hand, there is the process of the intellectual rationalisation of the systems of ideas (in terms of their growing internal coherence, precision, generality and so on) which leads to the destruction of unitary religious world-views and to an irreducible *plurality* of the culturally valid symbolic systems of world-interpretation based on irreconcilable ultimate values and to the emergence of an autonomous culture whose various spheres are in a conflictual relation with each other. On the other hand, and parallel to the first, there runs the process of the practical rationalisation of the institutional orders of social action (in terms of their growing calculability, predictability, effectivity and so on) which leads to a *homogenisation* of the organisational structure of all forms of social institutions according to the requirements of goal-rationality (bureaucratisation of all spheres of life).

> [R]ationalism may mean very different things. It means one thing if we think of the kind of rationalisation the systematic thinker performs on the image of the world: an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of

[181] *FMW*, p. 355.

[182] *ibid*., p. 293, my emphasis.

> increasingly precise and abstract concepts. Rationalism means another thing if we think of the methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means. These types of rationalism are very different, in spite of the fact that ultimately they belong inseparately together.[183]

In this sense the divorce between the "epistemological" and "sociological" image of science only expresses the fundamental underlying characteristics of Occidental rationalism – at the level of its "logic" the two belong "inseparately together."

These considerations of Weber, however, raise further perturbing questions. Through them science, "our" science (or as Weber says: "a science which has reached a stage of development which we today would accept as authentic")[184] is firmly put in a historical and comparative perspective: it is *one* form of the theoretical mastery of the world by means of concepts involving a specific understanding of truth characteristic and valid for *our* culture. "It should be remembered that the belief in the value of scientific truth is the product of certain cultures and is not a product of man's original nature."[185] It is the outcome of a process of rationalisation "which is unique to the West."[186] Does this mean, however, that science in this sense is only one of the forms of intellectual comprehension of reality, each culturally relative and each rationalisable, but from different directions and for different ends? Or does Western science represent in these comparisons, independently of the question of its particular historical origin, a special privileged case? Does it have a "superiority" precisely from the viewpoint of its immanent rationality and objective validity? In one of the late, programmatic formulations of the very intentions of his oeuvre Weber comes close to posing this question himself:

> It is both inevitable and right that someone who is himself the offspring of modern European civilisation should approach problems in world history with the following question in mind: through what concatenation of

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[183] *ibid*.

[184] *ST*, p. 331.

[185] *MSS*, p. 110.

[186] *ST*, p. 339.

> circumstances did it come about that precisely, and only, in the Western world certain cultural phenomena emerged which, as at least we like to think, represent a direction of development of universal significance and validity?[187]

Do we have, however, any rational grounds to think so, or is this just a case of cultural ethnocentrism?

There is no explicit answer to this question in Weber's writings and, it seems to me, no unambiguous and coherent solution to the problem is implied by them either.[188] On the one hand, Weber most energetically underlines the multiplicity of the forms of rationalisation and "rationalisms," and the diversity of their meaning, not only insofar as they apply to different lifespheres, but also within each of these spheres. In particular, he specifically emphasises the existence of different types of rationalism in the intellectual sphere itself,[189] where the culturally most significant types differ from each other in respect of the "ultimate points of view and … purposes" (or "directions") from which their rationalisation is undertaken, and differ so radically that "what counts as 'rational' from one of these points of view may be 'irrational' from another."[190] Since Weber rejects the possibility of any general theory of historical evolution or that of a universal system of values which would once and for all fix their order and their meaning, the conclusion seems inevitable: in respect of those great systems of world-interpretation which belong to radically different cultures one can do nothing more than clarify their typological

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[187] *ibid.*, p. 331, my emphasis.

[188] The different interpretative positions concerning this question are closely connected with the variety of views concerning the fundamental intentions of Weber's theory and the reconstruction of the process of its formation and development. For some of the representative views which have emerged in the more recent discussions, see F. H. Tenbruck, "Das Werk Max Weber," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol. 27, 1975, pp. 663–702; W. Schluchter, *Die Entwicklung des okzidentalen Rationalismus*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1979, chs I-II, esp. pp. 34–38; Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. I, ch. II, esp. pp. 252–261; and W. J. Mommsen, "Rationalisierung und Mythos bei Max Weber," in K. H. Bohrer (Hg), *Mythos und Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1983, pp. 382–402.

[189] Compare *FMW*, p. 293.

[190] *ST*, p. 340; see also *PE*, pp. 77–78 and 194–179.

differences, since they are "incommensurable." On the other hand, many of Weber's formulations clearly suggest the presupposition of a transcultural logic of intellectual development.[191] He speaks without hesitation about the "ultimate forms of images of the world,"[192] and repeatedly describes the autonomous value-spheres of modern Western culture as expressing "the ultimately possible attitudes toward life,"[193] "our ultimate position toward life,"[194] and their autonomy (which is emphatically called "lawful") as being the result of "the development of inner and other-worldly values towards rationality."[195] At least his rhetoric evokes the impression that the great cultural conflicts of modernity represent the ultimate choices between fundamental values finally reduced to their completely coherent form so that their character can now be self-reflexively recognised: in other words, to irreducibly different ways of meaning-*making* in a world which lacks any meaning. But the suggested theoretical alternative, if it is one, never emerges as a problem for Weber: he is so firmly convinced of our impossibility to transcend, at least in a rationally foreseeable way, the standpoint of modernity (which as a historical fact becomes day by day more universal, sweeping away all other socio-cultural complexes) that the question, being in any case not one within the competence of an empirical scientist, has no conceivable practical relevance for him. And a fundamental constituent of this conviction is Weber's firm belief that for those who have eaten from the tree of knowledge, there is no other way at all to acquire coherent empirical knowledge of the world but the one presented by the positive sciences: "scientific truth is precisely what is *valid* for all who *seek* the truth."[196]

It is therefore probably no accident that the dilemma concerning the universal validity versus the cultural relativity of science has emerged as a genuinely pressing problem, influencing the very image of science in our days,

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[191] For example, "The rational conception of the world is contained in the germ within the myth of the redeemer," *FMW*, p. 274.

[192] *ibid.*, p. 352.

[193] *ibid.*, p. 152.

[194] *ibid.*, p. 143.

[195] *ibid.*, p. 328.

[196] *MSS*, p. 84.

amidst the growing erosion of public confidence in science and expressing diverse concerns for quite disparate reasons giving rise to a rather amorphous search for some "alternative to science" or "alterative science." Between Weber's and our times is the period during which the two images of science have been solidified into unproblematically diverse disciplinary approaches: philosophy versus sociology of science existing for a time in a benign neglect and ignorance of each other. The historical dimension of science, through which Weber attempted to organically interconnect the two approaches, had been temporarily lost by both.[197] Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that these divergent disciplinary images of science had no point of contact, they were not incompatible, in fact they stood rather in a relation of complementarity and structural analogy to each other. Philosophers of science (in the tradition of "logical empiricism" exemplified in the works of Carnap, Reichenbach and Hempel) occupied themselves with the "logical reconstruction" of the language of science, that is, with the exact characterisation of those syntactic and semantic features of theories understood as complex logical *systems of statements* that allow them to satisfy (in various degrees) the precisely formulated criteria of scientificity ("cognitive significance"): degrees of confirmation, conditions of adequacy of explanation and so on. These criteria were seen to be the mere logical clarifications and exact-formal specifications of the actual, though usually vague and unreflexively employed, standards guiding the acceptance and rejection of hypotheses and theories, since their satisfaction explains what was accepted as a self-evident fact. The statement that science *functions cognitively well*, on the other hand, provides us with *empirically verified and technically utilisable* (predictive) systematic knowledge about states of affairs obtaining in the world. Sociologists of science (like Storer or Hagstrom working in the tradition of the later writings of Merton) were also occupied with building a model of science understood as a separate functional *system of social actions* which through institutionalised norms are directed at pursuing

[197] The following – in any case very schematic and oversimplified – remarks relate to developments in the English-speaking cultural area. In France, for example, philosophy of science (in the works of Meyerson, Bachelard, Canguilhem and so on) always retained a strong historical orientation. The gap between it and a sociology of science (which emerged as a separate discipline later than in the United States) has been also less pronounced.

a definite social end. Such a model then served for the determination and justification of various empirical and quantifiable measures (indicators) of effectivity of the reward, promotion, communication, and so on, as arrangements of concrete scientific organisations. The institutionalised norms of science were again seen (overall and in the "normal" cases) as the consciously interiorised maxims that actually guide and motivate the activity of scientists since this sufficiently explains what was accepted as a self-evident fact: how science (excluding some exceptional social circumstances: Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia) *functions socially well* that is, successfully produces an ever growing body of *socially certified* (consensually accepted by the concerned actors) and *new* knowledge.

This happy state of an unintended "pre-established harmony," however, has slowly begun to dissolve since the late 1960s. This was connected with the re-emergence of a *historical* view of science – initiated by Popper, who emphasised the importance of the purely temporal relation between hypothesis and evidence for the validation of scientific theories. In both disciplines this occurred in the wake of Kuhn's theory of "normal" and "revolutionary" science. Simultaneously there was a great resurgence of interest in the social, "externalist" history of science. This global re-historisation of science did not lead, however, to an explicit linkage of its two conceptualisations, the epistemological and the sociological. Its result was precisely the opposite: the emergence of two images of science which are clearly *incompatible*. Admittedly a great many (perhaps the majority) of those who work in the field of either of the two disciplines occupy some "middle" position between the two rival views, but this is not so much the result of coherent theoretical considerations amounting to some unified conception of science; rather this has the character of a practical compromise dictated by the implausibility of simply accepting all the consequences which follow from either of these views.

The two opposed images no longer strictly coincide with disciplinary boundaries. For convenience' sake I shall, however, identify them with the disciplines in which they are prevalent. In the *philosophy of science* the interest has decidedly shifted from problems concerning confirmation of isolated theories to the "rational reconstruction" of the process of theory change. Science is further understood as "ideally objectified" knowledge, that is, as a system of statements, now usually conceived as a complex hierarchical organisation

of several levels and comprising statements of different logico-epistemological type.[198] The effort is directed at the formulation of such logical and epistemological (in some cases, set theoretical) criteria which would allow a rational choice between competing theories; the characterisation of some theory as cognitively "better" than its rivals. The endeavour presupposes the existence of an *internal* logic and rationality of scientific development which suffices to explain how science *can* do what it evidently *does*: to produce a changing and growing body of knowledge that allows for making progressively more precise predictions and exercising more effective control over processes of nature. But the approach also leads to some uncomfortable consequences. For simultaneous historical or sociological investigation of cases of theory change (often the same ones which – in a highly idealised form – served in philosophy as examples of progressive theory replacement) convincingly demonstrate that the established criteria of rational theory choice are insufficient to explain the actual behaviour of scientists in the concerned situations. Not only do eminent scientists often make "wrong" choices in situations when, in view of the criteria formulated, they could have made more rational ones, but, more importantly, the "correct" choices also very often turn out to be motivated by (at least partially) "wrong reasons," that is, by considerations which in the sense of these criteria are "irrational." The historisation of the epistemology of science paradoxically leads to the result that its *actual* (now called "external") history is "an ocean of anomalies."[199] Thus if the presupposition of an internal, rational logic of scientific development satisfactorily explains how science can do what it effectively does, it achieves this by creating a new enigma: how can the actual course of scientific development be

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198 In spite of the emergence of the so-called "non-statement view" (Sneed, Stegmuller), I think this remains, overall, a fair characterisation even if the conceptual explications of science, to emphasise its multi-levelled structure, now are often directly formulated in programs, paradigms, axeological norms, and so on.

199 Compare "I need not say that no such historiographical research programme can or should explain *all* history of science as rational: even the greatest scientists make false steps and fail in their judgement. Because of this *rational reconstructions remain forever submerged in an ocean of anomalies*": I. Lakatos, "History of Science and Its Rational Reconstructions" in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 134.

ultimately in accord with such a logic, if the actual conduct of scientists as scientists is to a large extent (in the above sense) irrational?

In the meantime there has been a marked shift of research interests in the *sociology of science* as well: away from building functionalist models of science as a sui generis social system and from the statistical evaluation of the effectivity of various forms of its institutions, towards detailed empirical investigations of the actual process of research, often with the aim to reconstruct it from the viewpoint of its actors themselves, reproducing their interpretation of the situation (including not only its social, but also cognitive, and more broadly cultural aspects) and the strategies of their interactions with each other.[200] These investigations tended to show, not surprisingly, that scientists in their actual practice do behave rationally, only the rationality of their conduct as scientists does not simply follow any "logic of scientific rationality" in their decisions of what line of research to pursue, whether to accept or reject disputed experimental results of others, what choice to effect among rival hypotheses or theories, and so on; argumentative considerations take place within a much broader, "external" context of generalised cultural expectations and orientations. They are interwoven with purely pragmatic deliberations, with motives dictated by professional and institutional interests, and the need to gain or maintain "public" support for research and so on. What ultimately emerges as scientific consensus is often the result of complex social negotiations among the actors concerned in which their power position, prestige and rhetoric may play no less a role than arguments. The justification of such choices and decisions in the objective-impartial language of science, which alone is allowed to be voiced in the appropriate publications, is seen from this perspective as a *post festum* rationalisation expressing a culturally specific professional ideology rather than the actual reasons and motives. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of many such amply documented observations, but the explanations of the actual conduct of scientists leave one with another enigma: if this conduct is rational only in this sociological sense, if the development of science is in fact determined primarily, or at least to a considerable extent, by such "external" factors and the objectivity of

[200] See for example the writings of B. Latour, S. W. Woolgar, K. D. Knoor-Cetina, M. J. Mulkay, G. N. Gilbert, H. M. Collings etc.

science is only a socially and culturally conditioned ideology, how can this science then be at least *technically so effective* (and increasingly so) in providing theoretical foundations for the control of the processes of nature? The very effort to extend the research interests of sociology from the institutional conditions of scientific activity to "what the scientists really do" seems to result paradoxically in the evaporation of the cognitive aspect of this activity which in fact constitutes its specificity.

"[S]ociological rationality and epistemological rationality must overlap at some point," so writes one of its participants at an early stage of the dispute.[201] Most will agree with this sentiment, since it seems impossible to reject completely either of these two images of science and to accept without any qualification all the consequences of the opposed view. A mere "compromise" between the two, a mixture of them ("there is a role both for external and for internal determinations in the development of science") will, however, not do, and not only because it does not seem to answer ultimately any of the relevant theoretical problems, but also since the two images concerned express not only diverse disciplinary interests and approaches, but first of all *opposed practical attitudes* to science. But the theoretical articulation of these two attitudes, "epistemological" defence and "sociological" critique of science, today seem to proceed on quite different planes, and do not seem to meet at all, and are therefore unable to engage with each other in a meaningful confrontation and dialogue.

What is needed, it seems to me, is a "mediation" between the two conceptualisations and approaches: a "third" image of science, if you wish. For neither the epistemological claims of scientific experiments, hypotheses and theories, nor the social strategies and negotiations of the scientists take place in a vacuum: they are articulated within, concretised through, and constrained by, a system of sui generis social relations which constitute and define science as a historically specific and particular *cultural form or genre*. In an earlier paper[202]

[201] R. Whitley, Introduction to *Social Processes of Scientific Development*, London, Routledge, 1974, p. 5.

[202] G. Markus, "Why is There No Hermeneutics of Natural Sciences? Some Preliminary Theses," *Science in Context*, I, 1987, pp. 5–51. The necessity to describe "how scientists' accounts are organized in ways which portray scientists' actions and

I attempted to specify this approach and to characterise science as a cultural genre in terms of the institutionalised norms, expectations and evaluative criteria concerning the relations between imputed author, "proper" public and effective tradition; in general, in terms of an institutionally imposed and normative *Author–Work–Recipient* relationship. I tried to argue there, though certainly in a sketchy and anticipatory way, the relevance of such a "culturological" view of science to the just outlined dispute between its two presently competing images. For between science understood as a system of *statements* in the ghostly objectivity of their well-defined meanings and unambiguous truth-claims, and science understood as the complex sequence of *actions* of, and interactions among, scientists (including their verbal and written *utterances*) in all the ambiguity of their social motivations and consequences, there is science as the highly organised (and constantly reorganised) body of texts as *cultural objectivations* with a well-defined range and modality of admissible meanings which is determined by the cultural norms regulating the ways they ought be written, and which cannot be interpreted, criticised or positively referred to and be brought into relation with other types of texts. The cognitive semantics of science and the social ethnology of the behaviour of scientists as a group ought be supplemented and mediated by a historically oriented *cultural pragmatics* of science as a specific form of cultural objectivation.

Such a "culturological" image of, and approach to, science is certainly one-sided at least in respect of *modern natural sciences*; its explanatory potential, even on its own terms is a limited one. For these sciences cannot be treated as textually objectifying, discursive practices *alone*. They also incorporate definite, equally socially constructed manipulative "laboratory" practices which have their own objectivations (scientific instruments), their own partial

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beliefs in a variety of specifiable and contextually appropriate ways," has been repeatedly underlined by M. Mulkay and other sociologists collaborating with him: see for example M. Mulkay, "Action and Belief or Scientific Discourse?," *The Philosophy of Social Sciences*, vol. II, 1981, pp. 173–181; M. Mulkay, J. Potter and S. Yearley, "Why an Analysis of Scientific Discourse is Needed," in K. D. Knorr-Cetina, M. Mulkay (eds), *Science Observed*, London, Sage, 1983, pp. 171–203. However, the "discourse analysis" offered by Mulkay et al. – see esp. N. Gilbert, M. Mulkay, *Opening Pandora's Box*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984 – significantly differs, both in methodology and in its theoretical premisses, from the one proposed by myself.

traditions (of experimental schools and procedures), and their sui generis interconnections with other fields of social activity (technique, material culture in general). The specificity of natural sciences is primarily determined by the historically changing and culturally regulated way these two fundamentally different types of human activities, textual "representation" and experimental "intervention," are interrelated and integrated *within* science itself.[203] An analysis of natural sciences therefore makes us face, certainly in a very specific form, one of the fundamental problems of philosophy: how are the two basic ways we create meanings in, and try to confer sense upon, the world – discourse and action – related to each other? To address this in regard to science, however, we must first be able to analyse adequately how each of these particular practices is culturally constituted within it. Only then can we hope to answer the further questions: what is constituted science able to *tell* us *about* the world, and what *does* it do to us, as social beings acting *in* the world?

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[203] For, in some respects, a similar point of view see I. Hacking, *Representing and Interviewing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; P. Gallison, "History, Philosophy and the Central Metaphor," *Science in Context*, II, 1988.

Chapter Seven

Why Is There No Hermeneutics of Natural Sciences? Some Preliminary Theses

A. The Problem-Situation

1. A hermeneutics of the natural sciences – as an area of recognisably distinct cognitive interests – does not exist today. Writings explicitly addressed to such an undertaking are very rare, and then are usually of general, polemico-programmatic character, essentially restricted to a hermeneutically informed criticism of the "mainstream," analytic philosophy of science. Generally speaking, the situation today remains the same as in the only but outdated bibliography of hermeneutics.[1] This bibliography contains hundreds of entries under the headings of historical, juridical, philological hermeneutics and so on, but it has no section which deals with the hermeneutics of the natural sciences. Works somehow related to this latter topic appear in it only in connection with the old *Methodenstreit*, the dispute over the relationship between causal explanation and hermeneutical understanding.

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[1] N. Henrichs, *Bibliographie der Hermeneutik*, München, Saur, 1968.

2. Hermeneutics, of course, emerged as a philosophical discipline exactly in connection with this dispute, or more broadly: in the struggle of the human sciences for methodological and epistemological independence from the model of natural scientific inquiry. Modern, post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, however, has sharply attacked this restrictively methodological conception of its subject-matter, in the name of the universality of the hermeneutic approach. It has emphatically underlined that "understanding" should not be conceived as one of the possible cognitive relations between the subject and some specific objects of knowledge, but should be regarded as a basic mode of our finite-temporal existence encompassing the whole of our world-experience. It is just in respect to this claim of universality – especially in view of the earlier history of the discipline – that the silence of modern hermeneutics about the natural sciences acquires a somewhat strange character.

3. This impression is reinforced if one pays closer attention to what the initiators of a "hermeneutical turn" have in fact said about natural science as a cultural form or genre. I shall here take the example of Gadamer alone. On one hand, he unambiguously upholds the universality-claim of hermeneutics also in respect of the natural sciences themselves. These represent a form of *literature*, sharing with literary artworks the fundamental characteristics of being inherently bound to language and therefore being able to be written down (*Sprachlichkeit* and *Schriftfähigkeit*), which makes the differences between them less basic than usually assumed. Gadamer reinforces this latter point[2] by pointing to the fact that important works of science may simultaneously also be outstanding examples of an artistic prose legitimately belonging to world literature – a remark which gives his considerations a somewhat dated character, since it is more applicable to the Galilean period than to recent works in the natural sciences. And indeed, when Gadamer explicitly deals with *modern* science, he seems to revoke the above characterisation. He not only repeats Heidegger's famous (and for many infamous) dictum according to which, in the emphatic sense of the word, "science itself does not think," but adds that it "actually does not speak a proper language either."[3]

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[2] H. G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 4th edn, Tübingen, Mohr, 1975, pp. 155–156.

[3] H. G. Gadamer, *Vernunft im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1976, p. 10.

He underlines the *monologic* character of scientific "sign-systems" which are, allegedly, completely determined by the realm of inquiry to which they refer.[4] This would seem to deny the presence of some of the most fundamental features of linguisticity in the literary practice and works of the natural sciences: the constitution of the "matter" of talk in the very dialogue of "two speakers" and the associated world-openness of language. In short: Gadamer ultimately seems to suggest that a hermeneutic approach to the natural sciences can legitimately discover their ineliminable dependence upon everyday language and communication, on the one hand, and their being in need of a higher, rational-philosophical "unification" (as an open-ended process) accounting for their role in the totality of human existence, on the other. Hermeneutics can then play an important *reintegrative* cultural role with respect to the natural sciences, but with little to say about the proper cultural-cognitive practice of autonomous scientific inquiry. This remains as the legitimate domain of an analytic philosophy of science which investigates the logic and epistemology of artificially constructed, secondary "sign-systems," the idealised "language" of the natural sciences.

4. This resigned (or at times hostile) attitude toward the natural sciences, which in a sense accepts their positivist image, is characteristic not only of Gadamer, but also of his predecessors such as Heidegger and of his critics such as Habermas (at least as far as it concerns his earlier writings). However, it is today opposed by several trends in the philosophy, historiography and sociology of natural science which developed a convincing critique of its predominant positivistic interpretation and which clamour (explicitly or implicitly) for a hermeneutic approach to scientific activity itself. It is quite conspicuous that the presently powerful criticism of the traditional "whig" history of the sciences (which constructed their past as a continuous series of contributions resulting in the contemporary state of the discipline) in many respects reproduces well-known hermeneutical arguments against a naive idea of progress which does not recognise the role and "creativity" of hermeneutic distance in history and in historical interpretation. Interestingly, even

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[4] *ibid*., p. 11. Similar views were expressed also by H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 3, and in the early writings of Habermas (e.g. "Die Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik," in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp 1971, pp. 130–131), etc.

such historians of science – who are certainly not "revisionists" – as for instance, A. C. Crombie,[5] consider today the hermeneutical practice of the history of philosophy as the methodological example to be emulated in the historiography of science as well. Similar phenomena can also be observed in the sociology of the natural sciences where there is a definite shift (or at least broadening) of interests from the investigation of the informal social interaction between the scientists to the way the literary accounts of their activity are constructed.[6]

5. The few papers that directly address themselves to a hermeneutics of the natural sciences have no difficulty in demonstrating that several fundamental hermeneutical concepts and ideas can be fruitfully applied to the characterisation of their proper cognitive activity. The role of a hermeneutic logic of *question and answer* in scientific inquiry has already been indicated by Popper, and has since led to the elaboration of some interrogative models of scientific activity. The presuppositional character of scientific knowledge, entailed by such varying conceptions as Polanyi's idea of a "tacit dimension," Kuhn's concept of the paradigm or Elkana's emphasis on the role of the "images of science," can be treated as a case (or specific cases) of those historically inherited *"prejudices"* (that is, pre-judgements) which in hermeneutics constitute

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[5] A. C. Crombie, "Philosophical Presuppositions and Shifting Interpretations of Galileo," in *Theory Change, Ancient Axiomatic and Galileo's Methodology*, ed. J. Hintikka and D. Gruender, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1981, vol. 1, p. 279. In the same volume an identical point is made by N. A. Jardine, "Philosophy of Science and the Art of Historical Interpretation," p. 347.

[6] N. Gilbert, "The Transformation of Research Findings into Scientific Knowledge," *Soc. Stud. Sci.*, 6, 1976; L. J. Gusfield, "The Literary Rhetorics of Science," *American Sociological Review*, 41, 1976; B. Latour and P. Fabri, "La rhétorique de la science," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 13, 1977; S. Woolgar, "Discovery: Logic and Sequence in a Scientific Text," in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, ed. K. D. Knorr et al., Dordrecht, Reidel, 1980; N. Gilbert and M. Mulkay, "Contexts of Scientific Discourse: Social Accounting in Experimental Papers," in *ibid.*; M. Mulkay, "Action and Belief or Scientific Discourse?" *Phil. Soc. Sci.*, 11, 1981; C. Bazerman, "What Written Knowledge Does: Three Examples of Academic Discourse," *Phil. Soc. Sci.*, 11, 1981; K. D. Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge*, Oxford, Pergamon, 1981; N. Gilbert and M. Mulkay, *Opening Pandora's Box*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

the precondition of any understanding. Similarly, the relationship between theory and observation can be analysed in an enlightening way with the use of the idea of the *hermeneutic circle*. Metaphor's role in the emergence of new theories, the intimate relation between scientific production and reception shown in the history of science[7] – all these undoubtedly represent themes and problem-complexes in which investigations of natural science are in close contact with the ideas of hermeneutics.

6. Arguments of this type – which appear in the relatively few papers explicitly attempting to transpose some ideas of a hermeneutical philosophy to the study of the natural sciences[8] – have, in my view, the force and significance of successful *analogies*. They shed new light on an already established field of research by unexpectedly connecting it with an independently developed line of inquiry and its problematics. However, they also share the usual drawback of such analogic procedure: in the transfer process some of the original problem's or notion's most fundamental constituents are often lost. For example, K. O. Apel has convincingly argued[9] that when one regards the theory-observation nexus as a case of the "hermeneutic circle," one actually misses

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[7] On this latter point see some of the papers in *Science and Its Public: The Changing Relationship*, ed. G. Holton and G. A. Blanpied, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1976; further R. G. A. Dolby, "Sociology of Knowledge in Natural Sciences," *Sci. Stud.*, 1, 1971, pp. 16–21; S. Shapin and A. Thackray, "Prosopography as a Research Tool in the History of Science," *Hist. Sci.*, 12, 1974, parts 2–3; S. Shapin, "The Audience for Science in Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh," *Hist. Sci.*, 12, 1974; R. Porter, "Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England," *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 3, 1980.

[8] In the English-language literature arguments to this effect can be found, for example, in P. A. Healan, "Hermeneutics of Experimental Science in the Context of the Life-World," *Philosophia Mathematica*, 9, 1972; T. Kisiel, "Comments on Healan, 1972," *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, 4, 1974; T. Kisiel, "Hermeneutic Models for the Natural Sciences," in *Phänomenologische Forschungen*, ed. E. W. Orth, Freiburg, Alber, vol. 2, 1976; T. Kisiel, "Heidegger and the New Images of Science," in *Radical Phenomenology*, ed. J. Sallis, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1978; and J. Farr, "Popper's Hermeneutics," *Phil. Soc. Sci.*, 13, 1983.

[9] K. O. Apel, "Comments on J. Farr, 1983," *Philosophy of Social Sciences*, 13, 1983, pp. 186–187.

the whole problem-background, which this latter concept has been introduced to solve (the problem of the necessity of mediation between two meaning-intentions in incidents of communication over a cognitive distance). More importantly, however, there is, in my opinion, something contrived and artificial in all these attempts which simply transpose the readily-taken ideas of a general philosophical hermeneutics to the cultural field of natural scientific activities. The relationship between hermeneutics and natural science is not only strained from the hermeneutics viewpoint; it is equally problematic from the natural sciences viewpoint. Bluntly put, the natural sciences, in practice, seem to be in *no need* of a hermeneutics – they succeed quite well without it.

7. This last assertion is intended to be a mere statement of fact. It attempts to focus on a situation which is perhaps best illustrated by comparing professional socialisation in the humanities and in many of the "soft" sciences with that in the developed disciplines of natural science. A student of philosophy, history, and also sociology spends much time during their education on the actual acquisition of simple hermeneutical skills: they are emphatically and explicitly taught and trained to understand, interpret and use definite types of texts in definite ways. A student of physics, on the other hand, is not explicitly taught how to read the discipline's scriptures, although they can certainly appear to the layman as formidably difficult to understand. Whatever the student is taught – physical theories, mathematical techniques, the use of instruments and devices in laboratory situations and the appropriate interpretation of its results, and so on – through this learning process the student is supposed to acquire the "language of physics." This language, once learnt, should make the texts of the discipline unambiguously and perspicuously comprehensible. Interestingly, this learning of physics will also involve rigorous training in how to *write* texts of such kind. Thus, in the various branches of humanities there are a great variety of manuals teaching people how to read, while in the natural sciences there is a similar variety advising them how to write – but not vice versa. It is as though these two great branches of learning shared the opposed halves of the conviction of the Shakespearean Dogberry: *either* to write *or* to read "comes by nature."

8. Philosophers of science may convincingly destroy the idea of an ideally sharp and unambiguous language of physics; historians of science may

discover that in all the great disputes in this field – from the reception of the Copernican theory to that of quantum mechanics – the adversaries not only regularly misunderstood each other, but these misunderstandings also played a constitutive role since they polemically influenced the way the concerned theories actually developed; "ethnomethodologists" of laboratory life[10] can demonstrate that already simple "experimental reports" are under-determined in their meaning and therefore, as a rule and without some additional conditions, cannot be replicated even by the expert reader – despite all these criticisms, the "hermeneutical naiveté" of the natural sciences persists, because it "works." That is, the "ideology" (*if* it is a mere ideology) of the natural sciences which regards any acceptable scientific text as totally self-sufficient as to its meaning (and therefore as unambiguously clear to any reader with adequate competence) does succeed because the *hermeneutical* consequences of a so conceived practice seem to confirm this belief. From the viewpoint of its actually realised *hermeneutical achievements* natural science seems to be very "superior" to the hermeneutically very conscious humanities and "soft" social sciences.

Whatever one's view of the idea of a unilinear scientific progress, it is the modern natural sciences which indubitably provide at least the best approximation to what should be understood by the notion of an "accumulative historical growth" – the process of continuous *tradition-transmission* and simultaneously creative and accretive transformation of this tradition proceeds in a paradigmatic way in them. As a result, at any given historical moment, natural sciences are characterised – especially in contrast with the never ceasing "battle of sects" in humanities – by the existence of a widely shared *background consensus*. Due to this consensus, the frequent disputes and disagreements at the frontier-areas of research usually prove to be "resolvable" relatively quickly (even if this truly involves a "decision," that is, a fallible and always revocable resolution of the dispute). Lastly, whatever the frequency of the de facto misunderstandings is (something which cannot

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[10] For example B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Fact*, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1979; or, in some respects, Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge*.

be judged), it is at least true that the *argument from being misunderstood*, this perhaps most usual countermove in philosophical polemics (and in many other fields of the human sciences, too) does not belong to the "normal tone" of disputes in the contemporary natural sciences. The fear of possible mis-comprehension, this *neurosis philosophicus* which, from Plato's seventh letter on, accompanies its whole history, seems to be conspicuously absent from the public rhetoric of the natural sciences. Thus in respect of all these desiderata the modern natural sciences seem to represent a true Eden of hermeneutics: a state of fulfillment and perfection achieved without any effort. Therefore, any hermeneutical investigation of the natural sciences ought to first answer the question: why are its own cognitive interests and methods (or, at least, why do they seem to be), from the viewpoint of natural scientific practice, *unnecessary*? In answer to this question, however, it is insufficient to indicate or to demonstrate that some of philosophical hermeneutics' ideas and concepts are nevertheless applicable in some sense to the field of natural scientific inquiry as well.

9. Edenic happiness and innocence – as we know – has its own restrictions, and moreover, deprivations: there is some price to be paid for being able to dwell in Paradise. The clarification of this price is attempted in the following sections of this paper. Or; to put it less "poetically": I shall try to articulate – in a very schematic way – some constitutive features of contemporary natural science understood as a definite cultural practice and genre (or, in another terminology, an institutionalised discourse-type). These features at least partially explain both its hermeneutical "success" and "innocence." At the same time, I shall also point (even if only in broad hints) to some of those historical-cultural processes during which these characteristics were formed. (If the analysis stops at this, essentially "cultural," level, it is *not* because I would deny the interconnection between it and processes of deeper social transformation. Just the opposite. This interconnection cannot, however; be meaningfully discussed within the present paper's limits. But I should also add: this "culturologist" approach to science does indeed reflect my conviction not only in the usually conceded "relative autonomy" of cultural activities in modern society, but also in the existence of a specific, sui generis *system of relations* pertaining to the processes of cultural production, transmission, reception and innovation.)

10. The method employed in the following analysis is itself – at least in my own understanding – hermeneutical, but in a rather unusual and "revisionist" sense. In contradistinction and in opposition to the ontologising approach of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics I would designate it as that of a historical hermeneutics of cultural institutions.[11] This latter approach focuses on the comparative analysis of the Author–Text–Reader (ATR) relationship constitutive to different cultural genres in different historical epochs. The terms of an ATR-relation are per se – no doubt – not specifically hermeneutical; they can be seen and treated, for example, as belonging to the conceptual field of a sociology of (literary) communication. Specifically hermeneutical is, however, the insistence on the following three points:

(a) The roles of the author and the reader are not solely determined by empirical – sociological and/or psychological – variables, but are co-determined by *normative* requirements posited through the genric characteristics of the specific text. Each text contains *inscribed* in it a definite authorial position and "voice," and simultaneously posits a definite reader-role and attitude (or attitudes) *prescribed* by it (as being adequate to it).

(b) The text acquires its "genric" character only through its articulated relation to other texts which appear in relation to it as its tradition, into which it has to be – in culturally characteristic ways – inserted and which is (or can be) not only mobilised, but also partially reconstituted by the text itself.

(c) The historically conceived "production" of cultural (more narrowly literary) objectivations cannot be understood without the simultaneously ongoing process of their reception which constitutes the specific *telos* of the first activities, and as an active process codetermines – in a dialogic interaction – their course.

It is the inscribed author, the posited (adequate) reader, and the text in the intertextual context of its tradition which constitute the main terms of the following schematic analysis.

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[11] In this methodological respect I have borrowed and used – though in a generalised and rather transformed form – several ideas from the so-called "aesthetics of reception," especially from the writings of H. R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970; and R. Warning, ed., *Rezeptionsästhetik: Theorie und Praxis*, München, Fink, 1975.

B. The Inscribed Author of Natural Scientific Texts

11. Within our civilisational complex, culturally relevant texts are as a rule regarded as "authorial," that is, they are ascribed to some particular individual (or to the collaboration of a few individuals) as his or her (or their) "creation." This cultural trait cannot be reduced to the mere fact that such texts (or more generally works) are actually the results of the intentional, relatively autonomous and non-habitual activity of some particular person(s). This may be so and a culture may nevertheless treat them as parts of an anonymous tradition. On the other hand, the compulsion to ascribe culturally significant objectivations to well-defined authors is so strong within our own culture that it can drive to a "discovery" of authorship for the anonymously inherited works of the past, even when it is realised that. they were created under conditions making the applicability of such a concept highly problematical.[12]

The texts of the natural sciences are in the above, ascriptive-"proprietarian" sense strongly authorial. This is clearly demonstrated in the (presently usual) case of multiple authorship: there exist elaborate, highly formal conventions concerning "name ordering" to recognise each particular author's "assumed share" in the collaboration's literary outcome. Individual authorship in the above sense plays a pivotal role in modern science, since its social reward (and motivational) system is firmly anchored in this concept.

12. Despite this highly personalised concept of authorship (and its accompanying individualistic ideology), the author *inscribed* into the texts of contemporary natural sciences is (as a norm) a completely depersonalised one.

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[12] This tendency is most conspicuously present in the practice of art history, with its strong interest in the questions of "attribution." Past works of art are often ascribed to individual artists though it is known that they were the products of a workshop with a strict division of labour, that their "program" might have been entirely due to their donors or patrons (whom the age concerned might have credited with the "making" of the work) and that they were created under cultural conditions which did not recognise our own distinction between an "original" and its "copies." The fact that attribution of authorship as a concern is especially predominant in the arts does not seem to be incidental since within our cultural ambit works of art are predominantly conceived and interpreted as expressions and self-realisations of a unique and exceptional individuality.

The *depersonalisation* of the inscribed authorial role is one of the fundamental traits characterising these texts as constituting a separate and recognisable type of discourse.[13] In this respect the following points seem to be of relevance:

(a) Contemporary natural science (as a *cultural* genre) is characterised by the extreme *paucity* of its accepted *literary genres or forms* (whose diversity in general renders possible – among others – the expression of varying authorial attitudes and commitments to the communicated content in culturally codified ways). The "scientific paper" (unsharply divided into experimental and theoretical ones), the "comprehensive textbook" and the "theoretical monograph" are its main literary genres.[14] This can be supplemented by the observation that from the late nineteenth century on, the genre of "theoretical monograph" is increasingly in decline. Since the textbook's primary function is to fix the already achieved results in a field of inquiry in a comprehensive-systematic way, the "paper" remains as the nearly sole genre for the formulation (or at least public recording) of new scientific results and ideas.[15]

(b) The contemporary scientific paper (especially the experimental "research report") has – at least in most of the disciplines – a routinely standardised structure rigidly prescribed for the author and reflected in the well-known sequence of sections: Abstract – Introduction – Materials and Methods – Results – Discussion – References. I shall discuss the hermeneutical significance of such a structuring later (§39-40). At this point it should already be indicated that this organisation has far-reaching consequences insofar as it implies a definite way the paper *ought to be understood*. The existence of the Abstract posits that it is possible to summarise

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[13] Compare "The authors seem only to be contributing a filler for a defined slot, and they are only in competition with a few other authors who are trying to fill the same slot. The personal, though proud among colleagues, is humbled before nature:" Bazerman, "What Written Knowledge Does", p. 365. This depersonalised character of the textual objectivations is all the more striking since the more evanescent, informal communications among scientists usually demonstrate a very strong emphasis on personalities and their clash.

[14] To this list one should perhaps also add such rather institutionally defined "genres" as the Ph.D. thesis and the "proceedings" of a symposium or conference.

[15] T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 136–138.

its essential "content," that is, that this latter is independent from the exposition's literary form and argumentative context. The distinction between Introduction and Discussion, on the one hand, and Methods and Results, on the other, implies the possibility to divorce "interpretation" from "description," while the division between Methods and Results indicates a similar possibility of separating the ways of investigation from its "findings."

(c) Research papers are characterised by a peculiar, idiosyncratic and highly conventional style; generally, they possess a distinct and shared "linguistic register,"[16] and the above-mentioned "training to write" essentially consists in the socialisation to its active use. Especially in the last decade, sociologists (and to a lesser degree linguists) have paid considerable attention to this "literary rhetoric" of the natural sciences.[17] Since it is impossible to deal in detail with their respective analyses, I shall merely refer to those, mostly descriptive, characteristics which they share with each other. It has been indicated that the "language" of the experimental paper is, firstly, highly *decontexiualised*: in its main body the specific experimental actions situationally contingent upon the laboratory's local conditions are expressed in terms of codified, laconic, general formulae chosen from a restricted vocabulary. A further sign of this decontextualisation is the rarity (in comparison with other types of texts) of "essentially indexical expressions" in these writings. More particularly – and in direct connection with the depersonalised authorial role – among all the pronominal *deiktica* (through which different subject-positions in relation to what is conveyed in the text can be expressed) only the use of the undifferentiated "we" is allowed. Furthermore, natural scientific texts prefer the employment of a passive voice through which the *actions* of the experimenter (the "real author"), intentionally undertaken through the exercise of practical choices in the laboratory, become transformed into a sequence of *events* following

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[16] The concept "register" refers to those lexico-grammatical and text-organising choices ("field," "tenor," and "mode of discourse") which are systematically realised by an item of language-use in dependence upon the character of the *social situation* in which it occurs. For the elaboration of this concept see M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotics*, London, Arnold, 1978, pp. 31–35, 63–68, etc.

[17] See M. Gopnik, *Linguistic Structures in Scientific Texts*, The Hague, Mouton; A. Hofstadter, "The Scientific and Literary Uses of Language" in *Symbols and Society*, ed. L. Bryson, New York, Harper, 1955; and the writings referred to in footnote 6.

upon each other. Lastly, these texts not only exclude any explicit value-judgement, but also do not use emotionally or normatively tinged, evocative expressions, with which personal authorial attitudes can be suggested.

Due to all these indicated characteristics the "inscribed author" of the natural scientific texts appears as an anonymous performer of methodologically certified, strictly regulated activities and a detached observer of their results – without any further personal identifying marks beyond possession of the required professional competence. Through this depersonalisation of the author the experimental paper acquires its fundamental cultural trait of *report*.

13. The depersonalised authorial role represents, of course, a "genric" requirement; it is not a fact, but acts as a *norm* (and has normative consequences). That is:

(a) The independence of the experimental report from its author's personality is to a large extent *fictitious* in the sense that no two scientists performing the same experiment (according to the accepted criteria of "sameness," since literal replication of experiments is in principle impossible) will write it up in an identical way. What is more, the differences between the various "expositions" will reflect not only inessential personal idiosyncrasies, but can have far-reaching cognitive effects. As a rule experimental data (depending on the theoretical context they are inserted into) allow one to draw a number of different interpretive conclusions, which can be formulated again with varying "cognitive force," from the sceptically conditional to the dogmatically assertive. There are therefore – in spite of the impersonal, purely "registrative" tone of the scientific paper – always personal choices to be effected, for instance, between the strategies of maximisation versus minimalisation of the possible knowledge claims.

(b) It is, however, characteristic – and already belongs to the normative effects of the indicated "author-role" – that the minimalisation strategy of the involved knowledge-claim (that is, carefully taking into account all the possible objections, presenting the interpreted data in an appropriately sceptical manner, and so on) is considered to be the properly scientific one. This is not only expressed in the positive evaluation of the cautious, sceptical attitude as part of the scientific ethos, but more importantly, in case of such a minimalisation strategy, an experiment whose results the scientific community ultimately refuses to accept, is often not counted as the result of the author's mistake or error. It is usually regarded as a piece of

"bad luck," the result of some "freaky incident" that could neither be foreseen, nor explained with the present state of knowledge, and can "happen" to any experimenter.[18] In this sense the depersonalised authorial role goes together – under appropriate circumstances – with a diminished *authorial responsibility* (in the cognitive sense) for the text published. This naturally means a "reward" for reducing the knowledge-claim contained in the paper – a strategy hardly advantageous from the viewpoint of scientific *progress*. But this tendency is counterbalanced by another normative requirement towards scientific objectivations: they must represent a *new* contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Since novelty of results is both a *constitutive* criterion for any work to be admitted into science and an evaluative criterion of its significance, from the viewpoint of this requirement strategies of maximalisation of cognitive claims are to be preferred. Because of the simultaneous validity of both norms, which can produce clashing preferences, each scientist must find in every case their personal compromise between "scepticism" and "dogmatic" commitment.

(c) If the depersonalisation of the inscribed author somewhat diminishes the responsibility of the real one for the text written by them, this desubjectivisation also results in the reduction of their *authority and control* over its *meaning*. Earlier (§8) I referred to the fact that – in comparison with the humanities – charges of being willfully or inadvertently misinterpreted occur relatively rarely in disputes within the natural sciences (insofar as the *texts* are concerned, since such charges occur quite frequently in informal communications). This, however, has now to be supplemented by the observation that another – and stranger – kind of misunderstanding is often suggested in the latter controversies. The *author* is often charged (even if not necessarily in so many words) with having misunderstood what they have "described." The meaning of what is reported in the main sections of the research paper is posited as beyond the author's control, belonging to an impersonal and interpersonal realm. In this sense scientific papers are truly treated in this cultural-hermeneutical practice as imperfect fragments from an infinite "Book of Nature." This perhaps also explains the enormous staying-power of this

[18] For a case study well illustrating this point, see B. Harvey, "The Effects of Social Context on the Process of Scientific Investigation," in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, ed. Knorr et al., esp. pp. 149–151; further Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge*, pp. 102, 124–126; Gilbert and Mulkay, *Opening Pandora's Box*, ch. 4, etc.

metaphor which, originally introduced in the Augustinian tradition for the articulation of "sympathic" understanding of nature as divinely created meaning-connection, has retained its force even after its whole onto-theological background has first been radically transformed, and then completely lost.[19]

14. Depersonalisation and desubjectivisation of the authorial role brings natural scientific texts into an unexpected parallel with some works of modernist literature which consciously and programmatically aim at the elimination of the personal authorial voice (the "*oeuvre pure*" precisely characterised by the "*disparition élocutoire du poète*," in the words of Mallarmé). Just because such a comparison seems to be (and, I hasten to add, essentially is) quite absurd, it is worthwhile to follow it through.

The programmatic elimination of the subjective authorial voice from "pure poetry" (or that of the narrator from "nouveau roman") aims at making these texts completely *self-referential*. That is, such a text normatively insists on being received "for its own sake": it foregrounds the language actualised in it as its *material*, instead of this language's being used as a mere *means* of communication (about something, real or fictitious). This is achieved (insofar as it is achievable at all) through a conscious and systematic destruction of the

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[19] The latest resurfacing of this metaphor is, of course, in our talk about the "biological code," amino acid analysis as "deciphering," etc. It is interesting also to observe that this *topos* often recurs even with those thinkers who are theoretically completely opposed to the understanding of knowledge on the analogy with the "correct reading" of something already meaningfully articulated. So, for example, Marx, in his first attempt to formulate a radically historicist understanding of knowledge as a specific type of production, simply transferred the metaphor of the "Book of Nature" to industry understood as the "*open* book of *essential human powers*:" Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte," 1844, reprinted in *Marx–Engels: Werke*, Berlin, Dietz, 1968, vol. 1, p. 543. About the history and the role of this metaphor in general, see E. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern, Francke, 1948, ch. 16; B. Nelson, "Certitude and the Book of Scripture, Nature, and Conscience," in *The Nature of Scientific Discovery*, ed. O. Gingerich, Washington, Smithsonian Institute, 1975; E. Rothacker, *Das 'Buch der Natur'*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1979; E. L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, ch. 5; and H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1981.

identity and unity of those directly referential relations which are spontaneously evoked by any use of the language.[20]

In all the relevant respects natural scientific texts demonstrate directly opposed characteristics. Their restricted vocabulary, pedestrianly straight syntax, the ban on the use of rhetorical and poetic figures and *topoi*, all make the language used (for the competent "speakers") unobtrusively transparent, render the text's linguistic constitution completely opaque. They fix language normatively in the role of a mere instrument of communication. The exclusion of any expression of an authorial attitude (at least from the main body of the paper) is directed again at the homogenisation of its referential functions, but it homogenises and emphasises precisely the function of *direct (object) reference*.

These two types of equally "depersonalised" texts occupy therefore just the opposed poles in the wide spectrum of the culturally codified text-uses historically available to us. The texts, from which allegedly "language itself speaks," and those in which allegedly "the facts speak for themselves," are the extremes in that variety of hermeneutical positions from which our culture allows (or renders it possible for) *us* to speak within – and partially about – that world in which we find ourselves as a contingent fact.

15. To my knowledge, there are no historical investigations which systematically concentrate on the changes in the fundamental "genric"-literary characteristics of "scientific" texts. Nevertheless, elementary historical considerations do suggest that the depersonalised authorial voice and position do not characterise "natural science" as such, if this term is taken in its commonly accepted historical compass and meaning. A simple recall of the "genric"-textual features described earlier (§12) makes it clear that such a hermeneutical trait can only be attributed to natural sciences in relatively recent times. From the High Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century there was

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[20] R. Warning, "Der inszenierte Diskurs," in *Funktionen des Fiktiven*, ed. D. Henrich and W. Iser, München, Fink, 1983, pp. 198–200; R. S. Zons, "Über den Ursprung des literarischen Werks aus dem Geist der Autorschaft," in *Kolloquium Kunst und Philosophie*, ed. W. Oelmuller, München, Schoningh, vol. 3, 1983, pp. 122–127; M. Riffaterre, *Text Production*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 221–239.

a great variety of relatively well distinguished literary genres among which writer-scientists could choose – according to circumstances, authorial intentions and attitudes, and so on.[21] The conventions within each of these literary forms were much less rigidly fixed than they are today. Furthermore, a well-discernible authorial voice is directly present in many of the important natural philosophy and natural history works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not the least in those of their sections which (as it is often the case) touch upon metaphysico-theological or methodological issues. Experimental reports even well into the nineteenth century often seem to demonstrate a strong "narrative" organisation, with an appropriate narrator role for the author. In general, it would seem that the depersonalised authorial role, in the sense characterised above, does not emerge fully before late nineteenth century.

16. The lack of closer historical investigations concerning the changes in the literary forms of natural science can be, however, to some degree counterbalanced in an oblique manner: by recalling, in a cursory way, that better-known process through which the natural sciences have been separated from the arts. This historical separation is relevant to the emergence of the depersonalised authorial role of the writer-scientist in that within our cultural tradition, works of art are predominantly interpreted – in spite of the already mentioned modernist counter tendency – as expression of an irreproducible, exceptional individuality, that is, they are usually related to an irreducibly personalised authorial figure and role.

Therefore it is not without interest that, at the beginning of the long process of their cultural autonomisation, arts and natural science appeared in close unity, and just because both were equally regarded as expressions of an individual-personal creativity. The *virtuoso* – as the man of *virtù* – of the Renaissance designated both the artist and the scholar-"scientist," and in such cases as Brunelleschi or Leonardo it is certainly impossible to draw any strict line between artistic, technical, and scientific concerns. Leonardo emphatically characterised painting as science, and opposed it to poetry on the basis

[21] So L. Olschki, *Geschichte der neusprachlichen wissenschaftlichen Literatur*, Leipzig, Olschki, vol. 2, 1922, pp. 219–300, could fill up almost a hundred pages with the discussion of the various genres of sixteenth-century scientific literature in Italy.

that the latter has to do with moral philosophy, while the former has to do with natural philosophy.[22] It is usually maintained that such a "hybridisation" of architectural and visual arts, on the one hand, and the "sciences" of nature, on the other, ends with the fifteenth century: "By the middle of sixteenth century," writes Ben-David, "the relationship between science and art reverted to the earlier pattern of two endeavors running widely separate courses and having few meaningful encounters."[23]

This is, however a rather simplified picture since the process of their complete divorce was much more protracted. Insofar as those "minor arts" are concerned in which technical innovations played a significant part (like turning, medallion-making, engraving, and so on), even the unification of the roles of artist and scientist in one person has survived into the eighteenth century,[24] all the more easily since their practitioners were often the makers of the "philosophical instruments." Even in such major fields of artistic endeavour as painting, the interaction between it and some branches of natural philosophy (primarily optics) remained relatively close and direct well into the eighteenth century. This contact was both of practical (such as the employment of up-to-date optical devices by painters like Vermeer, Fabritius or Hoogstraaten) and ideological character (as the largely spurious use of Newtonian optics in painterly manuals), and it allowed landscape artists to continue regarding themselves during this period as some kind of experimenters in natural philosophy.[25] Even in the nineteenth century Ruskin could

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[22] Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*, selected and ed. I. A. Richter, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 200.

[23] J. Ben-David, "The Scientific Role: The Conditions of Its Establishment in Europe," *Minerva*, 4, 1965, p. 29. Similar views are expressed also by G. de Santillana, "The Role of Art in the Scientific Renaissance," in *Critical Problems in the History of Science*, ed. M. Clagett, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1959; and J. S. Ackerman, "Science and the Visual Arts," in *Seventeenth-Century Science and the Arts*, ed. H. H. Rhys, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961.

[24] For an interesting example, see P. M. Gouk, "The Union of Art and Science in the Eighteenth Century: L. Spengler, Artist, Turner and Natural Scientist," *Annals Sci.*, 40, 1983.

[25] See J. Gage, "Newton and Painting," in *Common Denominators in Art and Science*, ed. M. Pollock, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1983.

still meaningfully advise painters to first learn to see nature as she is *from science* (characteristic of that time, the science referred to was geology).

17. From the viewpoint of our topic, however, the question of the divorce of the natural sciences from the *literary arts* is of greater importance. This problem goes beyond the effects of the development of natural science on literature, and the influence of the latter upon the reception of scientific theories,[26] and has been explicitly discussed in an interesting paper by W. Lepenies. His main conclusion: "up until the eighteenth century it is a senseless enterprise to divorce science and literature"[27] is, if taken literally, undoubtedly overstated. Certainly no contemporary reader would miss the point that the works of – let us say – Marivaux and Maupertuis belong to quite different cultural genres. He is, however, completely correct in emphasising that until the first half of the eighteenth century the appropriateness of applying definite aesthetic-rhetorical requirements and criteria to writings in natural philosophy and history was taken as self-evident. To my knowledge, it is a Mémoire presented to the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1740 by De La Nauze which first explicitly raised the problem about the relationship between science and the *belles-lettres* (to protest against attempts at their separation).[28] Only in the second half of the century were voices raised with growing frequency (for example, in the discussions of, and disputes about, Buffon's work) stressing the potential conflict between the demands of scientific objectivity and exactness, on the one hand, and those of stylistic "beauty," on the other. However, as long as *both* literature and science are primarily conceived as forces of intellectual and moral cultivation, that is, are comprehended in their relation to the individual, and not as objectivations, no strict distinction is made between the two. It is therefore not accidental that a clear distinction between the sciences and the arts is first theoretically

[26] As discussed in respect to Newtonianism and English poetry by M. H. Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1946; and D. Bush, *Science and English Poetry*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1950.

[27] W. Lepenies, "Der Wissenschaftler als Autor," *Akzente*, 25, 1979, p. 137.

[28] See U. Ricken, "Le champ lexical 'science-litérature' en Français et en Allemand," *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 10, 1978, p. 39.

drawn by Kant.[29] The actual process in which the natural sciences shed their literate-rhetorical character (and the intertwined personal-narrator role of the author) proceeded at a different pace in different national-cultural environments – in France, for instance, it certainly took longer than it did in Germany. By the end of the nineteenth century the scientist's depersonalised authorial role is, however, so well established and self-evident that Flaubert can characterise his own artistic program which aims at the impersonality of narration as that of the "scientisation" of literature.[30]

18. It is important to underline that the literate-rhetorical character of the early forms of "natural knowledge" did not simply mean the presence and effectivity of some *external* (and, in our understanding, foreign) requirements merely concerning the character of the "exposition" in scientific literature. The pleasing and engaging character of writings in natural philosophy and natural history (as a better or worse realised cultural norm) has been intimately connected with their cognitive structure, cultural function and ways of social institutionalisation. Firstly, there is – as it has been pointed out by

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[29] "There is no science of the beautiful, but only a critique. Nor, again, is there an elegant science (*schöne Wissenschaft*), but only a fine art (*schöne Kunst*). For a science of the beautiful would have to determine scientifically, that is, by means of proofs, whether a thing was to be considered beautiful or not, and the judgement upon beauty, consequently, would, if belonging to science, fail to be a judgement of taste. As for a beautiful science – a science which, as such, is to be beautiful, is a nonentity. For if, treating it as a science, we were to ask for reasons and proofs, we would be put off with elegant phrases (*bons mots*):" Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §44, trans. J. C. Meredith.

[30] This development did not take place, even in its semantic aspect, without resistance. So Ruskin in 1874 still wrote: "It has become the permitted fashion among modern mathematicians, chemists, and apothecaries to call themselves 'scientific men,' as opposed to theologians, poets, and artists. They know their sphere to be a separate one: but their ridiculous notion of its being a peculiarly scientific one ought not to be allowed in our Universities. There is a science of Morals, a science of History, a science of Grammar, a science of Music, and a science of Painting; and all these are quite beyond comparison higher fields for human intellect, and require accuracies of intenser observation, than either chemistry, electricity, or geology:" *Ariadne Florentine*, quoted by S. Ross, "Scientist: The Story of a Word," *Annals Sci.*, 18, 1962, p. 70.

Bachelard[31] – a strong interconnection between the conversational-rhetorical style of the works in early natural scientific literature and the concentration of "experimental natural philosophy" upon the demonstration and explanation of the *dramatic* and *marvellous* powers of nature, with the associated focusing of experimental activity upon the publicly displayable and spectacular. This had important cognitive consequences. The variety of such qualitative experiments, usually performed with non-standardised instruments and apparatuses on non-standardised materials and reported with a belletristic *ductus*, lacked consensually acceptable criteria of replicability:[32] in general such experiments could *stimulate* theory construction, but were unable to serve as *systematic control* (falsifactory) instances between competing theories. On the other hand, this concentration on the direct manifestation of hidden and marvellous natural powers was connected with a definite ontological conception of nature in general (understanding of nature in terms of pervasive, hidden and qualitatively different forces either immanent to matter or impressed upon it by God, and so on), and, simultaneously, with a definite understanding of the cultural role of science as a morally (and often also religiously)

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[31] G. Bachelard, *La formation de l'esprit scientifique*, Paris, Vrin, 1938, ch. 2; see also S. Schaffer, "Natural Philosophy and Public Spectacle in the Eighteenth Century," *Hist. Sci.*, 21, 1983; S. Schaffer, "Natural Philosophy," in *The Ferment of Knowledge*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and R. Porter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 72–86.

[32] The *norm* of replicability – as it is clearly reflected, for instance, in the principles of Royal Society in the formulation of Sprat – was already well recognised. Under the indicated conditions, however, failure to reproduce some reported experimental result could always be simply interpreted as the lack of "art" on the side of the second experimenter. (And this was not irrational. All the four scientists, to whom Kleist originally communicated his discovery of the Leyden jar, were unable to repeat his experiment.) On the other hand, the original experiment could be discarded with an equal ease, if not by questioning the probity of the experimenter (and implying the suggestibility of his audience), then through the indication of some quite ad hoc, vaguely stated and uncontrollable qualitative factors (as "complicating causes") invalidating its results. It is characteristic in general that during this period the problem of replicability was articulated as a question about the adequate "policing" of science and the struggle against charlatanism, that is, it was conceived in terms of control over individual morality.

uplifting and edifying force. That again involved a particular image of the potential audience for science which, in its turn, was not independent from the prevailing forms of its actual institutionalisation, in particular from the way social support for scientific activities has been solicited and secured. So the emergence of the depersonalised authorial role of the scientist was part and parcel of that transformation in which – mostly during the nineteenth century – the whole character of natural science as an institutionalised form of cultural practice has been radically changed.

C. The Intended Reader

19. As the above considerations already indicate the authorial role "inscribed" in the texts of the natural sciences is not independent from the *reader/addressee prescribed and implied* by these texts as their adequate (that is, able to understand, judge, discuss, criticise, and so on) recipient. As is the case with all *sensu stricto* cultural activities, a normatively defined "adequate audience" represents (at each historical moment) a constitutive element of the literary practice of science, the objectivations of which have a cultural significance only if they are comprehended, interpreted/used in some, well-defined way(s). It is only in the process of an "adequate" reception that the historically actual meaning and cultural significance of any text – including scientific ones – is established and consummated.[33] A culturally posited "public of

[33] This becomes clear if one considers, for example, the requirement of *novelty* of results as a necessary precondition for any work to be accepted as contribution to science. "Scientific novelty," however, cannot be characterised in terms of that individual process of production (of its "originality" or "creativity") which results in the work in question. The novelty of this latter is constituted by its relation to the contemporary literature of its subject; a work of science may be the outcome of highly original research and nevertheless "duplicate" some result which has just been published by someone else, and in such a case it will not be recognised as a relevant contribution to science at all. Since usually there are no unambiguous criteria of "sameness" in science (hence such concepts as that of "semi-duplication," often to be met in highly competitive fields), it is only in the *process of reception* that novelty (as a seemingly inherent feature of the work) becomes, often through negotiations and disputes, established at all. Understandably, with the change of the literature, some works may appear in

science" therefore belongs not simply to its social context "influencing," as it were externally, the direction of natural scientific inquiry, but constitutes an imminent characteristic of it as objectifying activity.

The so-conceived "intended" (adequate/competent) reader of contemporary scientific literature is – and solely – the *expert professional*, working in the same *research area* to which the work in question pertains. True, this research area – and thereby also the circle of recognised addressees – is only defined in a diffuse way. Basically it is pre-given to the author by the existing institutional structure of scientific specialisation (with its finer subdivisions into recognised areas of specific concern and competence) However, it can be partially projectively redefined by the paper itself. In principle, however, the audience of natural scientific discourse is restricted to those who can equally participate in its continuation. This *social closure* of the discourse upon itself: the *specialisation and professionalisation of its intended/implied public* – as interconnected, but analytically quite distinct phenomena from both the specialisation and the professionalisation of the scientists as writers/"producers" – constitute again a specific feature of contemporary natural science as a cultural genre.

20. One can immediately object to this formulation by pointing to the fact that "professionalisation of the audience" in the above sense is not specific to the natural sciences alone; under contemporary conditions it characterises all forms and types of *scholarly* endeavours. Though this remark, especially in an English-speaking cultural milieu, sounds almost self-evident, and although it undoubtedly legitimately indicates an observable historical *tendency*, it cannot be accepted as correct.

It is certainly the case that the distinction between works of scholarship and popularisation (with their quite distinct evaluative criteria) is today equally present in the natural and in the "soft," social sciences, and even in the broadly conceived humanities. Further, it must be conceded that perhaps ninety-nine percent of the scholarly works recently published, let us say, in

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retrospect as containing unsuspected, at first not appreciated "novelties." On this latter point, see for example, G. Holton, "Can Science Be Measured?" in *Toward a Metric of Science*, ed. Y. Elkana et al., New York, Wiley, 1978, pp. 43–44.

philosophy, are intended for, and are actually read by, "professionals" (including students as aspiring professionals). It is, however, the remaining one percent which is of interest. Because this consists not only of works of indubitable "scholarly" significance, but is composed, as a rule, of such writings that the "profession" itself regards as the most important contributions to the present state of learning. One needs only to compare international publication and circulation data concerning (in respect of a longer time-span), for example, the scholarly writings of Einstein and Dirac on the one hand, and Wittgenstein, Heidegger or Quine on the other, and the difference becomes immediately clear. At the same time this phenomenon is not restricted to philosophy alone. The same result will emerge if one replaces the above-mentioned philosophers with anthropologists like Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss or Geertz, or with sociologists like Durkheim, Weber, and even Merton or Lazarsfeld.

Even today the most important and influential scholarly works in humanities and social sciences regularly find an audience wider than the one comprised of the "professional experts" in the field. This public is constituted partly by scholars in *other* disciplines and specialities, partly by the elusive "cultivated reader" – and it seems to be growing rather than diminishing. Members of this audience certainly are not regarded as competent to partake on an equal basis in discussions among professionals about the works concerned, but their attitudes, evaluations and opinions do in various ways influence these discussions. They are regarded as legitimate recipients of the works in question, only of an "inferior" type (see §24). There is no similar phenomenon for the literature of developed natural scientific disciplines.

21. The simplest and most usual explanation of this difference refers to the varying degrees of difficulty, or "unintelligibility," the two kinds of texts represent for the non-specialist reader. Natural sciences – it is often argued[34] –

[34] In the relatively recent literature such argumentation occurs – with widely differing evaluative accents – in C. J. Lammers, "Mono- and Poly-Paradigmatic Developments in Natural and Social Sciences," in *Social Process of Scientific Development*, ed. R. Whitley, London, Routledge, 1974; K. D. Knorr, "The Nature of Scientific Consensus and the Case of Social Sciences," in *Determinants and Controls of Scientific Development*, ed. K. D. Knorr et al., Dordrecht, Reidel, 1975, pp. 232–235; P. Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the

operate with a mode of discourse autonomous, or at least far removed and differentiated, from everyday language, just as their problems also have little to do with everyday concerns. On the other hand, humanities and social sciences, even if they do employ some specific terminology or vocabulary, are deeply dependent upon natural language and everyday interests. This may be regarded as a sign of their theoretical underdevelopment or just as a constitutive trait connected with the specific character of their cognitive interests; in any case it is seen as sufficient explanation for their easier accessibility to the layperson or the non-specialist.

While this posited difference regarding everyday language may well be, in some general way, true, I doubt that it adequately explains the different constitution of audiences for the cultural genres in question. Firstly, it is not clear at all that such texts like the *Tractatus* or *Sein und Zeit* (texts undoubtedly read today by many non- philosophers, too) are in any meaningful sense more easily accessible to an uneducated layman than writings in theoretical physics or biology. It would seem that even a very elemental understanding of *both* types of texts demands a considerable educational (or self-educational) effort; that there is some significant difference in its intensity or prolongation in the two relevant cases, would need to be proven (and it seems doubtful). Secondly, even if this was the case, such considerations cannot explain why the adequate reader in the natural sciences is posited as the specialist expert in the given *area of research*, since the difficulties in question cannot be present – or at least cannot constitute a serious obstacle – for scientists within the same discipline or specialty, working, however, in unrelated research areas.

22. The answer to this last question does have something to do with the relation between everyday language and the discourse of the natural sciences, but in quite another sense than the one suggested above. Natural scientific activities involve (in our culture) not only argumentative-discursive, but also experimental-manipulative practices. Therefore new knowledge is fixed and accumulated in this field not merely in the form of textual objectivations, but also through *incorporation* into those laboratory activities which have the

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Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason," *Social Science Information*, 14, 1975, pp. 34–36; and so on.

character of craft skills and can only be learned through example and controlled performances in the relevant situations. More particularly, the very meaning of the sui generis "observational" terms of experimental natural science is undivorceably interconnected with this particular (usually instrumental) action-context and action-orientation. Regarding this embeddedness of some of its basic concepts in the pragmatic contexts of manipulative activities, the discourse of natural science is rather *similar* to everyday discourse (with the important *proviso* that laboratory actions, in opposition to everyday activities, are as a rule constructed as socially and morally neutral, as *eo ipso* technical activities). While the natural sciences certainly have no autonomous (from everyday talk) "language" of their own, their discourse does possess – in view of the intimate-intrinsic interconnection between practical situation, manipulative action and linguistic-conceptual articulation – the character of a sui generis (even if "derivative") *language game*, in counterdistinction to the humanities and social sciences which essentially represent *metadiscourses* divorced from *direct* connection with practical-manipulative activities.

As a result an adequate understanding of natural scientific texts cannot be learned/acquired in an intercourse with these *texts alone*. To adequately comprehend a research report – to understand what the experimenter has done and why, whether therefore the experiment is at all, in principle, reliable, that is, whether it can have any claim to be scientifically relevant – presupposes an ability to translate the abstractly, formulaically indicated "methods" into concrete actions envisaged in the described laboratory situation, so that their "fitness" to the problem concerned, and so on, could be judged. Understanding, therefore, presupposes some degree of shared craft skills and practical know-how: a *"tacit" knowledge* which is in fact present only among the members of a restricted circle of specialists working in the same (or closely related) research area(s).[35]

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[35] See M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, New York, Harper, 1964, pp. 49–63; P. A. Healan, "Hermeneutics of Experimental Science in the Context of the Life-World," *Philosophia Mathematica*, 9, 1972; H. M. Collins, "The TEA Set: Tacit Knowledge and Scientific Networks," *Science Studies*, 4, 1974; N. Gilbert and M. Mulkay, "Contexts of Scientific Discourse: Social Accounting in Experimental Papers," in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, ed. Knorr et al., pp. 282–293.

23. There are, therefore, some good reasons to regard contemporary natural scientific texts (or at least some important class of them) as ones with an intelligibility inherently limited to the small circle of professional experts. All arguments, however, which would explain the restriction of the adequate audience with similar considerations of *factual* nature, are insufficient. The cultural construction of the relevant reading public definitely figures in the natural sciences as a *normative injunction*, and cannot, therefore, be represented as the mere consequence of some inescapable facts. The boundary limiting and enclosing natural scientific discourse is not pre-given, but actively *maintained*.[36] The layperson and the non-specialist are posited in the natural sciences as ones whose interpretation of, and opinion about, the works of science *ought* not intrude into the relevant discussions at all. Their views are culturally fixed as being in principle irrational, or at least irrelevant. This is directly reflected in that (institutionally strongly enforced) norm which forbids the researcher to appeal in any way to an external public before their results have been accepted and "certified" by the competent professional community concerned. Proper scientific publication is in this way construed as the opposite to "seeking publicity." Deviance from this norm involves, as a rule, strong sanctions; it is often seen as legitimating a violent professional reaction which itself may seriously impinge on the usual standards of fairness and objectivity.[37] There is no such institutionalised norm in force in other areas of learning.

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[36] For the same reason, Kuhn's account for the social closure of the discourse in the natural sciences, in terms of the socio-psychological characteristics of the scientific community (its educational homogeneity, relatively high degree of social isolation, etc.), also seems unsatisfactory to me.

[37] See B. Barnes, "On the Reception of Scientific Beliefs," in *Sociology of Science*, ed. B. Barnes, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, pp. 283–287; P. Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason," *Social Science Information*, 14, 1975, pp. 23, 42; R. Whitley, "Changes in the Social and Intellectual Organisation of Sciences," in *The Social Production of Scientific Knowledge*, ed. F. Mendelsohn et al., Dordrecht, Reidel, 1977, pp. 146–148; R. G. A. Dolby, "On the Anatomy of Pure Science," in *Scientific Establishments and Hierarchies*, ed. N. Elias et al., Dordrecht, Reidel, 1982.

24. Thus professionalisation of the audience for natural science is a *normative* cultural construct, and not a simple fact. This can be demonstrated also from the other way round. It must be assumed that works of this cultural genre are even today regularly read by some non-specialist outsiders and that *in fact* this reading does influence the on-going practice of the relevant disciplines. Firstly, it would seem that some scientific publications do have an interest to scientists *outside* the given speciality, or even discipline, since there is no field of research that does not employ techniques, results and theories originating in unrelated areas. Secondly, some scientific writings (projects, reports, and so on) should be read and evaluated by those institution members who decide upon the support of various research projects, upon the selection of scientific personnel, and the distribution of economic and social resources necessary for the maintenance of scientific activities – and they are mostly not fellow-specialists.

Contemporary natural scientific practice does therefore presuppose the existence of some readers who are not "expert-professionals" in the indicated sense. But its hermeneutical constitution is characterised just by the fact that these – potential or actual – readers are not posited as *sensu stricto recipients* of the concerned texts (even with a reduced competence), but are treated as *clients-users* of the results fixed in, or the information provided by, them. They are recognised as competent to judge the instrumental significance of some result from an "external" viewpoint, but not the intrinsic value and meaning; they should accept the latter as authoritatively established by the relevant research community.

Perhaps the following, no doubt anecdotal, consideration may to some degree illuminate how this dichotomy of the adequate recipient versus client-user differs from the presupposition of a *multiplicity of recipient-types* which is – despite all tendencies of professionalisation – still culturally accepted in the humanities.[38] Both mathematicians and philosophers (but I could have

[38] This multiplicity of the implied recipient-types is, of course, even more pronounced and more clearly recognised in the arts, where it is a commonplace to distinguish between the receptive position and attitude of the fellow-artist, the critic, the connoisseur and the "naive" reader (or viewer), with important ideological battles going on concerning their relative significance.

chosen other examples) are inclined to complain, at least among themselves, about the inability of physicists or sociologists, respectively, to get any mathematical or philosophical, respectively, idea straight. Mathematicians, however, will not be apt to criticise publicly the physicist's "misunderstanding" of mathematics (as clearly distinct from making technical errors in the employed mathematical procedures), the latter are just not supposed to get it right. Philosophers, however, do criticise sociologists for such interpretative sins; as an example I can refer to some vitriolic comments in the recent philosophical literature directed at a number of sociologists of science for their alleged misrepresentation of the views of Wittgenstein and Kuhn.[39] At the same time philosophers sometimes make direct use of ideas and viewpoints developed by sociologists in the context of such "philosophical excursions." They do recognise the latter as recipients and interpreters of philosophical thought and texts, even if of a suspect and certainly inferior type.

The multiplicity of recipient-types recognised in humanities provides them even today with a *multifunctional* cultural role. The strict, normatively posited "professionalisation" of the intended, implied reader of the natural scientific literature is synonymous with its cultural *monofunctionality* in view of which all the "nonprofessional" use of its results and resources is reduced to the case of an external, *technico-instrumental application*.

25. In view of the fact that the demarcation of the research area, to which some scientific publication "belongs," is – as a rule – fluid and diffuse, the distinction between the adequate reader and the mere user of natural scientific texts also has a similar character. In great many cases it is not pre-given at all, but becomes established in a complex process beginning with the definition of the genuine problematic of the research and ending with conferring the label of being competent/incompetent, relevant/irrelevant upon the various standpoints and criticisms. In this process usually *both* argumentation and social negotiations play role.[40] The line between considerations that are

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[39] See for instance the editorial introduction to G. Gutting, ed., *Paradigms and Revolutions*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980, pp. 9–11.

[40] See M. Callon, "Struggles and Negotiations to Define What Is Problematic and What Is Not," in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, ed. Knorr et al.; Knorr-Cetina,

"internal" and "external" with respect to some scientific investigation is established during a social interaction in which not only scientists, but also some of their "clients" may in fact participate. It belongs, however; to the characteristics of contemporary natural science as an institutionalised cultural practice that regarding its objectivations and "results," such a line – somewhere and somehow – *ought to be drawn*.

26. The most important hermeneutical consequence of this professionalisation of the audience consists, however, in the fact that – in conjunction with the earlier characterised depersonalisation of the authorial role – it normatively posits the *complete interchangeability* of the author and the recipient. The (inscribed) author appears as only one member of that research community which is the adequate addressee of their paper and simultaneously the bearer of that "we," in the name of whom the text is usually formulated. Each participant in this "community" has in principle equal competence and right not only to judge the veracity of what is reported, but also the *meaning* (correct interpretation) of what is so *described*.

While this equalisation of the author's and implied reader's interpretative authority is certainly a counterfactual postulate embedded in textual characteristics, it is – in contemporary natural sciences – *not completely* fictive. The now usual circulation of drafts and preprints, and the function of the "reviewers," can involve a significant part of a paper's intended audience in its formulation process since their reactions, comments and criticisms may seriously influence its final "public" form.[41] In this sense modern natural sciences come closer than any other type of cultural practice to the direct realisation of the Romantic hermeneutical postulate concerning the co-creative role of the recipient, certainly with rather unromantic consequences.

27. The significance of this postulate of interchangeability of the authorial and reader roles comes sharply into focus when seen through the prism of some

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The Manufacture of Knowledge, ch. 4; H. M. Collins, "Son of Seven Sexes: The Social Destruction of a Physical Phenomenon," *Social Studies of Science*, 11, 1981.

[41] This point is made by Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge*, pp. 104–106, 125–126.

modern theories of fictionality. Rainer Warning[42] especially has underlined the strong connection between the cultural recognition of the "fictitious" character of literary works of art, on the one hand, and the appearance in the relevant texts of an authorial (or narratorial) voice whose identity with the real person of their creator is at least problematic, on the other hand. This "dedoublement" leads to a split between the "internal" communicative situation articulated *within* the text and the "external" situation of its *actual reception*, and so it creates a pragmatic *double-bind* for the reader. As a result, texts of such type, on the one hand, force, or at least stimulate, the reader to take various positions in relation to their "message" in a play of imagination; on the other hand, they themselves thereby acquire the character of *res ficta sive fabula*, of a mere "tale." Something told by someone whose identity, vantage point, and so on, *in principle* cannot be established in an unambiguous way and which therefore *eo ipso* cannot (and *should* not) be verified.

If fictional texts in this way systematically exclude the interchangeability of the dialogic roles which is an overall pragmatic trait of everyday communicative exchanges, texts of the natural sciences fix this interchangeability as a feature of their *very textual constitution*.[43] What they tell is posited as something which could (and, under the observance of elementary rules of veracity, also should) be told by everyone who possesses the necessary (and in principle universally accessible) competences. A claim to *strict intersubjectivity* and *objectivity* pertains to the way the cultural objectivations of natural sciences are constituted in their contemporary practice.

28. In the case of "research reports" this claim of strict intersubjectivity takes on the form of the well-known postulate of replicability of the

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[42] Warning, "Der inszenierte Diskurs," in *Funktionen des Fiktiven*, ed. Henrich and Iser, pp. 191–198. See also F. K. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens*, 2nd edn, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck, 1982, esp. chs 4–5.

[43] "… the author does not claim a specific vantage point, or viewpoint as compared to his audience … The audience knows as much and as little as the author. They are on equal plane … The mode of writing reduces distance and avoids claims of authority or superior judgement on the part of the author:" L. J. Gusfield, "The Literary Rhetorics of Science," *American Sociological Review*, 41, 1976, p. 21.

experimental results. This postulate has a paradoxical character.[44] Those features of the scientific texts which *allow* such a claim to be made also *exclude* its fulfilment in any "literal" or ordinary sense. On the one hand, the extremely stylised and typified character of the description of the procedures used as "methods" renders the information contained in the paper insufficiently specific for any veritable replication. On the other hand, only such a description makes the claim to replicability possible at all. This is not only so in the sense that in all their individual details no experimental conditions and actions were practically reproducible (or even describable). More importantly, the text's mere *focusing* on the particular-local, non-recurrent aspects of the laboratory events would immediately situate its author in the position of a privileged, exceptionally placed observer whose role in principle cannot be taken up by just "anyone." Precisely here lies the difference between a "scientific report" of an experiment and a belletristic or journalistic "reportage" about the goings and doings in a laboratory.

From this viewpoint the usual "Methods" section of a research paper should be seen as a projective claim which specifies those formulaically indicated conditions under which all competent persons (with the necessary "tacit" knowledge and experimental knowhow) should reach results, at the given level of knowledge counting as essentially identical with the ones described. When there is a disagreement about the results of an experiment (mostly in the form of a dispute of what should be considered as its competent replication), then it is the above claim's justified nature which is usually questioned. In the cultural practice of the contemporary natural sciences such disputes are, *as a rule*, consensually solved in a relatively short time, even though *in principle* there never can be completely conclusive argumentative grounds for such a solution (which, of course, does not imply that this latter is by necessity an irrational or cognitively unmotivated one). In this resolution of dissension *both* "internal" *arguments* (for instance, as to the legitimacy of the various

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[44] See H. M. Collins, "The Seven Sexes: A Study in the Sociology of a Phenomenon, or the Replication of Experiments in Physics," *Sociology*, 9, 1975; Collins, "Son of Seven Sexes …," *Social Studies of Science*, 11, 1981; B. Harvey, "The Effects of Social Context on the Process of Scientific Investigation," in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, ed. Knorr et al.; A. Pickering, "The Hunting of the Quark," *Isis*, 72, 1981.

ceteris paribus clauses silently assumed in the competing reports, and so on) and "negotiated," socially "influenced" *decisions* (for instance, concerning the relative advantages/disadvantages of continuing a series of experiments, and so on) usually play their interwoven parts. When the research community is unable to re-establish the consensus in the above way (which of course does happen), this fact often results not in the continuation of the controversy, but in its *neutralisation* through a split of the original research area into two. (About "specialisation" as a way to eliminate dissension in the natural sciences, see §37.)

29. The intended audience's specialisation and professionalisation certainly cannot be regarded as a characteristics of the institutionalised forms of knowledge of nature *before* the nineteenth century. In this respect one ought to summarily mention the following, generally well-known, historical facts:

(a) The period usually considered to be that of the emergence of natural scientific discourse was characterised by frequent conflicts between the corporatively organised, traditional, academic scholarship and the representatives of the new forms of natural knowledge. In these struggles the latter regularly appealed for support to a larger cultivated public. Their newly created institutions (Academies and so on) also united the producers of scientific knowledge and their dilettante patrons in a single institution and largely on an equal basis.

(b) Seventeenth- to eighteenth-century "natural philosophy" still had a markedly multifunctional character (see §24)[45] and was in general successfully communicated to socially and culturally divergent groups of addressees. Even those works which represented the most formidable difficulties of understanding for

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[45] The question about the multifunctionality of eighteenth-century scientific literature is directly addressed by C. Lawrence, "The Nervous System and Society in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, ed. B. Barnes and S. Shapin, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1979. See also the general discussion of this problem by S. Shapin, "History of Science and its Sociological Reconstruction," *Hist. Sci.*, 20, 1982, pp. 187–194, and the writings referred to by him – though Shapin, it seems to me, tends to conflate two distinct questions: the one about the variegated *roles* scientific writings have fulfilled (in a non-accidental way) in different socio-cultural settings and for different groups of cultural addressees, and that concerning the diversity of *motives and interests* determining the theory-choice of the scientist.

the cultivated reader of the time, like Newton's *Principia*, quickly became not only objects of widely read "popularisations," but also exercised a deep influence upon, and were thoroughly discussed within, other, already culturally (in a fluid way) separated forms of discourse: theological, properly philosophical and even literary ones. In their turn, these discussions occurring in "alien" genres seriously influenced the more narrowly scientific impact of the works concerned, and were usually regarded as having a direct bearing upon the question of their truth.[46]

(c) The question of the proper audience for science and the "popular" versus "expert" character of scientific literature turned in the second half of the eighteenth century into the subject-matter of explicit cultural struggles which acquired a directly political character during the French Revolution.[47] It is only with the deep transformation of the whole organisational framework of natural scientific activities and of the ways social support and patronage is ensured for them that the audience's specialisation and professionalisation became established during the nineteenth century (in different disciplines with differing pace) both as a norm and as a fact, broadly speaking simultaneously with the professionalisation of the scientist-author's role itself. It is in this process that the *république des savants* of the eighteenth century, still loosely uniting scientists, philosophers, publicists and cultivated amateurs, has been transformed into a multitude of separated *research communities* comprising the professional specialists in the given area and now posited as the sole public for the relevant scientific objectivations.[48]

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[46] About the direct influence of theological disputes and discourses upon the formulation and development of early corpuscular theories and Newtonianism, see J. R. Jacob and M. C. Jacob, "Seventeenth-Century Science and Religion: The State of the Argument," *Hist. Sci.*, 14, 1976; J. B. McGuire and J. G. McEvoy, "God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent," *Historical Studies in Physical Science*, 6, 1975; and so on.

[47] See C. C. Gillispie, "The Encyclopédie and Jacobin Philosophy of Science," in *Critical Problems in the History of Science*, ed. M. Clagett, Madison, Wisconsin University Press, 1959; E. Mendelsohn, "The Emergence of Science as a Profession in Nineteenth-Century Europe," in *The Management of Scientists*, ed. K. Hill, Boston, Beacon, 1964, pp. 7–13.

[48] For an early, succinct characterisation of this whole process see Mendelsohn, "The Emergence of Science as a Profession." This paper, however, does not make a clear distinction neither between specialisation and professionalisation, nor between these

30. This historical process in which the monofunctional character of the contemporary natural sciences has first been formed, at the same time meant a progressively *narrowing of their cultural significance*.[49] A discussion of this problem would first require an overview of the main stages through which the natural sciences divorced themselves from theology and philosophy – and this cannot be undertaken here. So I must restrict myself to some broad hints on this account.

Early modern systems of scientific natural knowledge still had a direct claim to an onto-theological – and through it also moral and political – significance. One may recall the formulation of Fontenelle who certainly was no religious enthusiast:

> Astronomy and anatomy are primarily those two sciences which most apprehensibly manifest two great characteristics of the Creator; the first His immensity through the distances, dimension and number of celestial bodies;

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processes insofar as they concern the practitioners of science and insofar as they occur in relation to its audience. In respect of the first distinction, see R. Porter, "Gentlemen and Geology: The Emergence of a Scientific Career," *The Historical Journal*, 21, 1978, and the literature referred to by him. The complex process in which the very audience of science became restricted to the professional specialist is partially discussed (in its wider socio-cultural setting) in Shapin and Thackray, "Prosopography as a Research Tool in the History of Science," pp. 4–13. About the connection between these processes of institutional and cultural change with *cognitive* transformations see the comments in discussion by Diemer and Böhme in A. Diemer, ed., *Konzeption und Begriff der Forschung in den Wissenschaften des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Meisenheim, Hain, 1978, pp. 228–31.

[49] In this consists, of course, that *paradox* of the universalisation of scientific rationality which constituted one of the central ideas of Max Weber's historical sociology of modernity (and which should be distinguished from his more particular assumptions concerning the role of radical Protestantism in this process). Recent and convincing reformulations of this fundamental Weberian insight are presented by F. H. Tenbruck, "Fortschritt der Wissenschaft als Trivialisierungsprozess," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Sociologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 18, 1975; and M. Riedel, "Die Universalität der europaischen Wissenschaft als begriffs- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliches Problem, *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, 10, 1979.

> the second His infinite intelligence, through the mechanism of the animals. True physics advances itself till it becomes a sort of theology.[50]

By discovering the "secret order" of nature, science was seen, and culturally posited, as providing a rational access to the divine plan of creation, as being a way of ascertaining God's intentions with the world at large and with humanity. In particular, amidst the deep religious crisis and political uncertainties of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the various readings of the "Book of Nature" played definite justifying and legitimating roles regarding the various competing interpretations of the "Book of God," of the Christian tradition which was in turn perceived as the "cement of society." [51]

From the mid-eighteenth century on (in different countries at different times, for example in France definitely earlier than in England) the natural sciences gradually lose this function of deciphering truly meta-physical messages. But they themselves now take up the role of providing the key element in the newly created complex and concept of *culture* which aspires to replace religion by offering humankind a completely inner-wordly and immanent orientation in life. Natural sciences now represent not only the most eloquent demonstration of what humans can achieve by their own efforts when they act rationally, but also, through what is actually achieved *in* them – through the discovery of the universe's eternal laws (or later, the cosmic process of evolution) – they promise to deliver those basic insights upon which a rational and just moral and social order may be built.[52] It is primarily in

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[50] B. L. de Fontenelle, "Préface sur l'utilité des mathématiques et de la physique," in *Oeuvres*, Paris, Bastien, vol. 6, 1790, p. 70.

[51] For short overviews of the relevant contemporary literature see Jacob and Jacob, "Seventeenth-Century Science and Religion"; P. M. Heimann, "Science and the English Enlightenment," *Hist. Sci.*, 16, 1978; S. Shapin, "History of Science and its Sociological Reconstruction," *Hist. Sci.*, 20, 1982, pp. 180–184,

[52] This point of view is graphically formulated in Huxley's address *On the Advisability of Improving Natural Knowledge* (1866): "I say that natural knowledge, seeking to satisfy natural wants, has found the ideas which can alone still spiritual cravings. I say that natural knowledge, in desiring to ascertain the laws of comfort, has been driven to discover those of conduct, to lay the foundations of a new morality:" quoted Tenbruck, "Fortschritt der Wissenschaft als Trivialisierungsprozess,"

this interpretation that natural scientific education and self-cultivation also serves as an important avenue of social-cultural advancement for the new middle-class strata of society. The battle-cry of early, nineteenth-century positivism, that of the "natural scientific *world-view*," expressed these tendencies fully – and in its concrete content already foreshadowed their demise.

When the cultural closure of natural scientific discourse upon itself becomes a fact impossible not to recognise, when the meaning of its results and theories is culturally posited as completely intrinsic to this discourse alone and with only a pragmatical-technical *use* outside this proper sphere, then the divorce of natural scientific inquiry from general culture and cultivation is also inevitable. Natural science, having acquired the fundamental social function of opening up new and in principle unlimited possibilities for meaningful *technical* action upon, and intervention into the environment, can no longer confer some fixed and inherent meaning upon natural phenomena. It can retain the role of a *methodological* ideal in respect of some other forms of cultural endeavour, but what is achieved through these methods in their proper field of application is now posited as having no significance whatsoever for orienting people's conduct in the world they live in, or their understanding of this lived world itself. Tenbruck aptly formulated it: the view of nature provided by the sciences is no more a world-view.[53] As to the naively simple question: why are the literary objectivations of the natural sciences not read today by a wider public beyond the narrow circle of professional experts? – the answer cannot stop at a reference to the grave difficulties which understanding such texts poses to the non-specialist. Even the argument which indicates that they are only normatively addressed to a specialised readership will not be sufficient. One also should add: because today they are culturally defined as of no interest or consequence for a non-specialist reader. Other than idle curiosity there is no reason why such a reader *should* today read the texts of natural sciences.

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p. 30. See further the discussion of this problem in Shapin and Thackray, "Prosopography as a Research Tool in the History of Science," pp. 5–11.

[53] Tenbruck, "Fortschritt der Wissenschaft als Trivialisierungsprozess," p. 24.

D. The Work in the Context of its Tradition

31. Like all texts of cultural significance, writings in contemporary natural sciences possess an intersubjectively understandable and culturally relevant (in this case: scientific) meaning due to, and through their relation to some fund of past texts constituting their "literary tradition." *Intertextuality* of meaning is a constitutive characteristic of all cultural objectivations (at least of textual kind). In our culture, that is, under conditions of Western modernity to which the natural sciences as a broadly conceived cultural genre themselves belong, it stands under the fundamental postulate determining the character of this culture: the *postulate of innovation*. That is, as opposed to some other cultures in which works primarily fulfilling the function of preservation, collation or elaboration of a "tradition" (sacred or profane) have been recognised as culturally significant and valuable, in our culture a work must be *novel* within the relevant tradition, to be accepted as a sui generis cultural objectivation at all.

The intertextual character of any writing in the natural sciences is ensured by the fact that a work will not be regarded as *scientifically* relevant unless it contains "new results" of some sort – *in comparison* with a "literature," in whose context it will be placed by those who decide its cultural acceptance or rejection.

32. The literary tradition of natural sciences is characterised, as its most evident feature, with its shallowness ("skin-depth") in time.[54] As a rule, there is a significant difference between the time-span of the entire history of a natural scientific discipline, on the one hand, and the historical expansion of its *active tradition*, on the other (in the meaning of past works directly and consciously utilised by scientists and therefore usually also referred to in their writings),[55] –

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[54] This is pointed out by almost all authors explicitly addressing themselves to the characterisation of natural scientific tradition See esp. T. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977, pp. 228–229; E. Shils, *Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. 109–113; and H. G. Dosch, "Geschichtsbewusstsein in der Naturwissenschaft," in *Geschichtsbewusstsein and Rationalität*, ed. E. Rudolph and B. Stove, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1982, pp. 51–52.

[55] Of course, the traditions *embodied* in scientific terminology and, to a lesser degree, in scientific instruments and procedures, are usually of a longer duration than the literary traditions *actively utilised* by the scientists.

and this gap is constantly growing. In this respect the cultural organisation of tradition-transmission and tradition-preservation in the contemporary natural sciences differs significantly not only from such human disciplines as philosophy, but also from a number of social sciences in which – at least in regard to fundamental works of *theoretical* nature – no such gap can be observed. (Not to speak of the arts, in which one can observe an enormous *expansion* of the aesthetically mobilisable and mobilised tradition, especially in the last hundred years.) References in, for example, physics do not usually extend beyond five decades from the date of publication of the citing article. A philosopher, on the other hand, may well quote or discuss Plato or Aristotle (and this in a paper or book of *non*-historical nature, dealing with some "contemporary" problem). The difference in question is well-reflected in such bibliometric indicators as the so-called "Price-index" (percentage of references made to the last five years of the literature). In physics it is about 60–70 percent; in sociology (actually, the American sociological literature of the 1960s) around 40 percent; while its average in respect of philosophical journals seems to oscillate between 15 and 30 percent.[56]

However, other bibliometric data[57] strongly indicate that it is impossible to explain this difference in terms of more or less rapid progress of knowledge (whatever this means) in the respective fields of scholarship. Diachronic studies of the so-called "citation behaviour" have failed to demonstrate significant variations in the *average rate of obsolescence* in the respective cases (for instance, between papers in physics and in sociology). As a commonsense observation, I would also add: while it seems to make little sense to speak about "progress"

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[56] J. D. de Solla Price, "Citation Measures of Hard Science, Soft Science, Technology and Nonscience," in *Communication among Scientists and Engineers*, ed. C. F. Nelson and D. K. Pollock, Lexington, Heath, 1970, pp. 10–21.

[57] R. N. Broadus, "The Literature of the Social Sciences," *International Social Science Journal*, 23, 1971; M. Oromaner, "The Career of Sociological Literature: A Diachronous Study," *Soc. Stud. Sci.*, 7, 1977. I am well aware that the methods through which these data were attained are the subject of a dispute in the relevant literature (see, e.g., D. Edge, "Quantitative Measures of Communication in Science: A Critical Review," *History of Science*, 17, 1979). Nevertheless, the data can be safely taken – so it seems to me – as rough indicators of general tendencies, and only these latter are of any consequence here.

in philosophy, the rate of *change* in its contemporary literature appears to be quite rapid – schools, tendencies, problematics, which dominate the academic field for a while, often disappear in a very short time, to be replaced by other ones. In any case there were certainly more (at least self-acclaimed) "turns" and "revolutions" in the last fifty years of the history of philosophy than during the entire history of physics.

The difference between physics and philosophy in the given respect is thus not to be reduced to the differing *average life span* of their contemporary scriptures – in both fields the overwhelming *majority* of literary objectivations ages quite rapidly. At least in part this difference ought to be explained by the distinct composition and structuralisation of the respective "active traditions" in the two fields. The actually mobilised literary tradition in physics (and also in other natural scientific disciplines) consists of works of two types: the relevant writings in the *recent* literature (meaning the last five to ten years) and the *seminal* papers in the field. This latter comprises those publications that have played a pioneering role in founding a new research area, theory, experimental technique, and so on, and that may remain frequently referred to during thirty to fifty years[58] – until the whole research frontier moves to other areas, or until they are replaced by radical reformulations in more contemporary terms.

In the philosopher's use of the works of the past, one similarly encounters the same two types. "Seminal" are the works of those "standard bearers" who programmatically formulated the ideas of an identifiable "trend" or "school," and again these are discussed with great frequency as long as the school's direct cultural significance and identity are preserved. (Thus I would call Bohr's 1913 article on atomic structure and some of the programmatic papers of Carnap or Neurath in *Erkenntnis* "seminal" in the same sense.)

Philosophy, however, knows a third category of tradition as well: the *classical*. *Classical* are those literary products of the (usually more remote) past to which

[58] An unusually large percentage of these references may actually be "perfunctory" or purely "ceremonial." But since I am concerned not with the issue of actual "influences," but with that of the cultural organisation of tradition in natural science, the point does not seem to be specifically relevant for the topic.

the *present* cultural practice ascribes an "atemporal" (or at least epochal) validity: an ability to shed light upon the questions of any age, even if it is realised that they were born out of a specific cultural context and directly addressed themselves to now outdated problematics. Accordingly these texts are re-read, referred to, discussed, argued with, and so on by philosophers *qua* philosophers (and not as historians of philosophical ideas), though the strictly taken "doctrines" (in the meaning of *Lehrmeinungen*) of their authors often are no longer considered plausible. Moreover, works will sometimes be retained as classical even though their most broadly conceived standpoint and approach is rejected today with near unanimity: they are regarded as "paradigmatically wrong." Not only philosophy possesses such a classical tradition. Many of the social sciences – in spite of their much shorter history – also seem to have their own classics. In theoretical sociology the writings of Marx, Weber or Durkheim (though in *some* respects considered to be quite outdated) will be treated as highly relevant to contemporary issues and controversies. Even in economics it makes good sense to qualify some present-day standpoints as neo-Ricardian, Marxist or Keynesian, and so on.

Since my whole point here is to indicate that *contemporary* natural sciences do *not* possess classical texts, a further elucidation of the notion of "classical" can perhaps be neglected here. It is, however, necessary to at least indicate that having (or not having) a classical tradition is the characteristic of some *contemporary* cultural practice, more particularly: of the way it actively interconnects itself with, and inserts itself into, the selected results of past activities; it should not be regarded as an inherent feature of the concerned tradition itself. In this respect it is certainly not insignificant that while being classical means being "atemporally" valid, the actual composition, the "canonic list" of the classics often radically changes in time.[59] Furthermore, a cultural genre

[59] In this context it is worthwhile to recall the following quote: "This also must be confessed, that the most durable, as well as justest fame, has been acquired by the easy philosophers; and that the abstract reasoners seem hitherto to have enjoyed only a momentary reputation from the caprice or ignorance of their age, but have not been able to support their own renown with more equitable posterity. … The fame of Cicero flourishes at present, but that of Aristotle is utterly decayed. La Bruyère passes the seas, and still maintains his reputation: But the glory of Malebranche is confined to his

in some epoch can be posited as one in which no classical works can meaningfully occur, and then later a whole classical tradition of great antiquity may be "discovered" for it (as it was the case with the visual arts in the transitional period to the Renaissance). This is certainly also true in reverse. If the natural sciences today do not have a classical tradition, this does not imply that they never had one. Some of Newton's writings certainly fulfilled such a role for early nineteenth-century physics. Similarly Euclid's *Elements* functioned as a classical text in geometry, perhaps until the very beginning of this century. No text has, however; such a function in *contemporary* natural sciences. It is, therefore, no accident that from the second half of nineteenth century the historiography of the natural sciences and the actual scientific investigations of nature became sharply divorced from each other as completely different disciplines and cultural enterprises, though earlier they were usually accomplished by the same persons and treated in one and the same work.

33. The lack of a classical tradition provides the contemporary natural sciences – in comparison with other cultural genres – with a specifically *short-span historical memory*, institutionally endows them with a "historical amnesia."[60] (Or, if this seems to be an unduly negativistic formulation, I am ready to say: it ensures that ease of forgetting without which – according to Nietzsche – life itself would be impossible.) This is, however; a one-sided formulation and not completely accurate. The natural sciences do have – fixed in their contemporary texts – their own long-term memory, only of a specific kind. Galilean dynamics, Newton's laws, Darwinian selection, Mendelian genetics, the Lorentz-transformations, the Michelson–Morley experiment, and so on and so on – all these are "literary monuments" of modern science, through which a reverential remembrance is ensured to its distant heroes whose works are no more actively used in its actual practice. Natural sciences

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own nation, and to his own age. And Addison, perhaps, will be read with pleasure when Locke shall be entirely forgotten." And the author of this ridiculous misjudgement had, nevertheless, some idea of philosophy – he was called David Hume (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748, Sect. I, §4.).

[60] Y. Elkana, "A Programmatic Attempt at an Anthropology of Knowledge," in *Sciences and Cultures*, ed. B. Mendelsohn and Y. Elkana, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1981, pp. 35–36.

replace a long-term historical memory with the preservation of corresponding *memorabilia*. The items of this history which are intrinsic to science and fixed in its very language, are not only "monumentalised" (there was no "Michelson–Morley experiment" as a single historical event – this expression replaces a complicated *story*),[61] but they are also relentlessly *modernised*.[62] Newton's laws as they are found in the recent textbooks of physics are something Newton *should* have written had he used modern mathematical notations, contemporary physical concepts, and so on. The meaning of these expressions, therefore, changes as science progresses, though they are, of course, posited as designating well-identifiable, singular historical phenomena and events.[63]

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[61] See its description and analysis in I. Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 159–165, who also underlines that the meaning usually associated with "the" experiment could only be established retrospectively, twenty-five years later.

[62] This is forcefully emphasised by Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, pp. 136–143. Kuhn, however, essentially interprets this fact as the outcome of an *ideology*, imbued by a pedagogic practice and functional from the viewpoint of creating a group mentality ultimately promoting "progress." On this point see §40 and §43 of the present paper. About the unconscious modernisations involved in the intrinsic "folk-histories" of science see also Y. Elkana, *The Discovery of the Conservation of Energy*, London, Hutchinson, 1974, pp. 175–197, and Y. Elkana, "A Programmatic Attempt at an Anthropology of Knowledge," pp. 59–60, about the retrospectively construed character of some of the best-known cases of "simultaneous discoveries" in the natural sciences.

[63] In the language of hermeneutics one could say that in this implied form of historical understanding the aspect of *application* (in its Gadamerian sense) completely dominates over that of interpretation proper. In this respect the "naive hermeneutics" of the natural sciences is a kind of dogmatic hermeneutics, akin, for example, to the traditional Biblical one: both *grant* the validity claim of *some* texts as the *precondition* of understanding. There is, of course, a fundamental difference between them: in the case of the modern natural sciences these texts are not some authoritatively fixed scriptures of the past, but the momentarily codified literature of the ever changing *present*.

This intrinsic "folk-history" of a discipline suggests a very definite conception of the character of its development. Firstly, it ensures a highly individualistic picture of cognitive change in science as primarily a matter of those culture-heroes who really mattered and whose names are perpetuated. Secondly, it makes the past directly *incorporated* into the present which is seen as containing everything that was valuable (and worthy of recalling) in the past. We – pygmies or not – just stand on the shoulders of all these giants, and so we see *further* – and *not otherwise*. Thirdly, these historical *memorabilia* are also *memento mori:* science, in its relentless progress, turns even the greatest intellectual achievements into mere relicts, in it there is no other certainty besides this unlimited drive forward.

It can be pointed out that philosophy equally knows and uses such "literary monuments" of its past. No doubt, "Cartesian dualism," "Spinozist monism," "Hegelian dialectic," and so on, are historical *memorabilia* of the same type, with a meaning both vague and modernised. There is, however, one difference. In *philosophical* discussions (and I underline: philosophical and not historical ones), under definite conditions, the hermeneutical legitimacy of the so associated meanings can be raised. For example, in the critical reactions to Ryle's *Concept of Mind* – a work with no historical pretensions – the question of the adequacy of its authors' conception of Cartesian dualism has been frequently and emphatically raised, and justly so. Because whether what contemporary philosophy considers to be the *classical and paradigmatic* case of a dualist metaphysics really fares so badly in providing answer-schemas to the problems discussed, had a serious relevance to the claims Ryle was making. It seems to me that nothing analogous could occur in contemporary natural sciences – nobody will be taken to task because their mentioning of Newton's laws has been textually inaccurate or historically anachronistic. Of course, this latter occurrence is rendered highly improbable today by the fact alone that it is only the philosopher whose professional competence is conceived of as including the knowledge of (at least some) classical texts.

34. There are, naturally, some very good reasons for this "historical amnesia" of the natural sciences. In this respect special importance pertains to the fact that the knowledge accumulated in the experimental natural sciences cannot be fully objectified in their texts alone (see §22). Especially the understanding of experimental reports presupposes a degree of shared "tacit knowledge"

without which it is impossible to translate the formulaically indicated procedural rules and technically designated materials, devices, and so on, into envisageable practical operations with well-defined objects. As experimental apparatuses, standards for materials change, measuring procedures and so on are altered, this tacit, operational knowhow necessary for the understanding of the texts *disappears* (to be replaced by another one); now it can only be reconstructed by proper historical investigations. The fact that the operational meaning of the low-level theoretical (or sui generis observational) terms of science changes in this way, while their reference seemingly remains the same, only complicates the situation. Reading far earlier research reports, the scientist is often unable to work out what the experimenter really did, how reliable their measurements were, and even the data *of what* they actually are. (History of science knows many examples when the *meaning* of some past measurement has been radically revised in retrospect; for instance, in the historiography of early research of electricity we are constantly told that what has been measured was "really" something else than the original experimenter has thought.) Related, although somewhat different considerations apply to texts of purely theoretical nature, too. *Given* the way the scientist's professional competence is culturally constituted today, the scriptures of the natural sciences have a "*built-in* obsolescence" which makes the extension of a "search for literature" beyond definite time-limits an essentially senseless enterprise.

35. Difficulties of similar type are, however, not unknown in humanities and "soft" sciences either, insofar as the understanding of their classical texts is concerned. Even if these latter represent forms of "metadiscourses" – that is, the specific problems connected with the relatively traceless disappearance of a tacit operational know how do not emerge in respect of their comprehension – their meaning is never simply "given" to the modern reader: it has to be recovered by historical-hermeneutical means. Since this meaning is posited as being relevant and enlightening in regard to *present-day* problems, the task of interpretation emerges anew again and again. Thus the differences between the two cultural genres regarding the organisation of their effective traditions ("long-term" versus "short-term historical memory") cannot be accounted for *merely* by the differing features of the scriptures constituting their respective histories. (All the less since in more remote cases one

and the same text can sometimes be legitimately conceived as belonging to both the history of physics and the history of philosophy, and then it often will be read by philosophers, and not by physicists.) The question rather is the following: why is it the professional obligation of a contemporary philosopher to know something about Aristotle and to have some rudimentary competences for reading his texts, and why is this not so in the case of a physicist? The answer to this question ultimately has to point to the differing ways in which the field of *contemporary research or learning* is culturally articulated in the two genres and to the ways this organisation is then reinforced, legitimated and carried forward by a corresponding structuration of their activated historical past.

36. Human and social science disciplines are in general culturally articulated in a *polemic-dissensive* manner.[64] Though they are normally divided (usually in an ephemeral, overlapping and fluid way) into a number of "co-ordinated" specialties, this division is at least partially overlaid by another one: that between competing theoretical "schools," "trends" and "tendencies."[65] The relationship between these trends is *competitive-agonic*. They are usually regarded as in principle imcompatible solutions to ultimately identical or closely related problems (even if the explicitly formulated *questions*, to which they give answers, are *different*), as *alternative theoretical models or images* of what the discipline is about. Intellectual consistency (and frequently practical engagement, too) demands a choice between them.

The organisation of the tradition in the discipline or branch of learning is then to *support* this polemic structuralisation of its contemporary field. It traces the presently relevant theoretical alternatives (or the various conceptual components into which they are analysed) back to their "origins," and fixes as classical those texts that gave a *paradigmatic* formulation to one or

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[64] C. J. L.ammers, "Mono- and Poly-Paradigmatic Developments in Natural and Social Sciences," in *Social Process of Scientific Development*, ed. R. Whitley, London, Routledge, 1974, has spoken about their "multiparadigmatic" character in a related sense.

[65] Usually one and the same "school" will be meaningfully discerned as being present or influential simultaneously in many, though not necessarily in all, of the specialties comprising the discipline.

another of these alternatives: formulations which are posited as "forever" or at least epochally valid, since they demonstrate most clearly the reasons and motives for, and the consequences implied by, the acceptance of some fundamental theoretical model or image. The discipline's tradition is thereby organised into a number of "traditions," and each of its present "schools" – drawing on the common pool of "classics" – usually constructs a somewhat differing "list" of them and gives them a distinct (sometimes sharply opposed) interpretation.[66] Such an "agonic" reconstruction of history renders some works of the more remote past directly mobilisable for the present debates (both for legitimating and argumentative purposes), and at the same time *maximalises* the number of presently available conceptual *alternatives*.[67] A culturally active tradition is traced back with great historical depth which in some cases may extend beyond the time-point from which onward one can meaningfully speak about the existence of the discipline at all. (There is a Marxist sociology today, though of course there was no sociology as such during the life-time of Marx.) On the other hand, *what* the so-conceived problems and alternatives are – even in philosophy which is apt to treat them as eternal-perennial questions and controversies – *ultimately* depends on the present state of scholarship. Philosophers, for instance, are inclined to trace back the dispute between idealism and materialism at least to a "conflict" between Democritus and Plato, irrespective of the fact that these tendencies of philosophical thought do not appear as explicitly recognised and opposed alternatives till the eighteenth century.

37. The contemporary cultural field of the natural sciences is structured – in opposition to the above – in a *pluralistic and consensual* manner. These

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[66] The very historiography of philosophy begins, in Alexandrian times, with the construction of such an agonistic-"confrontationalist" interpretation of its development: G. Markus, "Interpretations of, and Interpretation in Philosophy," *Critical Philosophy* (Sydney), 1, 1984.

[67] As a result, the specific assertions and knowledge-claims made by the authors in these disciplines usually are evaluable only within broader contexts which, in their turn, are neither strictly fixed, nor consensually accepted. This point is specifically emphasised by C. Bazerman, "What Written Knowledge Does: Three Examples of Academic Discourse," *Phil. Soc. Sci.*, 11, 1981, pp. 370–373.

disciplines are not only sharply divided into a number of specialties, but these latter are again informally decomposed into research areas conceived as the main loci of innovative inquiry. The various areas and specialties within the discipline are posited to coexist in a fashion of loose *coordination*, as forms of inquiry directed at *different*, though interrelated problems, and sharing a background consensus concerning the (theoretical and experimental) foundations of the discipline the content of which is represented by its actual "textbook *fundus*." Even when it is accepted – that is, taken for granted both by common sense and in the implicit ontology of science – that the various specialties in fact investigate *one and the same* "object," the different theories, results and so on attained by them are usually not conceived as rival and alternative models, among which one ought to choose, but as conceptualisations of its *different aspects*, which are, at least in principle, compatible with each other. This assumption can even be upheld in cases when the theories in question are (in their present form) logically irreconcilable: their reconciliation is then projectively postulated as a task "future research" will solve (for example, the relationship between the general theory of relativity and the non-relativistic quantum mechanics). In this way *dissent* in natural sciences is, at least in periods of "normal" development, *contained*, *restricted* to disputes within the particular research areas as disagreement about how to answer definite questions – not as a controversy about the ways the very problem should be comprehended and the object of the inquiry should be approached.

This consensual and pluralistic organisation of its field is not so much a factual characteristics of "normal science" (that is, a state-description that most of the time happens to be true in natural sciences), but it is rather a state which this type of cultural practice tends to "normalise." That is, these practices are *directed at* the containment and localisation of cognitively relevant dissent by a number of specific, recognisable means. Disputes, for the plausible resolution of which the theoretical and technical resources of the discipline are, at the present level of knowledge, insufficient, often simply become removed as being "unscientific" or "metaphysical" (to be re-opened at a later stage, perhaps). Persisting controversies which for a longer time split the concerned research community are often "neutralised" by transforming the original disagreement of *views* into equally legitimate, separate specialties investigating different *aspects* of the same phenomena. Competition between them is

thereby removed from the argumentative-cognitive level to a "social" one (competition for academic and broader recognition, for financial funds and so on, on the basis of their perceived "fruitfulness" and significance). An ever progressing specialisation of research thereby functions as a means of conflict resolution in natural sciences.[68] In such a manner the strong *objectivism* of science (§27) is "tempered" by an easily evoked *perspectivism* which, in a reifying fashion, transforms theoretically, methodologically, and technically differing, and sometimes conflicting, *ways of investigation* into "aspective" differences of the *investigated reality*.

When these normalising practices of science fail to contain disputes, the event is perceived as anomalous: a "revolution," if its consequences later are regarded as significant and positive; an "aberration" if they are judged to be fruitless. This perception depends relatively little on such occurrences' actual frequency in the history of science – judging something to be anomalous has not much to do with its being (or not being) rare.

38. The actual organisation of tradition in the natural sciences *supports* this perspectivistic, pluralistic and consensual organisation of their contemporary activities. Textbooks often contain (as introduction) the discipline's official history – a hagiographic story interconnecting its most important "memorabilia" into a simple sequence. But the actually mobilised and culturally-cognitively employed *tradition* is organised and structured *within* each research area and essentially *independently* from each other. Instead of a number of long enduring and alternative tendencies-"traditions" (whose argumentative competition ensures the unity of the given branch of learning), the activated past in the natural sciences is present as the multitude of coexisting, side by side, "*states of research*," each of relatively short duration and connected only through partial overlaps. Each research paper directly

[68] About the conflict-neutralising function of scientific specialisation and "segmentation" see first of all W. O. Hagstrom, *The Scientific Community*, New York, Basic Books, 1965, pp. 187–226. For a historical case study (of the dispute between Bateson and Pearson, and the emergence of biometry) illustrating this process compare L. A. Farall, "Controversy and Conflict in Science: A Case Study," *Soc. Stud. Sci.*, 5, 1975. Further examples can easily be invoked (the divorce between thermodynamics and the kinetic theory of gases, between genetics and molecular biology, etc.).

contributes to the relative consolidation and the simultaneous modification of this tradition. The natural sciences can afford a lack of reflective historical consciousness, because *each* literary objectivation immediately participates in the articulation and interpretation of that (shallow) past which is relevant from the viewpoint of their present activities.

39. This tradition-organising function is today a *formal* feature and requirement of publications in the natural sciences. This is connected with the hermeneutical function and meaning of that conventional and standardised literary structure of the contemporary research paper which has been mentioned earlier (§7).

The *Introduction* of the research report (together with its *References*) has the task of placing the given investigation in respect to the "contemporary literature," that is, the literary inscriptions of a short-term past. For this purpose the corresponding tradition is reconstructed and interpreted in a characteristic manner: it is transformed into a single, but partial and open-ended *argumentative complex*. Works which may have been originally entirely unrelated, are now interconnected as either corroborating or possibly contradicting each other from the viewpoint of the chosen problem; the actual time-sequence of publications (and the lines of actual influences) is largely neglected and replaced by constructed argumentative nexuses.[69] In this way the author – as a truly creative recipient and interpreter of the past works of science – does not only select between them, but simultaneously transforms a complex, usually many-centred and heterogeneous historical story into a "logicised" one, thereby comprising it into a *momentary state*: the "current state of research." This logicisation and momentarisation of a short-term history serves a well-defined purpose; namely, to delimit a definite area of concerns as a relatively autonomous, legitimate field of inquiry and – even more importantly – to demarcate within it what is already solved, the sphere of the known, from that of the still persisting, unresolved dispute and ignorance. In this manner the past is construed as *objectively posing some question(s)*, to which the paper

[69] In the mainstream analytic philosophy of science this actual practice became codified and legitimated through the conceptual distinction drawn between the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification."

then addresses itself. The Introduction, therefore, through a definite construction of the tradition, provides legitimation for the paper's claim of "contributing" to the existing state of knowledge, by narrowing down an objectively pre-given area of uncertainty and ignorance. To legitimate their own work as relevant to science, the scientist must "acknowledge" the relevance of some earlier publications, and in this way they actually transform them into, or preserve them as, a tradition culturally active in, and significant for, the present.[70]

This organisation of the tradition, in which each natural scientist is routinely, and mostly unreflectively, engaged, is, of course, a "subjective" interpretive activity, that is, it involves individual (or group) decisions about the limits of the research area, the relevance, novelty, and significance of earlier literary contributions to it, and so on – all, of course, depending on the way the scientist in question interprets their own results and their possible significance. There are no cognitive criteria which would prescribe (or allow) an unambiguous choice concerning *any* of these matters. It can well happen that two scientists, performing largely similar series of experiments, will construct the relevant literary tradition quite differently, and in such a way insert their own findings into different theoretical contexts and interpret them accordingly.[71] Nevertheless, these *(re)constructions* of the tradition are seen as simple *descriptions* of a pre-existent state (of knowledge). This is ensured not only by the injunction prohibiting the stylistically direct expression of individual choices and attitudes, but also – and first of all – by the existence of a number of normative requirements aimed at securing the "impersonality" of such a construct. The "search for literature" ought to be comprehensive, all works of influence and relevance should be acknowledged, the interpretation of the findings of other authors – except in cases of explicit polemics – should not radically deviate from their authorial interpretation, and so on. Certainly, already the meaning of these requirements is diffuse, and in the actual practice even cases of flagrant deviance (simple neglect of rival theories) do

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[70] See N. Gilbert, "Referencing as Persuasion," *Soc. Stud. Sci.*, 7, pp. 100–101, 110–13; Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge*.

[71] Compare, for example, with the material presented in Gilbert and Mulkay, *Opening Pandora's Box*, pp. 43–51.

frequently occur. Nevertheless, these postulates are *posited* as valid. That is, a paper can be criticised (and even denied scientific relevance) for conspicuously failing to comply with them. It is perhaps best to regard the construction of tradition (presented in the Introduction and so on) as a *proposal for consensual acceptance* of what should count as the actual state of knowledge in the given area. It is then in the literary interaction of the ongoing sequence of related publications that this tradition becomes – for a time – relatively stabilised (the "important recent works" in the field, most frequently referred to, and often in one cluster, are selected), and in this same process the given paper also succeeds or fails to insert *itself* into this tradition.

40. If the task of the Introduction is primarily the construction of a short-term history as objectively posing a question to be answered or solved, the Methods section serves to demonstrate that the way the given scientist proceeded to "find" the answer, their manner of producing the new scientific knowledge, was a warranted one, codified by the previous literature and research. The alleged "raw data" pertaining to the answer are then presented in the section of Results, to be interpreted as providing (or contributing to) the solution of the originally posed question in the Discussion. This latter section, however, usually accomplishes more: the requested sceptical tone of science gives at least strong preference to the explicit indication of the still undecided interpretative alternatives, the theoretical and empirical problems left open for *future* research. In this way the paper inserts itself not only into an immediate past, but also posits itself in some relation to the projected (proposed) future of inquiry as well.

41. Thus, already the formal-routine organisation of a natural scientific paper submits its whole to the hermeneutical logic of *question and answer* – with the proviso that the questions appear as our own (dictated by the present state of our knowledge and ignorance), while the answer is largely objectified and naturalised (ultimately provided by the all-deciding data as "straight facts"). The so-reported experiment, therefore, truly becomes a way "to force nature to answer our question" (Kant) – the second all-powerful metaphor which, just like the simile about the "Book of Nature" (§13), directly transposes intersubjective, hermeneutical-dialogic relations to the interaction between nature and man.

This "naturalisation" of a hermeneutical process is ensured partly by the fact that the logic of question and answer is applied in the natural sciences as the *direct organising principle* of their historical tradition, through which history becomes strongly "logicised"[72] and turned (from the viewpoint of the present) into a unilinear process. Through the structuring just described, each paper becomes firmly embedded into a short-term past, in which the lines of demarcation between knowledge and ignorance are firmly drawn. It then claims to push this frontier somewhat further and thereby also to open up some new questions. Thus, the institutionalised character of these literary objectivations confers upon them the significance of a *contribution* to an always open-ended, continuously progressing collective enterprise. All literary works of the natural sciences are thereby posited as merely transitory stages, evanescent stepping- and stopping-points in the relentlessly forward moving process of knowing.

The idea of scientific progress is therefore neither a mere ideology of the scientists (and some philosophers), nor does it express some fact about the history of science: it is a *postulate*, the admittance of which is necessary to confer *meaning* upon natural scientific activities as they are culturally organised today. This is so not only in the sense that the "historical amnesia" of the modern natural sciences, the shallowness of their activated tradition, can be conceived as rational only as long as one assumes that everything cognitively valuable in the works of more remote past is completely contained in the "recent" literature. As I tried to argue, the requested "adequate *understanding*" of a scientific paper, posited by its genric form, demands its comprehension as a contribution to an encompassing, irreversible process of knowing,

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[72] This "logicisation" of history is directly connected with the norm of reproducibility of the experiment. Insofar as the research paper claims to describe the actions of the experimenter only in those of their aspects which render their outcome (the "results") replicable, it also has to eliminate the real historicity of these actions in respect to their *motives*. The personally and historically contingent actual motivations of the actor have to be replaced by reasons which can be claimed to be equally compelling for everyone committed to scientific investigation in the given area of knowledge. The undertaking of the concrete experiment is to appear as a rational thing to do in regard of a given "state of knowledge" *alone*.

constantly moving forward. The idea of progress is therefore to be conceived of as a *historically-culturally contingent regulative idea*[73] which is intrinsically connected with, and undivorceable from, the contemporary cultural organisation of natural scientific activities and their literary objectivations. Of course, the question: whether there is "progress" in any given branch of science or research, "progress" in the sense of criteria, implied or suggested by its regulative idea – is an empirical question. But the presupposition that natural scientific knowledge in general is capable of accumulative progress is a historically specific assumption connected with the contemporary cultural organisation of this form of knowing. Its "contingency," however, does not imply its arbitrariness. Natural science is "able to progress" as long as the so-organised cognitive practice can actually satisfy the basic social expectations, demands, and needs addressed to it, at least as long as it is not challenged effectively by a form of practice otherwise organised.

42. There are, of course, strong *social grounds* which can account for the strikingly different ways in which the cultural fields and the associated traditions are structured in the humanities, on the one hand, and in the natural sciences, on the other. Works in the human and social sciences remain strongly connected and associated – either in an avowed, or in an unreflected way – with differentiated, partly opposed social interests, with the legitimation or the criticism of various extant social institutions and practices divergently affecting the social position of different groups in society. Our relation to nature, on the other hand, is posited within our culture as being predominantly a technical one which should only be judged on the basis of the graded criterion of effectiveness usually conceived as neutral both morally and socially. The fact that there are good social-cultural grounds which make the existence of the above difference comprehensible does not mean, however, that there are *compelling epistemic-cognitive reasons* for it. In the latter sense it is not necessary that the tradition in humanities *should* be organised into competitive, opposed

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[73] I use here the term "idea" in a quasi-Kantian sense. "Ideas" are non-arbitrary *Sinnbegriffe:* forms of self-interpretation which fulfil a normative and orientative role by conferring a definite meaning upon practices, a meaning, however, which is not a "free invention" of the acting individual, but bound to the cultural-social constitution of the concerned practice.

"trends" of long historical duration, and in the natural sciences organised into many coexisting and merely partially overlapping "states of research" with shallow time-compass.

In fact the historical tradition of philosophy (to take this, in the given respect certainly most extreme example) *can* well be ordered according to a schema of continuous growth of philosophical knowledge. This has been done by most of the great "philosophical histories of philosophy" (mostly depicting their own authors' system as the immanent *telos* of this whole evolution), from Aristotle through Hegel to the neo-Kantian historiography. One ought not only to acknowledge the historical effectivity (in the sense of a *Wirkungsgeschichte*) of these writings, but – I think – should also hesitate to call them, even strictly interpretively, unilluminating. Furthermore, it is, of course, quite possible at any given historical moment to "reconcile" the fighting "sects" of philosophy and to neutralise their dispute, precisely through that method of perspectivistic relativisation and appropriate restriction of their opposed cognitive claims (to differing "spheres" or "aspects") which is, as we have seen, often exercised in the natural sciences. In the history of philosophy there has always been present a strong impulse towards such a syncretism. Today such attempts are evaluated pejoratively as "eclectic." This negative judgement, however, hardly accurately reflects either their past significance (some of the greatest philosophical achievements of the past – to mention only Leibniz or Kant – were seriously motivated by such an aim), or their present role (in all probability the majority of contemporary academic philosophers are not orthodox adherents of one or another clearly formed "school," but are "eclectic syncretisers"). This evaluation does, however, correctly express the cultural irrelevance – under present conditions – of syncretism as a *philosophical program* of solving the "dispute of schools" forever. To this, however; one has to add: there *were* whole cultural periods (such as late republican and imperial Rome) when syncretic attempts of some kind did achieve a relatively lasting dominance. (True, these were hardly the most fruitful epochs in the history of philosophy.)

43. The same point can be argued the other way around, from the side of the natural sciences. Until the early eighteenth century, accepted forms of natural knowledge were in general embodied in a number of culturally (and often also nationally) specific, multifunctional theories which opposed each other

competitively as alternative and irreconcilable "models" of the world of nature of which one had to choose. The relationship between Cartesian, Newtonian and Leibnizian "physics" (to mention only one case) was not in principle different from that existing between rival metaphysical systems (from which, of course, they can be divorced only in a modernising, ahistorical abstraction). This situation has then progressively changed during the entire eighteenth century. In spite of the predominantly Newtonian rhetorics of the age, it was *not* one paradigm's consensual triumph and general acceptance over all the others (as it is sometimes argued in a too-easy application of Kuhn to real history) which actually occurred during this period. Rather a "hybridisation" of these models, conceived earlier as mutually exclusive, took place; an "opportunistic eclecticism" which blended and combined their various features and constituents in ways depending primarily on the central research interest dominant in one or the other case (and also on the cultural traditions prevailing in the given milieu).[74] One should perhaps date the emergence of a cognitive strategy of "perspectivistic reconciliation" in the sciences of nature from this time onward. Earlier, in the dispute over the interpretations of Copernican theory, this had been definitely rejected. In any case, it was this "eclectic hybridisation" of the various paradigms which prepared the conceptual grounds for a theoretically and methodologically more rigorous joining of the concerns, results, and models of "experimental natural philosophy" to the mathematical principles of a "general physics," primarily to the (appropriately reinterpreted) Newtonian laws of mechanics, and allowed the emergence of physics as a unified (and growingly professionalised) discipline in the first half of the nineteenth century. This process also involved far-reaching cognitive changes in the understanding of the relationship between both experiment and theory, and between experience and mathematics,

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[74] For a convincing marshalling of the evidence and concise argumentation to this effect see Y. Elkana, "Newtonianism in the Eighteenth Century," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 22, 1971; H. Guerlac, "Newton's Changing Reputation in the Eighteenth Century," in *Essays and Papers in the History of Modern Science*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977; and R. E. Schofield, "An Evolutionary Taxonomy of Eighteenth-Century Newtonianisms," in *Studies in the Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. R. Runte, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, vol. 7, 1978.

changes which influenced both the operational (experimental) and the literary practice of the discipline.[75]

44. One cannot identify, however, the cultural constitution of tradition even in the nineteenth-century natural sciences with the relevant characteristics of their present practice. The mere fact that Newton was treated during this period as the "classic of physics," in the full sense of the word, already indicates the difference. The concept of an endless scientific progress, which already then had been firmly anchored in the cultural practice of the natural sciences, was still bound together with an equally firm belief in a definite (achieved or soon achievable) "scientific world view," whose principles were beyond any reasonable doubt and provided the guarantee for an *extensive* growth of knowledge. It was again Kant who first clearly articulated *both* aspects of this progress-concept in his theoretical philosophy.

It is only from the late nineteenth early twentieth century onward that the conception of an endless growth of knowledge in science has become interwoven with that of a principled *fallibilism*. Scientific progress now meant an irreversible process constantly approximating towards some unachievable end which was also uncharacterisable and unpredictable in any essential trait of its content. At about the same time the literary objectivations of the natural sciences, and the genric conventions and rules concerning their appropriate constitution and literary use also acquired their contemporary, modern form. In particular, the presently known rules of referencing, together with the specific "short-term historical memory" of the natural sciences described above, have been slowly established from the second half of the nineteenth century. Historians of science recently began to speak with growing frequency about a "second scientific revolution" which occurred during the nineteenth century – meaning *either* some radical changes in the theoretical orientation and methodological standards of science (first of all physics), *or* a fundamental

[75] See R. H. Silliman, "Fresnel and the Emergence of Physics as a Discipline," *Hist. Stud. Phys. Sci.*, 4, 1973; C. W. Smith, "A New Chart for British Natural Philosophy," *Hist. Stud. Phys. Sci.*, 9, 1978; S. F. Cannon, *Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period*, New York, Dawson, 1978, ch. 4; and E. Bellone, *A World on Paper*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1980.

transformation in the forms of social organisation of scientific activities in general.[76] A hermeneutical analysis of the natural sciences suggests that these two types of transformation were interconnected and integrated with each other through a series of simultaneously occurring changes not merely in their literary practice, but also more broadly in the set of cultural (ATR) relations which sustain this practice. Natural science as the cultural genre which *we* know, as the familiar form of institutionalised discursive activities, is the product of a nineteenth-century development in which the cognitive structure, institutional organisation, cultural forms of objectivation and its global social function have changed together.

E. Some Presumptive Concluding Remarks

45. Any substantive conclusion regarding the natural sciences in general which can be drawn from an hermeneutical analysis of the type attempted above must be conjectural and tentative. Such an analysis can deliver primarily a *phenomenological description* of those cultural conditions which are necessary to confer *meaning* upon the literary objectivations of contemporary natural scientific discourse. Its specific cultural constitution can thus be brought to sharper focus in contradistinction to other cultural genres, on the one hand, and to historically earlier forms of "natural knowledge," on the other. Since modern natural science, as has been emphasised, is comprised not only of literary-discursive activities, this analysis cannot, in principle, exhaust the subject-matter. Furthermore, by concentrating on the historically-culturally contingent conditions of culturally codified *meaning*, it cannot replace the more traditional enterprises of epistemological and sociological analyses, with their focusing on the problems concerning conditions of truth and social efficiency, respectively.

These three large problem-areas are, however, certainly not independent, even analytically, from each other. A hermeneutics of the natural sciences can,

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[76] The first view is exemplified in the works of Bellone, *A World on Paper*, and Cannon, *Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period*. For the second view see E. Mendelsohn, "The Emergence of Science as a Profession in Nineteenth-Century Europe," in *The Management of Scientists*, ed. K. Hill, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.

in particular, provide a needed corrective against often encountered biases of traditional epistemological and sociological approaches.

Philosophers of science often treat – or at least did so for a long time —the outcomes of natural scientific inquiry as disembodied "theories," that is, systems of *propositions* pertaining to some "idealised" language. Sociologists of science in the Mertonian tradition, on the other hand, used to look at them as if they were *utterances* of a speaker, motivated by his or her interiorised values and goals, and aimed to influence some group of interlocutors to achieve these ends. A hermeneutics of the natural sciences can serve as a useful antidote against both these views, insofar as it insists that the products of this type of cultural practice are *texts* of a well-defined type: literary objectivations with strong institutionalised "genric" characteristics that normatively circumscribe the way of their production, transmission, reception, and interpretation within the given historical-cultural context.

46. At the same time such a hermeneutics can also perhaps temper the force of those, today often vocal "revisionist" attacks upon the above, mainstream philosophical and sociological views, which seem to lead either to a radical epistemological relativism or to a strong sociological externalism, or both. The claims of objectivity, replicability, communality, novelty, and advance of knowledge are not simply ideologies, that is, forms of a false consciousness making the recognition of the proper character of a practice – in the interest of some agents – impossible; just as they are not (à la Merton) interiorised conscious maxims and standards actually motivating the activity of the scientist and forming his or her expectations towards the conduct of the others. They are rather *normative requirements* impersonally imposed upon the activity and literary interaction of the actors by the specific way this type of cultural practice and its objectivations are historically constituted, and this largely occurs independently of the actual motives and rules of conduct of the agents in question. Certainly it is true that in an absolute sense, irrespective of the cultural-social context, these requirements can never be fulfilled. Moreover, there are no historically constant methodological or epistemological criteria for deciding unambiguously and with certainty in any concrete case whether these requirements had in fact been complied with, even *relative* to the available intellectual-cognitive and technical resources. This must always remain a matter of *decision* for some group of concerned agents. This does not mean, however, that the decision in question is in principle arbitrary, though it

always will depend – to a larger or lesser degree – on the nature and character of the individual case, that is, it cannot be but *prudential*, *fallible and revocable*. It is again true that not only cognitive-argumentative, but usually also some "external" considerations will influence the decision actually taken. It does not make it, however, *eo ipso* non-rational, nor does it invalidate the very distinction between "external" and "internal" factors, because it belongs to the cultural organisation of the contemporary natural scientific practice that such a distinction – again in a tentative and negotiated, but non-arbitrary way – *ought* to be made. In general, a "prudential" fulfilment of the "internal" requirements of scientific activity in the on-going process of cultural interaction between the members of the scientific community is a condition of the meaningfulness of these activities, *given* the present constitution of natural scientific practice.

47. A hermeneutics of the natural sciences renders, in my view, highly implausible (though it certainly does not *prove* them wrong) all those attempts that endeavour to account for, and to justify, the cognitive characteristics of contemporary natural science in terms of some universal conditions of rationality, be they understood either in a strictly transcendental sense, or in the meaning of "quasi-transcendental" anthropological constraints pertaining to human knowledge in general. Hermeneutical analysis brings into relief those contingent cultural conditions and relations to which these epistemic characteristics are bound, or at least with which they are historically associated. It indicates that even within the post-antique Western intellectual development there has been a plurality of forms of "scientific" knowledge of nature as differently constituted cultural genres which not only fulfilled dissimilar socio-cultural functions: each possessed also a distinct epistemological structure (with an associated understanding of experiment, theory, scientific proof, criteria of novelty and advance, and so on) as well. It is certainly possible to *reconstruct* the sequence of these forms (and that of the theories in which they were embodied) as constituting a *progressive* development in our rational knowledge concerning natural phenomena; contemporary natural science as a culturally constituted form of activity even demands that we do so. And we can successfully make such "evolutionary" reconstructions, *once* we accept the present state of scientific knowledge as the *telos and criterion* of this whole development. The fact that we succeed to do so – that "Whiggish" histories of science are for us both more convincing and more illuminating than, for

example, "evolutionary" histories of painting are – is not inconsequential; it says something *both* about our culture and about science. This success and its "ease," however, should not obliterate an awareness of the fact that these are interpretive reconstructions of history determined by our own cultural premises, and that the actual course of the so-construed past "scientific evolution" in fact changes (sometimes dramatically) with each significant change in the composition and character of our *present* knowledge. Given the socio-cultural preconditions of modernity, natural science is an intellectual enterprise with the inherent ability to "progress," but any attempt at the definition of the criteria of this progress within some framework independent from transient historical-cultural variables seems to me doomed to failure and leading only to the hypostasis of some particular cultural characteristics as universal constituents of human rationality.

48. Such a standpoint of a "strong historicism" cannot deny the possible (*in principle*) meaningfulness of the idea of an "alternative" natural science. A hermeneutical approach to the contemporary natural sciences is itself able to indicate (though this has not been attempted within the framework of the present paper) definite strains within their actual practice, and it certainly bares those features that are far removed from, or even contrary to, those expectations which the great tradition of Enlightenment has organically connected with the idea of scientific progress. Such an approach, however, lends as little support to a romantic critique of science in practical respect as to an epistemological relativism in theoretical respect. It certainly indicates that there is a broad historical simultaneity and definite affinity between the various, epistemic, cultural and socio-functional traits of modern natural scientific practice. In particular, it emphasises that the natural sciences have *lost* their direct and general cultural significance (in the Weberian sense, that is, in the meaning of an encompassing cognitive orientation in the lived world as nature); their discourse became self-enclosed (that is, one among experts alone) in the very same process in which they *acquired* those epistemic and social characteristics which made them able to fulfill a direct function in technical development (transformed them into a "productive force proper," in the Marxian sense). The historical simultaneity and cultural affinity of these traits does not yet prove them to be undivorceable from each other under all conditions, but it seriously undermines the relevance of those wholesale criticisms of science which concentrate upon some culturally disquieting features of its

present practice, tacitly presupposing that they can be changed without perhaps sacrificing some of the characteristics and continuing achievements of science that may be fundamental to modern societies. The idea of an "alternative science" formulated in terms of (desirable) generalities remains, at the very best, a completely empty possibility which cannot be discussed rationally. A systematically evolved, social-cultural practice can be effectively criticised only from the perspective of a meaningful and concretely articulated alternative which can transform or replace it. A strongly historicist standpoint is just the opposite of the comforting relativist belief that "anything goes:" if history teaches us anything, it is – unfortunately – that among the great many imaginable and perhaps desirable things at any historical moment, only a very few have any chance of a practical-social realisability.

49. A hermeneutics of the natural sciences can only render explicit those characteristics which under contemporary conditions make a reflexive hermeneutical awareness unnecessary for the successful practice of the natural sciences; it merely indicates the "price" for the ease of their hermeneutic achievements. To the question "Is this price right?" it can provide no answer, since it is not a problem with which a philosopher would (and could) have more competence than anybody else. A hermeneutics of the natural sciences can only attempt to contribute – as philosophy should – to the clarification of what is at stake in asking this question, to elucidate what we do – as cultural beings – to ourselves, when we practise natural science the way we now do.

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Chapter Eight

After the System
Philosophy in the Epoch of Sciences

I

Contemporary culture is dominated by the sciences. This does not mean that scientific methods, theories or paradigms would decisively influence everyday thinking today, or would serve as guidelines for the effective orientation in our broader environment, in the "life-world." Just the opposite is true. This is partly because when sciences in the modern sense became autonomous, they distanced and divorced themselves from the habitual, everyday schemes of explanation, and as a consequence both their methods and results became intelligible only for an ever more narrowly delimited circle of expert specialists; and it is also partly because, from the end of the nineteenth century on, the idea of a unified "scientific world-view" able to fulfil the task of general cognitive and practical orientation, this great end and promise of the Enlightenment and early positivism, increasingly lost its relevance for the development of the sciences themselves. Today such synoptic overviews have been definitely removed from the field of science proper. They are relegated to the sphere of "popularisation" and dissemination of general

knowledge, strictly distinguished from genuine scientific practice. The sciences, which in their technical impact unified, homogenised the circumstances of everyday life, the human world, have turned out to be incapable of providing a single, coherent interpretation of reality, comprehensible in its connections – or at least they no longer undertake such a task. "There is no such thing as *the* science, there are only sciences" stated Scheler already at the beginning of the 1920s. If we use the term "culture" in its broad, anthropological sense, there have been few periods in Western intellectual history in which what was called "science" would have a lesser direct influence upon the forming of a culture than is the case today.

Nevertheless I think it is true, and even evidently true that the sciences – and let me be more precise: primarily the so-called "hard" sciences of nature, and to a lesser degree those social sciences which follow their epistemic model – are the dominant constituents of the *high culture* of contemporaneity. For they are the sole component of this culture in the case of which their becoming autonomous did not mean their simultaneous loss of all social functions, or – to formulate it in a more circumspect way – it did not give rise to deep uncertainties and doubts as to their possible function in human life. The hard sciences, through their broadly understood technical application, became a reality-shaping power whose contribution and progress is necessary for the continuous existence of modern societies. For societies in which material livelihood is based on the ever more rapid use, and using up, of finite and humanly irreproducible natural resources, in the long run can maintain themselves only under the condition of an equally rapid technical progress. And this can be ensured only through the continuous utilisation of the results of scientific research. In this sense the sciences have become one of the main determinants and steering mechanisms of social change. Of course, one can *evaluate* the human consequences of their role, their impact in widely differing ways. But the *fact* of their social significance cannot be doubted. What is more, it seems also clear that even their negative consequences cannot be remedied *without* their own contributions.

II

"Philosophy is the mother of all sciences." If we accept for a moment this trite (and at best) half-truth of cultural history, we sadly have to conclude that

family relations in the field of culture do not seem to shape up any better than is the case in many more prosaic families. For in the eyes, and from the viewpoint, of the sciences philosophy appears like that embarrassing parent who never succeeded in growing up. As opposed to the well-defined concepts of scientific theories which confer upon the latter an unambiguous meaning and make it possible to resolve the dispute between competing theories through their empirical verification and falsification, the truth-value of the speculative conceptual edifices of philosophy remains forever undecidable already due to the fact that their very meaning is the subject of never-ending conflicts of interpretation. Therefore, while controversies at the frontline of present scientific research always occur on the basis and background of a consensually accepted corpus of knowledge (the "textbook science") and their resolution contributes to the expansion or modification of this latter, the whole history of philosophy up to the present is characterised by the incessant struggle of opposed doctrines and intellectual sects who do not share even a common paradigm. The cultural form of existence of the specialised sciences is *research* as an ever advancing, collective practice, and even the most significant intellectual achievements are but great *contributions* to it. Philosophy, however, is still primarily embodied in the oeuvre of the "master-thinkers" – in individual and closed theoretical constructs which for this very reason can only be continued in an epigonistic way. Thus in all these aspects philosophy inevitably appears from the standpoint of sciences as a cultural formation that was and remains incapable of overcoming the infantile disorders that have characterised their own formative period, the pre-paradigmatic stage of scientific development. From this viewpoint philosophy is no more than – to use a Husserlian expression – a *Restbegriff*: it designates a mere residuum and remainder; its area of concerns is constituted by problems which could not have been transformed into empirically resolvable scientific questions – either because they are wrongly stated, are pseudo-problems, or because at the present level of our knowledge we lack the appropriate conceptual and technical means that would allow their empirically interpretable and decidable formulation.

III

It would be easy – invoking some of the newer ideas and insights of contemporary theories and historiographies of science – to lessen the sharpness of

the contrast here outlined which in this form rather pertains to the immanent ideology of scientific research than to the objective characterisation of its practice. Here, however, I would rather refer to the fact that one of the most influential trends of contemporary philosophy essentially accepts the so interpreted opposition, only to radically reverse the values associated with it. For the sciences have paid and do pay a price for their indubitable successes. In part, I have already mentioned it: they became a factor in the effective satisfaction of pressing social requirements only by becoming *monofunctional*, by "freeing" themselves from a whole gamut of tasks which in other cultures were fulfilled by forms of knowledge having the highest social esteem and recognition – first of all from the task of a unified and coherent world-interpretation able to directly orient people in their everyday activities. The modern sciences are constructive, but they are no longer edifying. This is so primarily because they are empirical sciences *of fact*. They are not value-free in the sense that the practice of scientific research presupposes a definite social and cultural environment which makes possible such activities and confers meaning upon them, an environment which is characterised by the dominance of definite values as a matter of fact. But the sciences do not, and cannot, investigate the significance and validity of the thus-posited values in general. Thus while they provide an ever growing body of information about that field of possibilities which we can use and exploit in our doings, they say nothing about what it is *right* for us to do.

The philosophical critique of the limits of scientific rationality referred to here does not stop, however, at this point. Its central target is that very concept of "fact" with which the modern sciences of fact operate. From the viewpoint of the sciences a fact is what can be described as a case of some general, conceptually separable and characterisable, causal or functional interdependence, the constituents of which are objects in the broad sense of this word, that is, entities which in principle are at our disposal and over which we can gain control, once we have discovered the laws of their potential interaction. The cognitive standpoint of sciences is a radically objectifying one. But not everything which as a matter of fact influences our life is a "fact" in this particular sense, and not all our actions aim at the production or modification of such facts, since we do not have everything even in principle at our disposal and we cannot treat everything that plays a role in life as a mere object. What is more, even science understood as the dynamic process of research today

increasingly acquires for us the character of such a "non-disposable." The direction and the rate of its development, the character of its utilisation is less and less determined by the conscious decisions of those – the members of the relevant research community – who seemingly possess the appropriate rational competence for such a task. This all becomes the resultant of disparate, momentary decisions of various state, economic, and other institutions and organisations. In its totality it takes on the form of an anonymous, uncontrollable process. The specialised sciences – so proceeds the critique – are therefore incapable not only of justifying those values the effectuation of which is actually presupposed by their own practice, they also cannot account by their own conceptual means for the real character of their own activity, for all that "happens" with, and through, them.

The philosophical critiques of science, only indicated here, take upon themselves the role of giving voice precisely to what is in this sense "non-disposable" and "uncontrollable." They can designate it, depending on their own conceptual framework, by the names of "Life," the "individual concrete," "Being," "bodily existence" or "generalised textuality." However, in whatever way they characterise it, from their own viewpoint the empirical sciences of fact now acquire the character of a *Restbegriff*, a residual concept: they are what remains from the universal idea of rationality or that of primordial thinking when it is one-sidedly and distortively restricted to the description and calculative prediction of the factually-objectively existent, of what exists as a mere object.

IV

The adversaries of this dispute are, however, in an unequal position. And not only because of the fact that the empirical sciences, in the consciousness of their indispensable social function, self-confidently can face such a speculative critique, but also because philosophy, being "the mother of all sciences," can hardly regard itself as blameless in respect of the (alleged or real) inadequacies of the modern sciences. From this follows the rather paradoxical situation: generally speaking, the more critical is the attitude of some philosophy towards science, the less inclined it is to deal concretely with science and the more preoccupied it is – with philosophy. This explains the great popularity in contemporary philosophical literature of the rather narcissistic

question: "What is philosophy?," "What can philosophy be today?" – the present paper, of course, being just an example of this hackneyed genre.

However, one comes up against considerable difficulties when one tries to answer such a question directly. And not because such answers are unavailable. Individual philosophers and philosophical schools usually formulate what is to be regarded as the genuine subject-matter of philosophical discourse and inquiry quite explicitly. They are forced to do so precisely because the philosopher, in opposition to the scientist, does not have at their disposal a consensually accepted body of background knowledge, interpreted in a unified way, which would circumscribe the general outline of the still unresolved and resolvable problems. But the answers given to this question seem to be simply incommensurable. Influential contemporary trends of philosophy assign to it the task of the phenomenological analysis of transcendental subjectivity, the disclosure of the semantic and syntactic structure of the sciences, the revitalisation of gnostic knowledge, the creation of a critical theory of society and even the deconstruction of the tradition of philosophy itself. Philosophy struggles today not only with the fact that its social and cultural function became problematical, it is also in a crisis of identity. "There are philosophies, but there is no such thing as philosophy as such" as Dilthey already formulated the fact of this crisis at the turn of nineteenth century.

Dilthey's statement evidently brings to mind the words of Scheler quoted earlier concerning the sciences. The two propositions, however, actually refer to two essentially different states of affairs. Of course, in both cases we are dealing with paradoxical formulations, since multiplicity and diversity can only be ascertained on the basis of some tacitly assumed viewpoint of unity. However, this implicit horizon of unity is, in our two cases, of fundamentally different character. In respect of the sciences it is ensured primarily by the existing interconnections between the different disciplines and specialties, by the partial utilisation in each of the sciences of results and methods developed in other branches of knowledge, and through the widespread practice of interdisciplinary inquiry. As a result no specialised field of research is isolated from the others; they all constitute the plural of *one* science, even though in their totality they do not offer a single, unified and coherent system of cognitions. The universal concept of science as such exemplifies the Wittgensteinian principle of *family resemblance*. The unity of philosophies,

on the other hand, is realised primarily through the incessant argumentative dispute and polemics of the opposed schools and trends, in a process in which each of them refers to a largely identical, but again agonistically organised tradition which is, however, articulated, interpreted and evaluated by them in sharply differing ways. If it would make sense at all, one could say that the universal concept of philosophy as such is based on the model of *family animosities*.

V

This present situation of philosophy is the product of a process of decomposition. This latter made untenable its earlier dominant *cultural form* – from the eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries – which still kept philosophy proper in an articulated unity with the only emerging modern theoretical sciences (known at that time by the name of *philosophia naturalis*). The idea of the *system* constituted this cultural form. For the notion of the system is not to be identified with a definite form of literary exposition, indeed it cannot be reduced to some particular type of logical structure as an "internal" form either. In fact, in the history of post-Renaissance philosophy one encounters several system-types differing from one another even with respect to their ultimate principles of construction. In this regard one can clearly distinguish the axiomatic-deductive, the genetic, the transcendental and the dialectical systems. What unifies them is not some abstract identity of their logical cast, but the essential similarity of the way they conceive the role and function of philosophy = science in the totality of human life. And this, in its turn, determines what normative expectations should be, at least ideally, satisfied by such cultural accomplishments; that is, it defines the manner in which their meaning and claim to truth is to be comprehended, and therefore also the way they can, or ought to be, evaluated and criticised.

VI

Here, of course, I can only in the most cursory way mention even the most essential constituents of this idea of the system understood as a cultural form. I would like, however, to make a short reference at least to three important aspects of it.

a. In its full conceptual realisation the idea of system first of all implies that philosophy = science is, in its manner of being, a chain of cognitions which in some way are *objectified* (and thereby made in principle accessible to everyone). This view seems to be so natural for us that we easily can miss its radical novelty: its break with the classical Greek conception of *philosophia* as *episteme* (the Latin *scientia*) – a conception which even thinkers of the early modern age took largely for granted. For in its original understanding *episteme* meant an acquired but lasting and firm mental aptitude or habitus undivorceable from the total personality of the individual – a disposition of the soul to insight into truths of the highest type, truths of strictly universal and necessary character regarding the "causes" of the phenomena. Accordingly such knowledge was regarded also as adequately transmissible only in the educative process of the formation of an intellectual and moral character, from person to person. (Incidentally, this explains also the general hostility towards writing characteristic of the classics of Greek philosophy.) The idea of the system destroys this "personalistic" understanding of the socially most esteemed form of knowledge which claimed to be an end in itself. It divorces philosophy – further regarded as a value in itself – from its direct impact upon the life of its practitioners (or recipients), from its personality-forming, illuminative influence, and thereby creates the conceptual preconditions within the framework of which the *modern* conception of the *autonomy* of cultural accomplishments first becomes intelligible.

b. According to those cultural norms and expectations which were implied in the idea of the system, the thus-objectified body of knowledge ought to constitute such a coherent meaning-formation which possesses a purely *immanent sense*, that is, which is understandable and evaluable strictly in and by itself. Thus such knowledge is not only accessible for everyone, but also in principle can be rationally evaluated by everyone with respect to its claim to truth and significance. Philosophy = science understood as system presented its claim to universal truth as the principle of an "epistemic democratism." In this way it not only broke away from the elitism characteristic of the classical conceptions of *episteme*, but it also essentially transformed the basic epistemological requirements and presuppositions associated with its concept. It partly *radicalised* them, partly gave to them (in a curious opposition to the above described tendency towards depersonalisation) a *subjectivist* turn.

In its classical understanding philosophy is not only *episteme theoretike*, but equally *episteme apodeiktike*: it represents the knowledge of necessary and universal truths based upon *proof,* acquired strictly through logical demonstration. This is perhaps the single most important feature of this view deeply influencing the whole subsequent intellectual evolution of the Western inheritance of Greek philosophy: the radical *decontextualisation* of the form of knowledge to which the highest spiritual value is ascribed. For this implied that the value of such knowledge is completely independent of its *source* (both from its relation to the tradition and from the authority or charisma of the person announcing it), from the *way and form* of its formulation and communication (from their poetically evocative or rhetorically persuasive character), further from the direct *utilisability* of its content. Its significance is based solely on the particular character of its truth-value which is guaranteed by the way it can be acquired: through an unambiguously delineated, invariant and interpersonal procedure, through syllogistic inference, the pure form of which had been first clearly recognised and fixed by classical Greek thought. In this way *logos* had been radically demarcated from *mythos* and *epos*; from *metis*, the cunning reason so important, especially in political conduct; from *eikos*, the probable relegated to rhetorics; from the forms of practical know-how, the *techne*; and equally from the description and systematisation of what is observable on the basis of the similarity of its constituents, from *empeiria* and *historia*. It was just this narrowing down, this radical and clear delimitation of the extent of the legitimate and legitimating cognitive grounds which conferred a specific direction upon the admitted discourses concerning the thus-constituted cultural form – they have been unambiguously restricted to discussions of, and judgements upon, its demonstrative grounding, they acquired the form of strictly epistemic critique. In this way classical antiquity first created the *concept of scientificity*.

Classical Greek philosophy, however; did not consistently carry out to its ultimate end this decontextualisation of knowledge. *Episteme* meant demonstrated knowledge, but the principles universally characterising the mode of being of all kinds of beings, the principles which as the highest premises make the whole procedure of inference possible at all, were not regarded (at least in the paradigmatic Aristotelian conception) as belonging to the thus-constituted sphere of competence of philosophic *episteme*. They pertain to

other faculties of the soul, to *nous* and *sophia*, intellection and wisdom. Their insights are legitimated by the principle of *consensus gentium et philosophorum*, ultimately by the essentially concordant opinion of those whom "everyman" regards as the most competent and the most wise. Thus classical antiquity could comprehend philosophy only in the context of a shared culture, within the framework of, and relative to, a common tradition and form of life. And it is this context which makes intelligible and legitimates the very way it frames its question and the ultimate answers it gives to them. It was this fact which also allowed it to reconcile philosophy's claim to universal validity with its pronounced exclusivity.

The postulates of meaning-immanence and epistemic democratism, however, cannot be reconciled with any admission of a factual context-dependence of knowledge: they demand it to be without any external presuppositions whatsoever. The system ensures this by interconnecting the idea of objective *logical grounds* with that of subjective *certainty*, thereby liquidating the epistemic dualism of the ultimate principles of intellection and the demonstrated truths of *episteme*, "science" proper. The starting points, the highest premises of the system (in whatever way they be defined) are given in an intuitive self-evidence which excludes even the possibility of doubt. To arrive at such evidences demands genuine intellectual labour, the cleansing of the mind of all its accumulated biases and prejudices, but in principle they are equally available for, discernible by, everyone. These self-evidences constitute the unshakable foundation of all knowledge. Its expansion, the construction and elaboration of the system, consists in the total or partial, step-by-step transfer of this evidence through the *construction* of newer and newer truths from the ultimate ones. This is made possible by the *method*: some complex procedure usually not reducible to syllogistic inference alone, but again thought of as a public and interpersonally controllable one. The intellectual building blocks of this method are characterised in terms of such elementary mental operations as every normal person is able to perform. The significance of philosophy = science in this way shifts from the apprehension and contemplation of personality-shaping truths to the *production* of ever new truths built upon a secure and ever-expanding foundation. Therefore the system is both closed and open at once. Closed, because the fixedness of its foundations and of the method from the very beginning predetermines the reach of its discourse and the way it can reach its objects. Open, because the value of the method

consists in its productivity, in its capacity to make new, ever more particular phenomena intelligible and explainable from the pre-given standpoint of the system.

c. All this, however, simultaneously means the inevitable collapse of the way in which the role of *philosophia* was conceived and its value legitimated in the classical tradition. In the perception of this latter the ultimate significance of its insight into universal and necessary truths consisted in the fact that such knowledge by its nature relates to that, and to only that, which is unchanging and eternal. Its comprehension therefore elevates the soul above the accidentalities and insecurities that rule the world of everyday experience and opinion, it fosters a spiritual attitude emancipated from the power of *tyche*, from the surrender to what simply happens to us. Precisely for this reason *philosophia* is not some body of knowledge to be learned, but a *praxis*, the highest form of meaningful and happy, salutary life, *bios theoretikos*. In this respect, as to its ultimate end – if one disregards the all-important point how it envisages to realising this end – classical Greek philosophy is closer to the great religions of salvation than to modern science.

The idea of the system disrupts this direct coincidence of theory and praxis, of intellectual apprehension and the good life. It further upholds as a normative requirement the strictly necessitarian character of all scientific truths. Due to its commitment to certainty it even enhances the dogmatism of the classical conception of knowledge. But it no longer seeks what is universal and necessary *above* the sphere of the changing, accidental individual phenomena, *beyond* the realm of transient practical needs and interests. Rather, it now locates the universal precisely in what remains constant and the same *in* the change of the phenomena, in the invariant regularities of their causal interactions, in their "*laws*." The discovery of such hidden causal mechanisms then makes it possible for us to gain control over their possible effects, to increasingly acquire power and dominion over nature, the ultimate material and object of all our activities. Instead of a "philosophical" way of life based on the intellectual contemplation of the eternal cosmic rationality and accessible only to a few elect, philosophy now aims at, and finds its legitimation in, the active *collective rationalisation* of the conditions of life.

It would be, however, a misleading oversimplification to identify this end solely with an increase in our ability to manipulate natural processes, with

the incessant growth of the security and effectivity of sheer survival independent of the meaning of life. The great systems of early modern philosophy regarded power over nature as a fundamentally important, but nevertheless only one, aspect of human *freedom*. They understood it as the expansion of the range of possibilities for the realisation of human ends and values that can consciously be chosen on the basis of their recognised validity. For while the idea of the system destroyed the classical project of an *immediate coincidence* between rational knowledge and good life, it still intended and attempted to embrace both physics and ethics by, and within, a single, coherent conceptual construction, even in those cases when their relation was conceived as that of opposition. The understanding of the relation of humans – these free and rational beings able to discover the laws of nature and to modify their activity in accord with the knowledge so acquired – to this very causal order, the place of man in nature, such an understanding casts light not only on the conditions of the realisability of human ends, but also on their intrinsic value and rationality. In the systems of German idealism, which already react to the beginning divorce of the "positive" sciences from philosophy, these two tasks became clearly distinguished from each other. The empirical sciences (relegated by Hegel to the sphere of Objective Spirit) are to answer the question *of Können*, of what can be done, while philosophy, in which Absolute Spirit reaches its fulfilment, primarily ought to indicate what should be done, the path to the humanly befitting utilisation of the enlarged scope of activity and choice. Philosophy = science understood as system articulated the grand promise of modernity: to bring, in theory as well as in practice, to an ultimate unity and to fulfil jointly, in harmony, the demands both of self-preservation and self-realisation.

VII

It was in the cultural form of the system that early modern philosophy = science achieved its autonomy. First of all, in this form it became independent from religion and theology, and acquired such an area of the knowable over which it successfully could claim the highest epistemic authority. This cultural form, however, came undone, not least in the result of its own successes: it proved to be in a sense self-destructive.

For those specific characteristics of the system-idea which I summarily outlined above also made possible a radical revision of the concept of scientific rationality. The emphasis laid upon the nature-transforming function of science allowed it to connect up with technical knowledge, with those "mechanical arts" that earlier were regarded as "servile," and in this way to accept experiment also as a legitimate source of reliable knowledge. Evidence understood as subjective certainty rendered possible the dismantling of that line of demarcation which earlier was drawn between *philosophia naturalis* as genuine science and the observation-based *historia naturalis* excluded from science proper, since, at least in some interpretations, the data of the senses also satisfy the requirement of self-evidence. The broad conception of method also made induction acceptable as a scientifically legitimate procedure; and as a result, the probable too could find its way into science. In general, early modern philosophies proved to be capable, while maintaining, and in some respects even radicalising, the fundamental cognitive features of the classical conception of scientificity, first of all its characterisation as decontextualised knowledge, to overcome to a significant extent its narrowness, rigidity and one-sidedness so often emphasised as its fatal blemish today. It would seem that precisely the clarity and sharpness of the strictly demarcated *logos-concept* conferred upon its tradition such a power and flexibility that permitted it to draw into its orbit much of that through the exclusion of which it had been originally defined.

It is clear that non-theoretical conditions were primarily responsible for the fact that these conceptual possibilities became indeed actualised. However, when this transformation occurred, then science, more exactly the sciences differentiated in respect of their objects and methods, divorced themselves from philosophy. Each great branch of science was now conceived as possessing its own experiential-experimental basis and therefore as having no need for a philosophical legitimation of its knowledge-claims. The concept of scientific rationality embodied in the always-advancing process of research had no more need to be articulated in terms of the concept of some ultimate philosophical *foundation* with indubitable self-evidence. Instead, it could adequately be formulated in terms of graded empirical *confirmation* relative to the achieved level of knowledge. The processes of professionalisation and specialisation, which were essentially completed by the end of the nineteenth

century, also provided an institutional framework for this dissociation of the various kinds and branches of knowledge. And when the scientific revolutions of the early twentieth century – first of all in the basic and exemplary science of physics – made almost unavoidable the recognition of the *fallibilistic* character of all scientific knowledge, the very idea of some "philosophical foundation" for science became – at least prima facie – untenable. In this way have gradually come into being the conditions for that antagonism between the sciences and philosophy to which I referred at the beginning of this paper.

VIII

This antagonism, however, is only one of the symptoms within the sphere of high culture of the more general and fundamental strains and problems of late modernity. First of all it is only a sub-case of that value-pluralism and conflict between the socially effective and recognised values which can no more be resolved – at least consensually resolved – by the establishment of a fixed value-hierarchy. On the other hand, this antagonism itself is constituent of that paradoxical situation in which the rapid growth of the quantity of information available about the reality environing us is accompanied by the felt decrease in our ability to directly orient ourselves in the world we live in. And this latter seems to be connected with the fact that under conditions of modernity intentional actions and activities directed at the purposeful transformation of the conditions of life often generate, or are enmeshed in, such anonymous and automated processes, the long-term consequences of which we are unable either to foresee or to bring under our control, perhaps since the degree of their complexity grows even more rapidly than the quantity of available information about them.

The questions: "What is philosophy?," "What can philosophy be today?" have acquired in our days the character of a standard "professional" problem for the philosopher, though evidently these are also personally loaded question concerning the philosopher's intellectual existence. But since the cultural situation, which makes this task of an anxious self-reflexivity unavoidable, is part and parcel of the more general and practical dilemmas created by the contradictions of modernity, the answer to these questions also

cannot be independent from one's (explicit or implicit) decisions and choices in regard of these alternatives. One cannot "prove" the correctness of such an answer, though, of course, one is obliged to argue, to offer a rational motivation for it.

In the history and the present practice of contemporary philosophy I think one can observe in a purely ideal-typical sense three fundamental trends and directions in the way these questions are sought to be answered. I would like to add immediately that we are indebted to each of these for insights, or at least for lessons to be learned, which it would be perilous to forget or to neglect. Therefore if now, at the end of this paper, I am to make in some cases critical, and even (for the sake of conciseness) sharply polemical remarks in relation to some of them, I do not intend by this to dismiss or hope to disprove them. I merely want to motivate my own answer and choice.

IX

One possible solution to the identity-crisis of philosophy is represented by the program of its "scientifisation," its transformation into a bona fide science. Such an objective has been formulated from the moment that philosophy had to face the autonomisation of the sciences. One could trace it back to Kant, and from that time on it has been articulated, with changing interpretations and contents, many times. Any such program elementarily presupposes the possibility of finding such a domain of discourse which is not already "occupied" by one of the positive sciences and which philosophy, in view of its own traditions, seems to be somehow qualified to deal with. Among the plurality of the thus motivated choices of a subject-matter for philosophy, in our days the most influential and significant is that which designates its task as the analysis of science itself. Philosophy understood as the self-reflection of actually existing science reconstructs the structure of scientific theories, methods and procedures of confirmation, the internal logic of the processes of theory-change, and precisely through such a reconstruction also legitimates the claim of science to ultimate cognitive authority as the most effective form of problem-solving.

"Scientifisation" of philosophy certainly has the advantage of being in accord with the institutional status of philosophy as an academic discipline in the

company of all the sciences. Its program, however, at least in its history until now, has not met with success (judged, of course, from the viewpoint of its professed end). Philosophy of science has remained philosophy, and has not been transformed into a science. Its whole development has been characterised again by the lack of a background consensus and shared paradigm, the endemic character of disputes between its various schools and trends, in fact by the reproduction of many of the unsolved dilemmas of the philosophical tradition in a new and more particular form. Furthermore even if its program were realised, it would achieve only something which the positive sciences – so it seems – quite well manage without: the scientific legitimation of their cognitive status. But it still would leave unanswered precisely the questions that are today asked with a growing intensity about science and by the scientists themselves: the specific problems of an ethics of scientific research; questions related to the social-political conditions and to the wider consequences of various strategies of development and application of science; in general, those problems which often emerge in the form of practical tensions, and which concern the institutionalised place, organisation and function of sciences in contemporary culture and society. A theoretical approach which takes the present form of science as an immutable facticity and is programmatically restricted to its *internal* analysis alone seems to be in principle unsuited to the critical illumination of such issues.

But perhaps the gravest difficulty faced by such an approach is raised by the fact that the development of philosophies of science has itself cast doubt not only upon the possible significance, but also upon the very meaningfulness of such a program of internal analysis. For in its course serious and weighty considerations have been adduced in support of the view according to which the procedures and criteria making possible the rational validation of scientific theories are themselves dependent upon the historically changing content and general character of the theories in question, and more generally that their demonstrative power presupposes the presence of definite, particular historico-cultural contexts. There is no such scientific method which would contain in itself all the conditions of its cognitive legitimacy. The idea of decontextualisation of knowledge, which deeply permeates the whole of our intellectual tradition, can only be thought of as a never completely realisable *Grenzbegriff*, precisely as an "idea" in the Kantian sense. However, to be able to proceed further in its direction demands a critical effort aimed just at

uncovering the relevant "external" contexts and conditions. The program of traditional philosophy of science does not seem to be helpful in regard to such a task.

X

We have already met with the second ideal-typical answer to the identity-crisis of contemporary philosophy. It attempts to give voice to that Other which scientific rationality, reducing everything to the facticity of objects, excludes and in which our finite existence is rooted: to that non-objectifiable ground of our being which is not at our disposal. In a culture, however, which is dominated, and in all its pores permeated, by the sciences, such an end can be realised only negatively, by the "destruction" or "deconstruction" of those deep structures of thought or discourse that as anonymous, largely unreflexive presuppositions have determined the whole direction of Western intellectual development. And since these latter generally received their most pregnant expression and articulation in traditional philosophy, a form of discourse whose potential has now been exhausted, the representatives of this line of thought programmatically describe and characterise their own accomplishment as the "end" of, the *ending with* this tradition of metaphysics, humanism, onto-theology, logocentrism and the like.

This program, however, at least in its history until now, did not meet with success (judged, of course, from the viewpoint of its professed end). Leastwise this seems to be indicated by the fact that every new effort at its realisation has been accompanied by the condemnation of its like-minded predecessors for remaining unconsciously captive of metaphysics. This was done – and in a rather convincing manner – by Heidegger to Nietzsche, by Derrida to Heidegger, and lately by Rorty to Derrida. The tradition declared to be dead proved to be a rather resilient ghost. At the same time this program obligates. The philosopher subscribing to it ought to realise performatively, in their own cultural practice the decomposition and overcoming of traditional philosophical conceptuality and argumentative discursiveness. This first of all seems to efface the boundaries of philosophy as a cultural genre and make uncertain what criteria of criticism are at all legitimate in respect of such accomplishments. This may well be a problem only for the "profession," but not necessarily for the spirit of philosophy. But it can result in an authoritarian

dogmatism which represents a danger for this latter, too. For from this viewpoint all argumentative critique must appear, independently of its concrete content, as the mere reproduction of what has been radically ended with, and overcome by, the discourse criticised. And this may create the danger of destroying even that fragile unity of philosophy which is guaranteed by the argumentative dispute, polemic dialogue of its various trends. If the "scientisation" of philosophy seems to transform the philosopher into a specialist with a skill of questionable benefit and able (or intending) to communicate only with experts of the same ilk, the view which demands a principled extraterritoriality for philosophy in respect of the requirements of scientific rationality in general, may turn them – since our times are not particularly auspicious for prophets – into a guru applauded by the faithful of their particular sect.

The most questionable feature for me of such a style and trend of thought, however, consists in the fact that it seems to leave open only the most extreme alternatives where the relation to the world of contemporaneity is concerned. For the phenomena of modernity appear from this standpoint to be anchored in such a metaphysical deep structure which, as an anonymous occurrence or state, today constitutes the *precondition* of all conscious, intentional choices and actions, be they collective or individual. Therefore, if the present is conceived as the final phase in a history of degeneration and decay pregnant with apocalyptic dangers, it then allows only for the attitude of an empty political attentivism which permanently stands in a resolute readiness for the coming of the "turn," inclined to welcome everything that claims to represent something radically "other;" or, arguing that it is the tradition of our present which made us to be what we are, it suggests the unconditional and wholesale acceptance of the values of modernity, together with all their unresolved contradictions. Between these two attitudes mediation is possible only at the price of willed, deep ambiguities. This characterises, I think, the view of some of the representatives of French post-structuralism: a merry little apocalypse, from now on and forever after.

XI

The third answer-type to the present situation of philosophy – the one with which I would broadly associate myself – does not strive to find an ultimate

solution to its crisis, since this latter is only one element and constituent in a much broader socio-cultural complex over which philosophy has no command. Therefore it attempts only to provide a general *orientation in thought* in this situation characterised by the widespread experience of contingency and disorientation, and in this way to keep alive or to cultivate such propensities to which the whole tradition of philosophy ascribes particular significance.

The concept of orientation was introduced into philosophy by Kant. To orient oneself, in its original, straightforward sense, means to find one's temporary place in relation to that from whence one came and to where one intends to go. An explicit need in orientation arises when we are unable to reconcile the recollection of the path covered with the idea of the journey still before us, when we are uncertain whether we are at the right place in respect of our chosen direction or whether our originally elected terminus was – given the experience of our track so far – one where we really want to arrive. All orientative accomplishments demand an answer to the questions: from whence, where and whither. What meaning can be, however; ascribed to the metaphor: to orient oneself in thought in a historical situation? How far is philosophy able to contribute with its cultural means to such a task? And if it can do so, what significance may this have at all?

To orient oneself in the historical present demands first of all its *interpretation* as a particular human situation. Philosophy can contribute to such an endeavour insofar as it attempts, partly though conceptual analysis, partly through the reconstruction of the decisive constituents of our tradition, to shed light on the normative *and* factual preconditions of the now dominant set of practices, on those historically specific, pluralistic and often contradictory, enabling and constraining conditions which make them appear legitimate and rational. Through uncovering their interdependence and collisions, their relation to everyday life-practice, philosophy presents an effort of totalisation within a culture which it cannot presume to constitute as a meaningful totality. In this way it distances itself (or at least, depending on its content, it can distanciate) from some practical and cognitive assumptions and postulates that tend to appear natural today.

The objective of orientation, however, demands something more than a kind of globalising description or diagnosis of the contemporary state of affairs, the illumination of our present situation from the perspective of a point of

departure and arrival. The metaphor of place and path can, however, become deeply misleading here. First of all the philosopher certainly cannot answer the question of "whence" by reconstructing – departing from some antecedent state – the process of an actual historical genesis. This is neither their task, nor within the field of their competences. In accord with its tradition and the specific character of its cognitive claims, philosophy relates the present not to a factually other historical or cultural particularity, as it is done by the anthropologist, the historian or the sociologist, but primarily to a *universality*; to a general, conceptually characterised paradigm of the relation between humans and their world – of course, as it is conceivable in the light of present experiences and in accord with the contemporary level of knowledge. Philosophy presents the problems of an epoch on the background of existential problems assumed to be universal. Only the articulation of this latter provides it with a general conceptual framework in terms of which it can coherently interpret the phenomena of contemporaneity and legitimate such an interpretation. No doubt, there is a plurality of such paradigms in philosophy today. This cannot be regarded, however, as a sign of its inadequacy, but is rather an essential feature of the cultural function it can actually fulfil. For if philosophy attempts to create some kind of rational connection between our ultimate, though situated, self-understanding, on the one hand, and our practical relation to the problems and conflicts of the present, on the other, it can do so now only in the clear awareness of the fact that it is no more possible to choose and designate as meaningful and exemplary a sole conception of the self and life, but it can aspire only to render possible a motivated and reflective choice among their alternatives.

This very formulation, however, may raise quite legitimate doubts as to whether such a conception of philosophy can be rationally vindicated at all. To interconnect in some way a general paradigm of the relation between humans and their world with the articulation of a *practical* attitude to the dilemmas of the present – this does pertain to the task of orientation in thought which ought to answer the question of "where to" as well. Philosophy certainly does not fulfil this requirement by outlining some concrete image of a desired future. And not because utopias are impossible or harmful today, but because the philosopher as such has no specific competences in this respect, for utopian thinking cannot be the privilege or burden of a nowadays thoroughly professionalised cultural practice. Philosophy fulfils this

requirement precisely by illuminating the problems of an epoch in the light of existential problems assumed to be universal, in such a way formulating an *evaluative* attitude to the collisions and conflicts interpretatively diagnosed. Undoubtedly every philosophy of this type actually does just that. The question is only: in what way and with what right? For I do not think that it would be possible today to represent convincingly the view which would infer or construct definite values out of some facts – be they of the most general kind.

To the question: how do some philosophies create a motivated connection between a paradigm characterising a universal human facticity and some concrete, situated value-attitudes, the most elementary answer is that they tend to do it in quite different ways. I think, however, that in this respect they all share at least one common feature. This connection does not have the character of a strict theoretico-logical inference or construction with them. It is essentially of *narrative* nature. After the "system," philosophy can no longer lay claim to the status of positive knowledge; it can only be a theoretised, "conceptual narration" acceptable at the achieved level of scientific inquiry and able (at least in its intention) to be generally orientative in thought. It can create a connection between facts and values by maintaining or suggesting that a "story" which illuminates *our* history can make this latter more meaningful, *if* here and now we take upon ourselves the responsibility to continue it in a definite way and direction marked out by some reflectively chosen values.

From this follows the peculiar, simultaneously maximal and minimal character of the rationality represented by, and demandable from, a philosophy. It is of maximal nature because philosophy ought to fulfil two types of cultural requirements. On the one hand, the satisfaction which we can expect from any well-told story: that it be meaningful and also engaging by virtue of its relevance to something in our life. On the other hand, since it is a theoretised, *conceptual* narration, philosophy ought also to meet the elementary demands of scientificity: that of conceptual clarity, logical consistency and empirical justifiability of what it assumes to be a matter of fact. A philosophy can always be legitimately criticised for the infringement upon this latter set of norms. But – and in this consists the "minimal" character of the rationality of its discourse – objections of this type, as this is demonstrated by the reception-history of philosophies, usually have a weight only in respect of the concrete

form and exposition, not in that of the core conception, the "spirit" of a philosophy. The philosopher, of course, must primarily orient their activity to fulfil this latter set of requirements, but the fate of a philosophy ultimately is decided by its ability to satisfy the much weaker and intangible criteria of the first type.

What is the function of philosophy conceived as "orientation in thought," what can philosophy "do" today? I think that – even independently of all considerations concerning the range of its potential audience and the actual effectivity of its impact upon them – it can do rather little. To "orient" oneself is a task for a concrete person in the concrete circumstances of life. Philosophy does not "give" orientation, it can only provide some general guideposts for it, and first of all it can contribute to the cultivation of faculties useful in this respect: the faculty of critical questioning and judgement, of reflexive distancing from one's habitual, social and cultural surroundings, the ability to take responsibility for the choices made. These are useful – for what? I doubt that such propensities would have a particularly high survival- or success-value. They are "useful" to keep alive a tradition which through all historical discontinuities imbues European intellectual history and which usually was borne primarily by philosophy: the tradition of a critical, reflexive self-awareness, which today strives to appraise critically also its own limits; a tradition which, if I would have to designate it by a single word, and in the full consciousness of the historical burden of this name, I would still call *enlightenment*.

Chapter Nine

On Our Beliefs About the Cognitive Structure of Contemporary Culture

One of the most important elements of our whole cultural tradition originates in Greece, in the early fifth century BC, when Parmenides drew a fundamental distinction between *episteme* and *doxa*, between the Way of Truth or Knowledge and that of Opinion or mere Belief. This is, in a sense, the foundational act of philosophy as a specific cultural enterprise, but also more generally that of rational critical inquiry, the self-reflexivity of which is a basic characteristics of our culture. It meant a fundamental break with what is often referred to as "poetic scepticism," embedded in the great epic tradition that certainly was more in accord with popular imagination. According to this latter, true knowledge is the sacred possession of the gods, and it never can be acquired by unaided human effort. The claim that at least some, however exceptional human beings, the philosophers, can reach, solely by the appropriate use of their own capacities, that is reason (in some broad sense) this very end is one of the most important elements of the legacy of Greek antiquity for our culture. All the more

so, because this true knowledge was conceived as having not only theoretical, but simultaneously also decisive practical import.

The distinction drawn between knowledge and belief is, of course, not merely a matter of philosophy. Though a matter of reflection, it is for us enshrined in the everyday language and fundamentally orients our cognitive activities. It presents a way we need to and do reflect upon what we quite ordinarily and unreflectively do: making assertions which others either accept as reasons for further assertions or actions, or challenge making us to give reasons for them. In this sense it concerns and orients the living give-and-take of human communication today in which the status of what is said is not necessarily settled beforehand and is not unquestionably determined by the status, charisma or other personal qualities of the individual who makes the statement concerned.

What do we mean then by "knowledge"? According to a tradition, which is usually traced back to Plato's *Meno* (no doubt, rather badly simplifying his views), but widely accepted and repeated in the relevant literature on the subject also today, knowledge is justified true belief. Let us depart from this understanding.

At first glance it may appear that this view is not in accord with how we ordinarily use the term to "know." I myself, for example, would maintain: I know that Madrid is in Spain, though I never visited this country, and similarly I know that the velocity of light in vacuum equals 300,000 kilometres per second. Were I challenged in respect of these claims, I certainly would be in trouble, for I could not provide justification for them in the sense of adequate empirical grounds or supports. In the improbable case that I were really pressed on these points, at best I could refer my interlocutor to a recent map of the world or indicate that they should consult a textbook of physics. This "at best" is, however, also "good enough." In fact, in most of the cases when I actually claim to know, I am incapable of offering elaborate cognitive justifications for my claims – instead I would indicate for them *authorising instances* generally regarded as valid in our culture.

This practice throws an important light on the very concept of knowledge. When I claim to know that this and this is so and so, I claim an *authority* of specific kind. Its character can be clarified through a suitable explication of the classical tripartite conception of knowledge as justified true belief.

The person who claims to know first of all makes an assertion (expresses a "belief"): undertakes a *discursive commitment*. But the putative knower also i mplies that this commitment is a responsible and rational one: they are *entitled* to it, because it is based on, supported by, appropriate authorising instances (it is "justified"). Lastly, the knower also claims that these authorising instances ought to be *recognised* by everyone (at least: by everyone rational) as valid and binding – therefore what they assert is, at least in the present state of our knowledge, to be accepted as true. The authority claimed by the knower consists in their cognitive "right" to transfer to, or impose upon others their cognitive commitment, to "command" their assent, which then also authorises them to draw further (theoretical or practical) consequences from it. (How great a weight this aspect of authority possesses in our everyday conception of knowing is borne out by the fact that in cases when only a strictly limited group of persons is entitled to make assertions of a definite kind, we – rather inconsistently – tend to attribute "knowledge" to them, even when we consider these assertions false. So we usually speak about the "secret knowledge" of the elders of a tribe concerning the adequate presentation and interpretation of a myth, though we regard this latter as "mere belief.")

Such an account, of course, immediately raises the question: what are the appropriate, valid legitimating instances, or more precisely what are they in *our* culture? I suppose they are of two basic kinds which I will label – somewhat misleadingly – epistemic and cultural.

Epistemic authorising instances are, generally speaking, observational reports made under normal conditions (an important qualification which would demand a lot of unpacking). It is they that provide entitlement for definite knowledge claims without themselves demanding further support: they stop the request for justification from becoming a debilitating unending regress. This in no way means that they are indubitable, immune to criticism: such reports can be challenged and often successfully – they can be false (owing to misrecognition, sub-standard conditions of observation, the unreliability of the observer and so on). In their case, however, it is not the one who makes the assertion, but the one who challenges it, who is under the obligation to vindicate it: in the absence of specific reasons for doubt, they are not to be challenged, but be accepted as "unjustified justifiers" (R. Brandom).

I labelled observational reports epistemic authorising instances in view of the fact that they owe their authority-conferring function to their epistemic status, to the way they are cognitively acquired – ultimately due to the overall reliability of the adaptive evolutionary mechanisms of human sense perception as source of information about the world. It would be, however, mistaken to assume that the so characterised function is a cultural invariant. True, I think, no culture can be imagined in which they did not play to some extent such a role. On the other hand, however, *what* is observable depends on the general resources of a particular culture – we need to think only of the fact that a great variety of observational reports in our culture (what is seen for example in an electron microscope or in the bubble chamber) depend on highly specific instruments and circumstances, and equally on highly specific, expert skills. At the same time, in many cultures it is *not only* observational reports which actually fulfil (or fulfilled) the function of regress-stopping, "unjustified justifiers." In respect of some (and often very important) discursive commitments also reports of dreams, of trance-like states induced by specific cultural practices, but also consensually accepted traditions do play in them a similar role.

When I refer therefore to the other type of belief-authorising instances as *cultural* ones, this is meant in the sense that under conditions of modernity a particular form of cultural practice (with its results and objectivations) is endowed with such a function. This is – in spite of some losses in the nimbus of its objectivity – *science*, primarily the "hard," natural sciences. This is meant in the sense of a cultural norm. Without any doubt, for many individuals, perhaps for the majority, in our societies other cultural formations – religious doctrines, philosophies, social and political ideologies or folk traditions – may similarly play the role of ultimate legitimating instances for commitments to particular beliefs. These are, however, normatively posited as themselves being based on idiosyncratic, personal commitments, the acceptance of which is not binding on others. Science – the results of scientific inquiry consensually accepted by the members of the relevant scientific community – is, on the other hand, regarded as "neutral" in respect of all such merely personal commitments.

Scientific truth is at the same time posited as fallible: even the best-established and unanimously recognised propositions of a science are open to criticism. Here again, however, it is the responsibility of the critic to offer reasons, and

for this challenge to be relevant, it must at least in broad sense satisfy criteria accepted as valid in scientific inquiry.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that these two distinct sources of belief-authorisation are, at least ideally, in agreement with each other. For it is generally assumed – be it true or false – that it is the "tribunal of experience" which decides upon the truths of science: it is ultimately observations which provide all the evidence for knowledge claims in science. The knowledge-system of modernity is in this sense coherent.

There is, however, an important remark to be made already at this point about this scheme of construction of knowledge in our culture. In it observation and science are the recognised belief-authorising instances, but both these sources of assertory authority deal with *facts* alone. Beliefs, however, concern not only facts, but are commitments also to *norms* and *values*. In respect of these latter, there are no such normatively acknowledged instances that would allow conferring "truth" upon these commitments, or at least normatively demand them. This *disequilibrium and decoupage* is one of the most basic characteristics of the cognitive structure of modernity, in its opposition to pre-modern cultures that generally assumed a fundamental unity between "cosmology" and "ethics," between the way the world is and the way we ought to conduct ourselves individually and collectively. It is the *law* that partly covers, bridges, this gap. The law, however, is a man-made, external and clumsy, primarily only prohibitive instrument, whose rightfulness itself can and ought to be judged. The collective social-political process, in which such judgements are realised, may well be actually directed in modern societies by some generally accepted elementary norms of universalistic character. Their set, however, is not fixed, there is no pre-given hierarchy between their constituents, though in actual situations their practical consequences often contradict each other; and – perhaps most importantly – these norms have widely divergent, partly irreconcilable interpretations in society. Thus there is a fundamental *imbalance*, a *normative deficit* in the social construction of knowledge under conditions of modernity.

At this point, however, one could object that there is the *constitution*, which – at least ideally – is providing a lasting and enduring framework of values, not merely to orient the functioning of the legal system, but also to provide the explicit ground for essentially procedural consensus that is vital for the

continuous existence of modern democratic societies. Constitutions are, however, themselves legal-political documents and institutions caught up in the contradictions of modernity, primarily connected with the division of the public domain itself into relatively autonomous spheres – economic, social, legal, political and so on. They must be primarily directed at safeguarding the freedom and the rights of the people for equal participation in the political process, while simultaneously also ensuring that in such a way the more substantive values of the common good – equality, justice and solidarity – will be satisfied. This double requirement, however, cannot be met in any other way than through hybridistic compromises, which take on significantly different forms in different countries, in dependence on their history and actual social arrangements and composition. In this way, however, constitutions as a unifying force are themselves the constant subject of ongoing, sharp and quite divisive interpretative disputes, resulting in not so infrequent changes and amendments. Providing a stable ground in universalistic values for the political procedural consensus in modern democracies, they equally contribute to its uneliminable fragility. Even in their limited domain of relevance they do not fully succeed to liquidate the consequences of the indicated normative imbalance.

In the result of these transformations a change occurs in the very status of *belief*. The assumption that processes and events of "nature" are mere facts that can be known, but only as enabling and limiting conditions of human actions, actions for which the individuals and their collectivities bear the sole responsibility, actually opens up in modernity the great sphere of belief as a cognitive structure, which while distinct from knowledge, is no less necessary, legitimate and a non-defective one. Given this understanding of "knowledge," what can we then say about our everyday conception of "belief"?

Having characterised knowledge as justified true belief, it certainly follows that "belief" is a broader, more encompassing category. In view of the earlier analysis we can say that the person who states: "I believe that this and this is (or ought to be) so and so" undertakes a discursive commitment (for believing that p certainly implies asserting that p is true), without accepting the responsibility for justifying this commitment through reference to authorising instances normatively valid for everyone. At least this person does not undertake full responsibility: beliefs are not mere guesses, they are still

located in the logical space of reasons – not only can they serve as reasons for further commitments, but one can legitimately ask for reasons for holding them: they are motivated. However, the reasons for holding a belief can be (and is often recognised to be) purely personal: desires, emotions, predilections, intuitions of the believing subject. Beliefs are cognitive claims raised without claiming the ability to justify them in ways obligating others. They can be, but do not have to be, accepted by them. And then the so conceived "mere beliefs" can either be treated as the broad basis upon which the whole superstructure of knowledge is raised, or as a residual concept, essentially parasitic upon full-blown knowledge-claims – this would make quite a difference in one's epistemology.

This is, no doubt, a compelling train of thought and legitimate analysis. It is, however, I think, one-sided and insufficient. It does not take into account that speaking about knowledge or belief situates these commitments in different primary contexts of relevance. To the validation of knowledge-claims the truth – or perhaps more correctly, the grounded verisimilitude ("truthlikeness") – of what is claimed is directly relevant: the correspondence of what is asserted with the appropriate facts, the world. However, when I express a belief, it is not the truthlikeness of the asserted, but the *truthfulness* ("sincerity") of this expression that is foregrounded as the focus of primary relevance. My belief can always be criticised as being false in its content, but the first question which arises in respect of it is not that of its correspondence with the world of facts, but its *pragmatic* coherence with my actions, with the overall course of my linguistic and non-linguistic performances. Beliefs are posited as what can motivate, explain and legitimate actions – what renders them intelligible. When they fail to do so, because the actual conduct is inconsistent with the expressed belief, this expression itself is invalidated: I was untruthful (or maybe just mistaken) in stating what I really believe. Truthful beliefs, said Peirce, are of the nature of a habit which – given the appropriate conditions – will determine how we behave. Knowing and believing differ, among others, in the way that the talk about the first foregrounds the cognitive, while talk about the second concerns the practical-pragmatic aspect of our intersubjective assertory commitments.

All this, however, relates to the particular beliefs of particular individuals, which are mostly short-term, idiosyncratic and without broader social

consequences. Our inquiry here, however, concerns the general characteristics, the scope and the functions of beliefs in the culture of modernity. This demands raising the question about the *belief-systems* of our times. For, as one of the most astute and enlightening cultural anthropologists, Clifford Geertz stated, it is actually the degree of systematicity of particular aspects of culture, that is one of its most fundamental features and determinants.

"Belief-system" is certainly not a notion of everyday discourse, but an explanatory construct. It serves primarily the articulation and analysis of those widespread beliefs that are largely shared by members of a community or a group and are of import for the understanding of their social behaviour. Provisionally, I would say that belief-systems consist of (explicit and implicit) mostly general beliefs, which are common to a collectivity and are relatively persistent. Individuals usually acquire them in the process of their socialisation and they are co-constitutive of their cultural identity. Such systems contain not only substantive assumptions, but also (usually only implicit) second-order beliefs concerning criteria for evaluating assertions, conditions they must meet to be capable of either truth or falsity, the ways they may be argued for or against, and so on. In short, they are characterised also by a definite "style of thinking." Belief-systems motivate, explain and legitimate not so much particular individual actions, but – specifying and grounding the conditions of their success or failure – social practices prevalent in some collectivity. They are like common maps that orient and steer communal/collective actions. They constitute an important component of a culture in the anthropological sense of this term as the meaning-bearing and meaning-transmitting aspect of all non-biologically fixed (linguistic and non-linguistic) human performances and their results.

There is one further point of clarification I have to make here: in terms of this sketchy characterisation such high cultural formations of modern societies as science, philosophy or elaborate theological doctrines should not be regarded as belief-systems. I have no doubt that there can be good reasons for treating them as such and that it is possible to offer an appropriate definition of the concept which would allow us to do so. However, given the explication just presented, they do not qualify for several reasons, the most important being that they are *disembedded* from the context of other social practices: their criteria of primary validation are internal to them. They are – had became so under

conditions of modernity – autonomous. This in no way excludes the important fact that some particular constituents of these formations – definite scientific propositions, philosophical or theological ideas – separated from their original context can and do enter the belief-systems of everyday. In any case my discussion will be restricted to their more specific, primary content.

Now it seems to me that the basic question one has to raise concerning the concept so understood is this: with what right and first of all in what sense can the so demarcated (no doubt vaguely and fuzzily demarcated) set of beliefs be characterised as a *system* at all?

The most obvious answer would probably connect this idea of systematicity with the logical consistency of the concerned set of beliefs. Even beliefs held by a single individual do not constitute a mere aggregate. Beliefs, as argued earlier, are situated in the space of reasons – they have consequences, are supported by and imply other beliefs. Someone who was incapable of recognising and drawing such inferences at all would not be a subject of beliefs.

It is clear, however, that the existence of a great multitude of such, usually short-term, independent relations of material inference has nothing to do with the question of logical consistency of a whole set of beliefs. And I would like to suggest that this latter requirement is – at least *prima facie* – simply irrelevant in regard of the everyday belief-systems. For they are generally inconsistent, and usually radically so: they often contain beliefs, which in their explicit general formulation logically contradict each other. And since consistency in logic is an all-or-none concept, to speak about "degrees of systematicity" would in principle be senseless. If systematicity is to be identified with logical consistency, then the very idea of "belief-*systems*" is an oxymoron.

I would therefore suggest that the coherence which is necessarily implied by any notion of systematicity is to be located elsewhere. It is not to be sought in the logical relations between the particular beliefs concerned, but between their whole set and the relevant social practices of the collectivity. A set of beliefs that is shared, persistent and so on is "systematic" insofar as, and to the degree that, it successfully orients, motivates and legitimates the important social practices of this collectivity – in so far as it "works" in terms of its ideal function. (From this it also follows that the systematicity of

a belief-system cannot be judged from a purely external standpoint, this presupposes an – at least imagery/virtual – "participatory" attitude.) I shall call this – for reasons that will hopefully became clear in the following – the basic or elementary criterion of the systematicity of beliefs.

Such an explication, however, raises elementary objections. If belief-systems often or usually contain directly contradictory assertions, how can they "work" at all in the sense of orienting practices and communal activities? If I believe simultaneously that *p* and not-*p*, then from this anything and everything follows – what it cannot do is precisely to orient me. Furthermore, by making logical inconsistency the characteristic of such systems as such, are we not contradicting the earlier point according to which without the presupposition of elementary inferential capacities one cannot attribute beliefs to an individual? Are we not in fact thereby resurrecting the discredited idea of a "pre-logical" thinking insensitive to contradiction, only now ascribed not merely to the "primitives" (Levy-Bruhl), but to the subjects of everyday life in general?

These are important questions, since they throw further light on the character of everyday belief-systems. As an answer to these objections we can point out that belief-systems as a rule do not consist of decontextualised assertions, but these latter come together with, are supplemented by strong (though almost always implicit) "pragmatic indexes" which specify the conditions and occasions of their applicability, the social situations in which the belief in question can or ought to be appropriately invoked. (This is a point that Jürgen Habermas has specifically emphasised: the "social propriety" of making an assertion is a necessary aspect of its evaluation.) Faithful catholics today who (without knowing much of theological subtleties) firmly believe that on the occasion of the Eucharist they are partaking in the body and blood of Christ, while at the same time, of course, knowing that what is offered is just humdrum bread and wine, are just as little "insensitive to contradictions" as was the provincial dignitary of the Roman Empire who sincerely believed in the divinity of the emperor, while at the same time avidly discussing the latest gossip concerning his health as a mortal being. The contradictory assertions do not constitute a *contradiction in beliefs*, because the belief-system itself insulates them: it forbids/delegitimises their conjoined invocation in one and the same practical contexts.

All this refers, however, to the *elementary* meaning of the systematicity of shared everyday beliefs. Many belief-systems in the course of history have undergone further, "secondary" systematisation and rationalisation. The main social processes and vehicles of the latter were *specialisation* (the preservation, maintenance and elaboration of particularly important beliefs becoming the task of some group of "professionals"); *scripturalisation* (fixation of such beliefs in writing); and *codification/canonisation* (conferring sole authority for their adequate representation upon some particular text or texts). These processes resulted in the growing internal elaboration of these beliefs that also acquired in this way a material permanence. Their main outcome, however, consisted in their increasing *decontextualisation*, "freeing" them from their original pragmatic index and context present in living intercourse. Beliefs now became truly transformed into "bare assertions" and it was precisely this fact which largely necessitated their growing elaboration. Because with the loss of their original pragmatic background, the mechanisms defusing contradictions in beliefs also became defunct – the solution of this task now demanded explicit cognitive means. Consistency now could emerge as a problem to be solved.

Two broader consequences of these transformations ought to be mentioned here. On the one hand, understandably, fixation of beliefs tended to transform the originally porous and traversable boundaries between distinct cultures in contact with each other into rigid and exclusionary ones: systems of belief could now become dogmas of *faith*. In this respect a comparison between the weakly institutionalised polytheistic religions of Graeco-Roman antiquity with the great monotheistic religions of the Book is instructive. The former, in their syncretism, were even hospitable to alien cults. Some of the rites and legends of the latter may have been regarded as strange or perhaps ridiculous, but the gods worshipped in the various cultures of this whole *oikumene* were regarded – through a particular practice of "translation" – as essentially identical. Gods are real and therefore the same everywhere, only their names are different. Mithra is just an alien name for Zeus/Jove, Isis for Hera/Juno. The notions of pagan, idolater, infidel, with all the conflicts they imply, were products of rationalised book-religions.

On the other hand, the same processes simultaneously produced also increased resources of critical reflexivity. Fixation of beliefs, which froze the

pragmatically embedded, contextual assertions into a system of permanent propositions, created new possibilities of critical examination, concentrating attention on their ideatory content alone. More importantly, decontextualisation stimulated and facilitated the transformation of that background component of a belief-system which we earlier characterised as its peculiar "style of thinking" into the explicit rules and procedures of logic, rhetoric, or narrative. New modes and styles of argumentation, inquiry and discourse could emerge on this basis – new forms of cultural practices, some of which acquired then autonomy under conditions of modernity.

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If we now, on the basis of the above analysis, again raise the question about the salient features of the belief-systems in modern Western societies, we may well find out that our question itself becomes problematical. For our common/shared beliefs do not satisfy the elementary/basic condition of systematicity as it has been articulated earlier. If the latter is identified with the capacity of widespread and persistent beliefs to orient, explain and motivate the most important social practices of a given collectivity, then the beliefs shared by members of modern society or by those of its particular groups have, in respect of a great multitude of vitally important social activities, been absolved from the fulfilment of such a task. This task in modern societies is accomplished by quite different means.

The vast variety of the usually highly specialised social practices that, in the broadest sense of this word, have a "technical" character are regulated and validated in modern societies not by the "beliefs" of the actors-participants. Productive work activities, but also the conduct (of both agents and clients) in bureaucratic institutions, are in general closely directed by, and evaluated according to, procedures governed by impersonal rules that stem from "elsewhere." Their appropriateness and legitimacy are based upon institutionalised systemic relations beyond the awareness or knowledge of the direct performers of these tasks – it is sufficient if they have a vague trust in the rationality of these institutions or at least passively accept their inevitability. The *functional scope* of beliefs has been significantly curtailed. Today their bearing concerns first of all problems of individual conduct, development and interpersonal relations in ordinary life, on the one hand, and some of the

broad and actual issues of public – economic, social and political – affairs, on the other hand.

But while the scope of beliefs has been significantly restricted, the potential *sources* from which they can be appropriately acquired have been greatly increased. Insofar as beliefs are concerned (as distinct from normatively recognised knowledge) modernity offers a variety of cultural formations – religious creeds, science, the arts, philosophies, different ideologies – each with *universalistic* claims and therefore presenting itself as valid grounds for everyone to orient their lives accordingly. Since the potential relevance of these cultural formations is not clearly demarcated, referred to definite occasions or well-defined spheres/aspects of life, and since the values they embody are in part irreconcilable, they stand in a competitive relation with each other (the Weberian "struggle of gods"): they are offered as objects of *conscious choice*.

If modernity in this way makes the cognitive commitments of the individuals a matter of the exercise of their autonomy, it simultaneously creates, on the other hand, powerful mechanisms for the uncontrolled and largely uncontrollable wide dissemination of beliefs: the *mass media*. Since the media constantly bombard all members of society with a vast amount of information and images, largely divorced from their actual life-practice and immediate experiences, the stereotypes that in a hidden way direct the selection of this information also tend to escape experiential control. Though theories ascribing an unlimited capacity of manipulation to the media seem to me badly exaggerated, the mass media do tend to create a fund of common beliefs unconsciously accepted by a very large number of isolated individuals.

Thus cooperative social practices in modern societies are in general not oriented and supported by shared substantive beliefs. Integration in them is essentially of functional character ensured by institutional mechanisms like those of the market and by impersonal technical-bureaucratic rules. Their functioning presupposes only a thin-in-content, shared political culture essentially exhausted by a procedural consensus concerning the appropriate ways of negotiation concerning issues of common interests and adjudicating potential conflicts in the public arena, and even this is brittle, though resilient. Beliefs in modernity have been *privatised* – not only in the sense that they are

primarily focused on issues of everyday life, but above all because individuals are conceived as bearers of a *right* to form, uphold and publicly express their own beliefs and to realise them in a chosen way of life – on the condition that in the course of this they do not infringe upon the same right of other individuals. This is the fundamental component of their autonomy.

Lack of systematicity is actually the cardinal characteristic of modern beliefs, be they individual or widely shared. This refers not only to the indicated decoupling of beliefs from the prevalent social practices, but also to their collage-like character. They are derived today from many divergent sources, and not merely from different cultural formations, but in our multicultural societies, caught up in processes of not merely commercial, but also cultural globalisation, also from cultures of differing historical-geographical location and origin. This is a new type of syncretism, based not on the translation of alien beliefs into the language of one's own or the combination of a few pre-given, codified elements, but on a "free montage" from practically unrestricted sources and the normative principle of tolerance.

It is, however, this unsystematicity that allows the individuals of modern society to *make* their beliefs *practically consistent*, thus capable to provide a coherent grounding for a chosen way of life and personal development. At least in principle, it makes possible for members of modern society to achieve the satisfaction of the twin requirements of *autonomy* and *integrity* that are normatively demanded for the maintenance of a continuous self-identity in these constantly changing, dynamic and pluralistic societies. Of course, individuals do not create their beliefs out of a void – to a large extent they still acquire them unreflexively in the process of their socialisation from their narrower social environment and its institutions. But they can, or at least they are free to, in the course of their life-history, in the light of their life-experiences, modify them, reject some and acquire, to an extent even invent for themselves, new ones. Unsystematicity makes possible the exercise of the power of a practical-experiential, *personal reflexivity* upon one's own beliefs: learning not pre-set social roles and rules, but how to become and to be oneself.

The exercise of such a power, the realisation of this learning, demands substantive, primarily cultural resources that clearly depend on economic and social ones. For a vast number of individuals the freedom to create their own

"collage" of consistent beliefs is no more real than the freedom to achieve the social-economic position corresponding to their aspirations, interests and abilities in this non-ascriptive, in principle meritocratic societies of ours. For them the unsystematicity of beliefs – their not being anchored in, and confirmed by generally accepted, reliable and mutualistic social practices of the collectivity, their pluralistic privatisation and volatility – means only a frustrated disorientation and endangered self-identity. *Fundamentalism* in developed Western societies (and I would like to underline that my remarks refer to this phenomenon solely within their context) is a contemporary populist and popular reaction to this endemic dissatisfaction, created and constantly reproduced in, and by, modernity.

I use the term "fundamentalism" here in a sense broader than its usual religious connotation, applying it also to some analogous ideological phenomena, concerned primarily with issues of race, ethnicity and gender, though undoubtedly it is its religious variants that are presently most wide-spread and influential. Such "fundamentalisms" share definite features with the Romantic or utopian counter-currents of modernity: the rejection of the abstract-formal universalism of the Enlightenment, of its atomising, competitive and permissive individualism, the allegedly ensuing from it shallowness and instability of interpersonal relations, in opposition to which the positive emphasis falls on organic communities and the need of belonging. They are set off, however, from these earlier (and perhaps today largely discredited) ideological trends by their insistence upon a strictly delineated, fixed set of beliefs, usually grounded upon a reconstructed or fabricated tradition that is posited as unquestionably valid and directly leading to a well-defined code of everyday conduct. This code at the same time sharply distinguishes those who "belong" from the outsiders, the rest of society. This immediate practicability of such belief-systems, their cohesion creating and electively separating, insulating power, to a large extent explains their mobilising force and success. They are able to create surrogate communities in a deeply individualistic and competitive society. It is not by chance that such trends are most widespread and powerful especially in countries in which the social-political measures and institutions (welfare state), able to counterbalance the most extreme consequences of economic competitiveness, are particularly weak or essentially absent. It also means, however, that their presence and activity – whatever their long-term expectations and promises be – does not in practice

disrupt the normal functioning of modern society. In fact, they actually enhance the plurality and exclusionary diversity characterising the everyday life of its members; thus they sharpen the very divide between the private and public-social spheres which they ideologically oppose and often aggressively attack.

Fundamentalisms, with their essentialisation of collective beliefs and absolutisation of a particular code of behaviour in everyday life, are not only in general sense opposed to the spirit of modernity. These shared beliefs in their content directly reject some fundamental tenets of cultural modernity: they are directed at the re-enchantment of the world, either by the retrieval of religious or ethnic folk traditions, or through the creation of new mythologies (as it is the case with some "new age" trends). They are, nevertheless, a typically modern phenomenon. This refers not merely to the fact that they (as indicated) passively adapt themselves to the basic institutional structure of these societies and at the same time actively employ the most modern means and resources of cultural communication and reproduction, like the television or the electronic media, these fruits of a scientific development whose one-sided rationalism they in principle repudiate. They are modern in their essential attempt to consciously and actively *make* some tradition, whose univocality and continuity has been broken, cohesive and binding again. And just therefore, whatever be their content, they are exercises in a *reactive rationalisation* aimed at regaining the lost practical and ideatory systematicity of shared beliefs.

This rationalisation, directed against the rationalism of the Enlightenment, is, however, of *regressive* character. The twin demands to sharply separate the circle of "believers" from the surrounding society and simultaneously to offer a belief-system that can be acted upon under its institutional conditions and functional imperatives – the pressures of purity, on the one hand, and practicability, on the other – impose narrow constraints upon the content of these systems. As it often has been observed in respect of the fundamentalist creeds in contemporary Western societies, their insistence on scriptural literalism usually goes together with a quite reductive reception and understanding of that religious tradition that they profess and intend to uphold. Creationism eliminates the great narrative wealth of its scriptural sources, the primary bearer of their exemplary authority and human significance. The evangelical

sects, on the other hand, lay an exceptionally narrow emphasis upon issues that in the Scriptures are either quite marginal (homosexuality) or, understandably, simply non-existent (abortion) without truly reflecting upon what was truly central to the great Abrahamite religions. In this respect there is a baffling similarity between them and their worst enemy and critic, contemporary atheism à la Dawkins and Hitchens. Both "forget" the irreplaceable contribution of this tradition to that development that ultimately resulted in the emergence of Western modernity: ethical universalism. Beginning with the *Decalogue* this tradition insisted upon the existence of norms of conduct that are equally valid and obligating for all human beings irrespective of their status, gender or ethnicity. This was a conception truly alien to the other great historical fount of this development, classical Greek antiquity, for which the very idea that same rules of conduct could apply equally to a free citizen, a metis and slave, or to a male and a female, was simply nonsensical. First of all, however, such attempts at the reactive rationalisation of shared beliefs are regressive, because in the name of a radical critique of the existing morals and the present state of the surrounding society they actually reduce and diminish the resources of a critical reflexivity. They reject the very idea of the separation between the private and the public spheres, and therefore practically undermine the normative demands of personal autonomy and tolerance. The direct intervention of many fundamentalist religious sects and groups into political life – bringing into question the constitutional separation between organised religion and the affairs of the state – is not an aberration, but quite consistently follows from their basic principles.

Fundamentalism is one of the recent symptoms and constituents of the contradictions of modernity – of the way it, in its perennial crisis, constantly produces and absorbs opposed, antinomistic cultural and social tendencies. In fundamentalist ideologies and movements the striving towards integrity, towards a stable and secure self-identity rooted in, and supported by, a community, becomes opposed to the principle and normative demand of personal autonomy. But this attempt at a contrived reabsorption of the individual into a community of shared and systematised beliefs in its overall practical effect only extends the scope of that against which it is most emphatically directed. The great variety and multitude of competing fundamentalist creeds and sects only enhances the existing pluralism of beliefs and values in society.

In offering an ever-larger pool of systematised beliefs for individual choice, they further contribute to the general tendency towards the privatisation of beliefs. In fact, in the countries, where they are particularly widespread and powerful, the conscious change of the religious faith during the lifetime of an individual becomes an ever more frequent phenomenon.

By actually rejecting some of the constitutive normative principles of modernity – those of the private/public divide, of the autonomy of the individual and the concomitant practice of tolerance – fundamentalist movements, one could argue, constantly test their boundaries, force critical re-examination of their meaning and limits, counteracting the tendency towards their empty routinisation. On the other hand, no doubt, such a "testing" may result under some imaginable conditions in a breakdown: communitarianisms of a fundamentalist type may at the end undermine the subsistence of that thin, essentially procedural consensus which is vital for the functioning of the political-cultural system of modern democratic societies. Whether modernity in the long run will be able to absorb this challenge, too – this is, however, not a question of knowledge, but one of "mere belief."

Part II

Chapter Ten

Culture: The Making and the Make-Up of a Concept An Essay in Historical Semantics

In one of his essays, aimed at the clarification of the "metaphysical grounds" of modernity, Heidegger[1] mentions – together with such phenomena as machine technology and scientific research – the concept of culture as one of those epochal characteristics which distinguish the modern age. At first this idea may seem strange. In our usual understanding each society possesses a culture of its own, since, on the one hand, having culture is a universal and fundamental feature of human life in general and, on the other hand, it is just as to their culture that the various geographically or historically distinct human communities primarily differ from each other. It therefore makes good sense to speak about the culture specific to modern Western societies, but to associate these latter with culture as such seems to involve a quite antiquated and virulent ethnocentrism.

Such criticism, however, would completely miss the point of Heidegger's observation.

[1] Cf. M. Heidegger, 'Die Zeit des Weltbildes" (1938) in *Holzwege. Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. I, Bd. 5,.Frankfurt, Klosterman, 1977, pp. 75–76.

It is not culture, but its *concept* – a concept, however, which practically permeates the way we comprehend and exercise our activities – that indicates something fundamental and specific to modernity. It is the fact that we do not regard the manner of our life and the way we interpret the world around us as something unproblematically natural or preordained, but conceive of them as belonging to some "culture," that is, as something made by earlier human generations and re-makeable by our own activities – it is this fact which contrasts the culture of modern societies with that of "traditional" ones. Our culture is a culture that conceives and knows itself *as* culture and as *one* among many: a culture for which "culture" has become a theme of reflection and a practical problem.

The theme and problem of culture is dealt with today in a number of scholarly disciplines – in anthropology, sociology, history and so on. To indicate their respective interests and "competences," and in such a way also to demarcate some place, if any, for philosophical concerns with culture, may seem to be the best approach to the clarification of the subject matter of a "philosophy of culture." Unfortunately this would be a rather hopeless enterprise. For within each of these disciplines there is a bewildering variety of definitions of, and corresponding approaches to, "culture." In a thick volume dealing exclusively with the overview and classification of the definitions of culture within anthropology (and mostly American anthropology) alone, Kroeber and Kluckhohn in the early 1950s succeeded in reducing their multitude to six main types[2] – and one can safely assume that the development of anthropology has produced in the meantime some new conceptions not to be easily fitted into this taxonomy. Similarly, in his interesting work on the sociology of culture,[3] Z. Bauman has argued that in its relevance to sociology "culture" connotes three quite separate, though equally legitimate and significant concepts belonging to distinct *univers du discours*. And in what concerns its everyday employment, the boundaries of this term seem to be completely fluid and indeterminate. We are all engaged, during a significant

[2] A. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge, Papers of Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 1952.

[3] Z. Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, London, Routledge, 1973. See ch. 1, "Culture as Concept."

part of our waking life, in "cultural activities," but these latter can mean jogging as well as painting, watching a Western on the TV as much as reading Kant.[4] Furthermore this everyday concept of culture is not only fatally vague as to its referential extension, but also deeply ambiguous as to the associated evaluation of its designated content. Culture is seemingly so valuable, or at least so important, that it is worthwhile for many states to have a specific "Ministry of Culture" providing and organising "cultural services" for the population on the basis of a "cultural policy" (not to speak of those which are bent on initiating a "cultural revolution"). It can, however, be seen as something so ephemeral and inessential from the viewpoint of real life and its genuine concerns that only "culture-freaks" or "culture-vultures" will take it seriously.

"Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language." Thus Raymond Williams opens his overview of the history of the term.[5] It is therefore understandable that anthropologists or sociologists are moved to introduce their own definitions of "culture," each restrictive in respect of the richness of its everyday meaning (thereby leaving scope for, or even provoking, alternative conceptualisations), but allowing the investigation of a more sharply demarcated field of phenomena. However justified such a procedure may be, it is singularly ill-suited for *philosophical* purposes, first of all because philosophy is hardly "innocent" as far as the ambiguity of this term in its contemporary usage is concerned. "Culture" is a word of learned-scholarly origin; it entered everyday talk (during the nineteenth century, first in Germany) from the pages of philosophical, educational and social publicistics. The complexity and vagueness of its present-day meaning reflects in a sedimented form that complicated history during and in which it was first coined in its relevant senses, and then employed in varying contexts and for changing purposes in philosophy. So what for the social scientific disciplines may be a mere confusion of everyday talk, for philosophy is the outcome of its proper history and tradition which it must face and come to terms with.

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[4] See the results of a Gallup poll on the "cultural interests" of the American public as reported in the paper by H. Levin, "Semantics of Culture," in G. Holton ed., *Science and Culture*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1965, p. 7.

[5] R. Williams, *Keywords*, London; Fontana, 1976, p. 76.

This necessity of conscious reflection upon the ambiguities of the contemporary concept of "culture" is, at the same time, for philosophy something more than a demand for historical rectitude. The philosopher's concern with culture today partly stems from the confusing state of affairs just indicated: we all do accept, as a thing "evident" and "commonly known," that our culture to some extent shapes and forms us, but we seem not to know, or are at least unable to agree upon, how to understand and even less how to evaluate the fact implied. This intellectual unease is part of the vexation and discomfort with culture which spurs on philosophy, and at the same time it is constitutive to philosophy, being – to some degree – the outcome of its modern history.

Thus philosophy cannot simply set aside the confusing ambiguities pertaining to the concept (or concepts) of culture, since its concern with the latter is rooted in these ambiguities. To understand these concerns one must grasp at least the *main dimensions of meaning* which today we ascribe to this term – dimensions which are partly interconnected or overlapping, partly irreconcilable. And there is no better way to perform this task of clarification than by following up the history of the principal usages of the word, its changing role and function in the concerned discourses, at least to the point where it entered, already with a confounding richness of historically sedimented senses, the realm of everyday talk.

Such an *historical semantics*[6] of "culture" inevitably draws its material, since the term itself is of scholarly origin, largely from philosophical texts, or at least texts of philosophico-social publicistics. It should not be mistaken, however, for the history of the philosophical conceptions of, or ideas about, culture. Not only because there may well be quite sophisticated theories of culture which do not employ the *term* itself (this is, for instance, largely true of Turgot or Rousseau), but, more importantly, because such an historical-semantic overview deals only with those aspects and components of the concerned philosophical views that – often in a simplified and condensed form – entered some broader, ultimately the everyday, discourse.

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[6] For the concept and the disputed program of a historical semantics see R. Koselleck (Hg.), *Historische Semantik und Begrijfsgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1978, and D. Busse, *Historische Semantik*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1987.

Not philosophical ideas, but some of their sedimented meaning-components that began to function beyond the realm of philosophy proper as models for the articulation of social experiences and expectations, constitute the subject-matter of the analysis. This, however, endows it with an additional significance. The term "culture" – a rather marginal expression of learned discourses until the beginning of the nineteenth century – has had a phenomenal career in the last one hundred and fifty years, invading with its derivatives and composites the talk of all of us. With this term philosophy has had, so it seems, struck upon something for which there has been, under conditions of modernity, a widespread need of articulation, a "designative demand." By observing which elements of the usually much more complex philosophical ideas have contributed to the formation of the everyday concept and have been retained also in its contemporary usage, one acquires some access to the understanding of the character of this demand. Historical semantics can serve in this way as a binding link between history of philosophy and social history.

Culture: The Individual Dimension

The term "culture," present in a form derived from the Latin *cultura* in virtually all European languages (French *culture*, German *Kultur*, Italian *coltura*, Russian *kul'tura* and so on), is, in its relevant sense, a modern expression: the main components of its contemporary meaning were not formed and brought together before the last quarter of the eighteenth century. At the same time the development of its uses demonstrates far-reaching similarities, at least in English, German and French, allowing us to draw a composite picture of it, though at some point one must, of course, take into account also the differences of meaning among the respective national languages and cultures.

Though modern in its now-accepted meaning, the origin of the term "culture" goes back to Roman antiquity. It is ultimately derived from the verb *colere*, which itself had a wide range of significations and served as the root for many of our contemporary expressions, from "cult" to "colonialism." *Colere* primarily meant to tend, to work upon, to cultivate, especially in the sense of agricultural activities, but also to inhabit, to adorn or decorate, to worship or honour. As a derivative from *colere,* the noun *cultura* originally signified cultivation as agrarian activity, and sometimes also its basic

precondition, the cultivated land itself. But, as with many other terms related to the all-important function of farming, *cultura* (or, even more frequently, *cultus,* originally used in the same sense) early acquired a metaphorically extended meaning: it began to be employed to designate the cultivation or improvement of something in general, such as *cultura* or *cultus litterarum* – the cultivation of letters. Insofar as the contemporary understanding of our term is concerned, the decisive shift in its meaning occurred with Cicero. In his *Tusculanae Disputationes*[7] he compared the uneducated soul (*animus sine doctrina*) with the uncultivated land (*ager sine cultura*) to arrive at the famous formulation: *cultura … animi philosophia est* – philosophy is the cultivation of the soul.

The implied comparison between "cultivation" and "education" was in fact not original with Cicero. It occurred already in the Aristotelian corpus.[8] Cicero only metaphorically contracted an old rhetorical analogy. But in a vast, ethnically and culturally very heterogeneous empire, where rise into the rank of the elite depended largely upon the acquisition by an individual of a specific cultural tradition acting as the cement of unification, this notion of a *cultura animi*, understood as the process of forming and reforming intellectual and moral abilities through one's own self-educational effort, articulated a socially important idea and ideal. In any case it was popular enough at the time of extinguishing antiquity to invoke Christian opposition and criticism. St Augustine in one of his sermons – presumably with a directly polemical intention addressed at Cicero – compared God's tending of the human soul with the ploughman's cultivation of the land.[9] God opens, with his words as with a plough, our heart to the seeds of his instruction, which will bring the fruits of piety. He cultivates us, for which we should bring him our cult in adoration (*colit arando/colimus adorando*). For to take care of "his culture in our heart" (*ista cultura in cor nostrum*), in order not to be ungrateful to our ploughman, is to fulfill our obligation which makes not him richer, but us more blessed.

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7 Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes,* Book II, ch. V, sec. 13.

8 Compare Aristotle, *Problemata Physica,* Book XX, 924a 19–21.

9 St Augustine, *Sermo LXXXVII,* sec. 1, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Paris, 1841, vol. 38, pp. 530–531.

With this magnificent simile St Augustine initiated that medieval transformation of the meaning of the words "*cultura*" and "*cultus*" (treated as synonyms) which is preserved in our contemporary term "cult." Medieval authors frequently wrote about *cultura Christi*, *cultura Dei*, but also *cultura daemonum* – in all these expressions *cultura* means worship and adoration (of Christ, God or of the demons).

It is from the end of the fifteenth century onward that the old Ciceronian metaphor, and with it the individual-pedagogic sense of "culture" as mental cultivation, was discovered again, first by the Italian humanists, and was then used with a growing frequency. As a result the word also slowly crossed over into the various Western European vernaculars, at least in learned writings. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, expressions like *cultura mentis*, *cultura ingenii* and their vernacular equivalents (among them the English "culture of the mind") had become so accepted that Francis Bacon could build another metaphor on the original one turned into a commonplace. Referring to Virgil's famous didactic poem about agriculture, the *Georgica*, Bacon in his great systematisation of sciences bestowed the name *georgica animi* upon that part of the ethics which ought to deal with the principles and methods of moral education as cultivation of the soul (*cultura animi*).[10] Elsewhere in the same work[11] he used *cultura* without explicitly indicating the object (that is, the mind) that is to be cultivated – a fact which demonstrates that the original metaphoric character of the expression had been eroded in its habitual usage and had by then, in the meaning of practical and theoretical education and self-cultivation, acquired a direct sense.

This sudden popularity (especially in the circles of Renaissance humanists) of a long-forgotten ancient metaphor cannot be regarded as a mere accident. It expressed a definite change in the whole conception of education as against its medieval, scholastic practice. "Culture" with its strongly associated meaning of tending for natural growth manifested the idea that the education of children was not simply a "training" according to some pre-fixed model

[10] F. Bacon, *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1605), Book 7, ch. 1.

[11] *ibid.*, Book 6, ch. 4. In French the independent use of the term comes up somewhat earlier: Montaigne writes about his *esquise culture* (in the sense of excellent education) in the first book of *Essais*, ch. 26, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1969, p. 222.

determined by tradition and status, but ought to be the development and improvement of the inborn capacities and abilities of the child, a forming of its whole character undivorceable from its own effort and activity ("tended for," that is, directed and controlled by the educator). In a generalised way this point was strongly emphasised by Hobbes, who in his *Leviathan*[12] (1651) distinguished "culture" and "cult" then precisely on this basis. "Culture" meant any process of labour, the profits of which follow upon its performance "as a natural effect" – as with "the labor bestowed on the Earth" or with the education of children called "a *Culture* of their mindes." *Cult*, on the other hand – as with *Cultus Dei*, the worship of God – "signifieth as much as Courting, that is, a winning of favour by good offices." In general, the concept of culture never completely lost those organismic overtones which pertain to it in the sense of "cultivation," and many later theorists of culture, especially those who operated with the famous opposition between "culture" and "civilisation," foregrounded just this particular aspect of its meaning.

It was a small step to transfer the meaning of "culture" from the active *process* of ethical and intellectual cultivation to its *result*, the general *state* of a cultivated mind, or even broader, to the whole way of life of a person of refinement. When this transposition occurred – and it could be observed already with the writers of the seventeenth century – "culture" and its synonyms and derivates acquired the character of a concept of opposition. Possessing culture, being "cultivated" or "civilised" could sometimes (and not infrequently in the eighteenth century) be contrasted to mere gallantry, to a purely external well-manneredness. More importantly and more usually, however, it was counterposed to being "uncultured" in the sense of vulgar, uncouth and uneducated. This contrast, of course, could be used to legitimate and reinforce, by reference to inherited abilities for a superior, exemplary way of conduct, claims to ascriptively conferred social privileges. But the concept thus conceived primarily served as a vehicle through which new aspirations for social prestige and status became articulated and expressed. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries one could observe in all major Western European languages that the earlier designations of social elite

[12] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 2, ch. 31, ed. Macpherson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 399.

emphasising descent (being "high-born," a person of "noble birth" and so on) were gradually replaced by expressions referring to the "possession of culture" (a "person of culture/cultivation" in English; *hommes/gens des lettres* in French, *gebildete Stände* in German). This was often accompanied in the writings of the age by elaborate arguments justifying the fundamental division of society into two classes – the cultivated and the uncultivated – and at the same time demanding free access to "cultivation," that is, access irrespective of social origins. The enormous success of the concept of "culture" from this time on was evidently interconnected with the social change that replaced the feudal distinction of estates with a new principle of social stratification legitimated in terms of individual achievement to be reached – in one way at least – through the channels of education and "self-improvement."

The Societal Dimension

When "culture" – in the sense of a refined and polished state of mind and way of conduct – became used in the above manner to characterise a whole social group of people in opposition to other groups, the way became open to transfer its meaning to the characterisation of *entire societies*. "Culture" then began to connote that general social condition which allows people to live in an organised and well-ordered ("civilised," "policed") society, advanced in material comforts, possessing "polite," urbane mores and rich in intellectual achievements. It acquired the meaning of a refined way of social existence attributed to a whole people or nation at some period of history. Then the earlier dichotomy between "persons of culture" and the "vulgar mob," referring to intra-societal distinctions, became supplemented by an *inter*-societal one: that between "cultured" (more frequently "civil," "civilised") people and *savage or barbarous* ones.

Occasionally such a contrast between *nationes culti et civiles* and *gentes incultae et barbarae* (or their vernacular equivalents) appeared with the writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Thus Montaigne wrote about "less cultivated nations" (*nations moins cultivees*).[13] The first thinker, however,

[13] Montaigne, *Essais*, Book I, ch. 25, p. 184.

who clearly articulates the implied societal concept of culture is one of the influential representatives of the secular theories of natural law at the end of the seventeenth century, Samuel Pufendorf. In his polemic work *Eris Scandica* (published in 1686, presumed to have been written in 1675) Pufendorf – in many respects following in the footsteps of Hobbes – argued that cultivated life and mores (*vita culta, mores culti*) and the cultivation of the mind (*cultura animi*) are possible only in the *civil state* (*status civilis*) of a people. As opposed to the state of nature in which barbarous nations live, civil society is characterised by *culture* (used in an absolute sense). Pufendorf explicitly defined this latter as "all that which accrues to human life through the assistance, industry and invention of others, through one's own thinking and abilities, or through divine guidance."[14] As his further train of thought made clear, he understood by "culture" primarily the refined condition and way of life of a people, created through peaceful labour and cooperation possible only under a lawful order secured by the power of a unified state, that is, in a "civil society."

Though the societal concept of culture was firmly rooted in the dichotomy of the "savage/civilised," once formed it also allowed the difference between various peoples to be conceived of not in terms of an absolute contrast but as a matter of *gradations* in culture, that is, in the level of improvement and perfecting – in material, moral and intellectual respects – of the ways of social life. Thus a *differential* concept of culture was formed which was already clearly articulated in Voltaire's *Essais sur les moeurs* (1756): "nature provides the unity, it establishes everywhere a small number of invariable principles. Thus the ground is everywhere the same. Culture then produces the different fruits."[15] Such a view rendered possible the *historicisation* of the culture concept and its association with the notion of *progress*: largely the work of the late eighteenth century. If the societal meaning of culture was introduced first to

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[14] S. Pufendorf, *Eris Scandica*, ch. 3, sec. 3, quoted in J. Niedermann, *Kultur. Werden und Wandlungen des Begriffs und seiner Ersatzbegriffe von Cicero bis Herder*, Florence, Bibliopolis, 1941, p. 165. This book still offers the most comprehensive overview of the subject.

[15] Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, Book 3, ch. 197, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. L. Moland, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1877, vol. 13, p. 182.

designate a state – that is, a characteristic way of life of a people or society – the term then regained the original, active-processual meaning of "cultivation," understood not as an individual but instead as a collective historical process. As opposed to nature, "culture" then designated all that which human beings have created and produced, expanding and modifying (but also perhaps deforming) the common stock of inborn human abilities, shared by all. Culture as the process of "the education of mankind to full maturity" became one of the great themes of late German Enlightenment and classical idealism in Lessing, Herder, Kant, Fichte and Hegel.

"Culture" so understood allowed one to conceive of human unity and universality in all the diversity and distinction of particular societies and epochs of history. At the same time, however, it could create distance and new divisions. With the dissolution of personal (or at least personalised) forms and relations of dependence, accompanied by the slow disappearance of those communal events and performances, such as festivities and festivals, carnivals and public sermons, in which both lower and upper strata participated (even if in different roles), "culture" offered a conceptual vehicle to articulate and legitimate a feeling of existence of the alien, a consciousness of fissure among members of the same society. An interest in exotic cultures, these living examples of the variety of mores and "opinions," all to be judged and transformed by reason, went together with the casting of the "lower classes" in the role of aliens at home, "savages" or "barbarians," whose "culture" now equally becomes the object of a distanced interest. Ethnography and folklore emerge in one and the same process, within the framework of an identical conceptualisation.

> While "savages" could be understood comprehensively as men, "the people" were at the same time defamiliarised, and this made them worthy of empirical study or theoretical reflection. Peasants and urban illiterates were reworked conceptually so that they joined other exotics as anthropological objects exemplifying the category of "primitive".[16]

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[16] E. J. Hundert, "A Cognitive Ideal and Its Myth: Knowledge as Power in the Lexicon of the Enlightenment," *Social Research*, vol. 53, no. 1 (1986), p. 154.

Both these tendencies and interests belonged organically to the very program of an "Enlightenment": to make the "uncultivated" and "uncivilised" the *object* of a social-cultural pedagogy and thereby raise them to the status and dignity of genuine, rational subjecthood.

By the second half of the eighteenth century the two indicated meaning-components of "culture," its individual-pedagogic and societal-historical dimensions, were well established and coexisted in its still mostly learned usage. Through this fusion the very concept stimulated reflection upon the question: what is the relationship between the individual's effort at self-improvement, on the one hand, and the general way of life, the "culture" of a whole society as the latter changes over time, on the other? How do individual innovations relate to societal traditions and mores? It is around these problems that the first philosophical *theories of culture* emerged, already by the middle of the century. Through the concept of culture the emerging bourgeois society announced its claim to historical superiority as a form of order able to ensure the fullest development and unlimited perfecting of all human abilities – but it was also the idea of culture through which this claim becomes challenged and found unjustified. The first two genuine theories of culture, both announced in the same year of 1750, those of Turgot and Rousseau, stood symbolically for the ambiguity of an affirmative and a critical power pertaining to the same concept, an ambiguity which would accompany its whole history.

Culture, Civilisation, Bildung

It is, however, characteristic of these early theories of culture that they very rarely operated with this *term*: they usually employed instead a number of synonymous or at least closely related expressions. At this point therefore it becomes necessary to take into account some important differences in the use of this word within the various relevant national languages. No expression can be fully understood if one is unaware of those antinomic and metonymic (substitutional) relations in which it can stand to other terms in a given language. We have already discussed some of the most important opposites of "culture," and we shall return to them below. Now it is necessary to turn our attention to some of its most important synonyms at the time when its contemporary meaning had essentially been forged, and these synonyms

were quite different in the various vernaculars, first of all in French and in German.

In French in the second half of the eighteenth century, "culture" had to compete for acceptance with a scholarly term of even more recent origin, *civilisation*. This word was apparently a rather unartful concoction of one of the leading economists and social theorists of the time, the Marquis de Mirabeau. He first employed it in 1757, deriving it from the verb *civiliser* (to civilise) already widely used.[17] This latter again can be traced back to Latin origins, ultimately to *civis*, meaning citizen. *Civilitas* originally connoted the social virtues of a citizen, those characteristics which a free member of a well-ordered state must exhibit to be able to live peacefully in the social space, and to participate, alongside others, in the public practices of such a society. The term was reintroduced into broader use (followed by its vernacularisation in *civilité*, "civility" and so on) by the pedagogical treatise of Erasmus, *De civilitate morum puerilium libellus* (1530), a work of immense popularity and influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[18] Erasmus' book practically formulated, in rules of external demeanour and appearance valid for everyone, the demand for increased self-control and restraint made necessary by the denser, more heterogeneous and anonymous web of social encounters and relations in the rapidly developing urban milieus. But while to him

[17] See Mirabeau, "La Religion est sans contredit le premier et le plus utile frein de l'humanité; c'est le premier ressort de la civilisations" (*L'Ami des hommes ou Traité de la population*), quoted in E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 1, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 338.

[18] There have been 130 publications and translations of this book up to the early eighteenth century. On this and the following, see N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, vol. I, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1980, esp. pp. 65–110; and R. Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modem France*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1987, ch. 3, which partly corrects some one-sided features in Elias' path-breaking work. For further literature on the subject besides Benveniste's already mentioned paper, see L. Febvre, "Civilisation. Évolution d'un mot et d'une groupe d'idées," in *Civilisation. Le mot et l'idée*, Paris, La Renaissance du Livre, 1930; J. Moras, *Ursprung und Entwicklung des Begriffs der Zivilisation in Frankreich*, Hamburg, Seminar für romanische Sprachen und Kultur, 1930; and J. Starobinski, "Le mot Civilisation," in *Le temps de la reflexion*, vol. 4, Paris, Gallimard, 1983.

proper behavior was the expression or the exteriorised form of the inner ethical qualities of the soul, during the seventeenth century in France *civilité* often acquired a disparaging sense of a formal and deceptive pretence, a merely external accommodation to some conventional code of conduct and conversation. "Civility is a certain jargon men have established to hide the bad sentiments they have for one another," wrote Saint-Evremond.[19]

The ambiguity of this root meaning became to a degree transferred also to the new term "civilisation" as it was introduced by Mirabeau. With him, it designated primarily that historical process and its end-result as a societal state, through which the original "barbaric" ways of life became "civilised," and which are expressed first of all in the gradual softening of manners, in the development of urbanity and refined conduct in human societies. But at the same time he denounced the barbarism of our "false civilisation," in which urbanity and politesse represent only the mask of virtue and hide the corruption of humanity.[20] With all this ambiguity in its value-accent, the term entered French usage during the second half of the eighteenth century to denote precisely what we indicated as the second, *social* meaning-component of the term "culture." Thus, for example, d'Holbach identified civilisation with the "perfecting of our governments, our laws, our education, our institutions and our mores."[21] Since this provided in French an independent expression for this meaning-complex, the use of the term "culture" became – and remained until the first decades of the twentieth century – restricted to its first, *individual-pedagogic* sense. Even in 1929 the dictionary of Larousse explicated the meaning of culture, beyond its primary sense of cultivation, as education and instruction.

At first a similar development could also be observed in English. Whether following the French example or independently, the term "civilisation" was introduced by Adam Ferguson, in his seminal *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). "Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood,

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[19] Quoted in Starobinski, "Le mot Civilisation," p. 23.

[20] Compare Moras, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, pp. 38–41.

[21] d'Holbach, Paul Henri Thiry, Baron, *Système sociale ou principes naturels de la morale et de la politique*, London, 1774, Part III, p. 162, quoted in Moras, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, p. 50.

but also the species itself from rudeness to civilisation,"[22] states Ferguson in the opening paragraph of the book. In a later work with great clarity he explicated the specific sense of the term and at the same time foregrounded the complex connection between civilisation and economic development:

> The success of commercial arts … requires a certain security of person and property, to which we give the name of civilisation, although this distinction, both in the nature of things, and the derivation of the word, belongs rather to the effects of law and political establishment on the forms of society, than to any state merely of lucrative possession or wealth.[23]

It is seemingly from Ferguson that "civilisation" in this meaning was taken over first by other representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment (Adam Smith, Adam Millar), and then appeared in the broader usage. Only later, and definitely under German influence, did "culture" appear in a related sense.

For in Germany *Kultur* (or earlier *Cultur*) figured during the eighteenth century in a semantic field quite differently articulated from the one pertaining to its French equivalent. Its main synonym was *Bildung*, to which no term corresponds either in French or in English. *Bildung* is an old German noun derived from the verb *bilden*: to form, to shape, to create. Thus the primary meaning of *Bildung* is "forming." It also has, however, a strong association with the noun *Bild*, meaning image or picture. The German mystics of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Meister Eckhart, Seuse, Jakob Böhme) and in their wake the pietist writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Arndt, Oetinger) had already combined these two associated senses and played them off against each other: *Bildung* then denoted that process of spiritual forming and reforming through which the human individual by their own activity transforms the soul into the image of God. This religious meaning of the term was then secularised by the representatives of the German

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[22] A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 7th edn, Edinburgh, 1814, p. 2.

[23] A. Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Sciences*, vol. I, Edinburgh, 1792, p. 241.

Enlightenment.[24] With them, in the second half of the eighteenth century *Bildung* acquired the sense of the pedagogic process of self-cultivation understood as the inner-directed development of inborn dispositions and capacities, the forming of a natural particularity into a mature moral personality. Then, following the meaning-expansion of the closely associated *Kultur*, *Bildung* also became transferred to a societal and historical plane. In an often-quoted passage, Moses Mendelsohn graphically described the situation ensuing at the end of the century.

> The words *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), *Kultur*, *Bildung* are still newcomers in our language. They belong, for the time being, merely to the language of the books … The linguistic usage, which apparently intends to draw a distinction between these words of similar meaning, did not have yet the time to establish its boundaries. *Bildung*, *Kultur* and *Aufklärung* are modifications of social life, effects of the industry and the endeavor of men to improve their social state.[25]

Until the first decades of the nineteenth century *Bildung* and *Kultur* were in fact broadly used as synonyms – with some writers like Mendelsohn proposing their own distinctions, incongruent among themselves, between their respective meanings. Only from the second half of the nineteenth century did the commonly accepted sense of *Bildung* gradually become restricted to the educational process proper and to its result.

Thus semantic change in Germany in a sense proceeded precisely in the opposite direction from that in France. On the one hand, it was the individual-pedagogic meaning-component of "culture" which slowly became occupied by another term, thereby making the societal aspect of its meaning predominant. On the other hand, *Kultur*, due to its long association with *Bildung*, continued to retain the sense of an inner-directed process or a state as its

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[24] Compare R. Vierhaus, "Bildung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck, Stuttgart, Klett, 1972, vol. I; E. Lichtenstein, "Von Meister Eckhart bis Hegel. Zur philosophischen Entwicklung des deutschen Bildungsbegriffs," in *Kritik und Metaphysik* (Heimsoeth-Festschrift), Berlin, de Gruyter, 1966.

[25] M. Mendelsohn, "Über die Frage: Was heisst aufklären," (1784), in *Schriften über Religion und Aufklärung*, Berlin, Union Verlag, 1989, p. 461.

end-result, primarily of spiritual and intellectual character. Therefore, when in the last decades of the eighteenth century, under French influence, the term *Zivilisation* also appeared in German, it was perceived as denoting essentially the same class of phenomena which were referred to by *Kultur*, but as *connoting* something quite different. Kant was the first to explicitly articulate this discrepancy of meaning. "We are" – he wrote in his short paper on the *Idea for a Universal History* (1784) –

> to a high degree *cultivated* (*kultiviert*) through art and science. We are *civilised* (*zivilisiert*) – overburdened by it – in all sorts of social propriety and decorum. But to consider ourselves to be *moralised* – for that, very much is still lacking. For the idea of morality still belongs to culture; the use of this idea, however, a use which only amounts to a simulacrum of morals in the love of honour and outward decorum, this constitutes merely civilising.[26]

The differentiation between culture and civilisation – already with Kant based upon the counterposing of the development of inner capacities to that of external behaviour – was first transformed by Pestalozzi into a sharp opposition between the two. Civilisation rests on and affects only the sensuous nature of human beings, its spread is not only compatible, but often directly associated with the moral corruption of the masses seduced by sensuous satisfactions made easily available by it. It ought to be subordinated to, and checked by, culture (individual and national), which consists of the inner spiritual transformation of human beings, in elevation to true humanness, in the unfolding of the moral and spiritual potential of human beings.[27]

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[26] I. Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht," *Werke,* vol. 4 (ed. Cassirer), Berlin, 1913, p. 161. In his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, ed. T. F. Rink, Kant makes a somewhat different distinction between disciplining, cultivating, civilising and moralising. Culture here is understood as the development of skill through teaching and education, the purposeful formation of abilities that can be used for arbitrary ends. Civilisation, on the other hand, consists in the acquisition of that worldly prudence which makes the individual able to adapt to the ever changing conventions, the "proper manners" of his society, and thereby to make use of others for his own purposes. See Kant, *Werke*, vol. 8, pp. 464–465.

[27] Pestalozzi's views on the antagonism between culture and civilisation are first formulated in Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *An die Unschuld, den Ernst und den Edelmuth*

As Norbert Elias underlined – somewhat one-sidedly, but overall legitimately – the antithesis between culture and civilisation in the context of German Enlightenment served primarily the expression of the critique of the ethos of a largely French-speaking courtly nobility by the emerging middle-class intellectuals.[28] In the second half of the nineteenth century however, this original social content of the construction became largely irrelevant and lost. Already with Nietzsche, who played a key role in the transmission and reinterpretation of the oppositional conception of their relationship, the critique of civilisation primarily articulated a protest against the contradictions, the utilitarian spirit, and above all against the homogenising force of processes of modernisation then in full swing in Germany. "Culture is first of all the unity of artistic style in all life-expressions of a people."[29] And:

> *Culture* against *civilisation*. The high points of culture and civilisation are separated. One must not be misled concerning the abysmal antagonism of culture and civilisation. The great instants of culture were always, morally speaking, times of corruption; and correspondingly the epochs of the willed and enforced *taming of the human animal* ("civilisation") were times of intolerance against the most spiritual and boldest natures. Civilisation wills something else than culture does: perhaps something opposite.[30]

Then, around the turn of the century, the contrast between culture and civilisation increasingly acquired a new ideological content and significance. The certainly not uninteresting semantic fact, that in French and partly in English the term used for the designation of the process and results of human progress ("civilisation") primarily foregrounded, by its very origin, the effects of a *political-legal* and economic system on the social forms of conduct, while in German the term typically used in such contexts ("culture") above all

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meines Zeitalters und meines Vaterlandes (1815). Compare *Kultur und Zivilisation*, Europaische Schlüsselwirter, vol. 3 (ed. Sprachwissenschaftliches Colloquium, Bonn), München, Hueber, 1967, pp. 303 ff.

[28] See Elias, *Über den Prozess,* pp. 8ff and 36ff.

[29] F. Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, Leipzig, Kriner, 1930, p. 7.

[30] F. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, aph. 121, Leipzig, Kriner, 1959, pp. 88–89. See also aph. 122, 864, and 871.

connoted the effects of an inner, personality-building, *moral and intellectual* development, then became utilised for the formulation of claims of rival *nationalist* ideologies. World War I was fought under the slogans of defence of Western civilisation, on the one side, and defence of (German) culture against the deadening, materialist civilisation of the West, on the other side.

The idea of an antithesis between culture and civilisation does not seem to be alien to the renascent nationalisms of contemporary Eastern Europe. This would, however, only indicate their intellectual anachronism. For in the meantime culture has decidedly won out in the competition with civilisation – if in no other way, at least semantically: in contemporary parlance it has been firmly established as the more fundamental and encompassing concept. "Civilisation" today is commonly understood either as meaning the culture of more complex, usually state-organised societies, or – more rarely – it is used in a way roughly equivalent to "material culture."

The Aspect of Objectivation

The developments broadly indicated immediately above lie, however, outside the proper temporal frame of this essay, which is to deal with the formation process of the contemporary concept of culture. Since we have still not discussed all the basic aspects of this process, we again have to return to Germany of the late eighteenth century, where a further, perhaps the most decisive, step was taken in this direction. The societal meaning-component of culture originally designated – as we pointed out – the conditions and the general way of life of people and nations who have lifted themselves out of the natural state of "barbarism." The cultural education of mankind, so conceived, represented a favorite and hotly disputed topic in the late Enlightenment. It was in these German discussions of the 1770s and 80s (though implicitly prefigured in the earlier writings of French *philosophes*) that a further shift of meaning occurred. "Culture" began to designate not an improved, refined way of existence of some social group, or the appropriate spiritual and moral frame of mind of a people which alone can confer upon the former a genuinely human significance, but all the *totality of those "works,"* the creation and use of which makes the acquisition and sustenance of such a collective conduct or mentality possible at all. "Culture" became the synonym for all those *objectified results* of human creativity by and due to which

the "natural constitution" of human individuals – their inborn needs, drives and propensities – become modified, developed and supplemented, and which is inherited by each generation from its predecessors as its legacy to be appropriated and changed by its own activity.

The step from collective manners or mentalities to socially transmitted "works" may seem to be an easy and a small one, and certainly it was taken in a rather imperceptible way. Nevertheless it is far from being self-evident. Especially in Germany, where – as we have seen – emphasis fell upon the spiritual components of cultural development, where morality, religion, science and the arts were usually regarded as the most decisive forms and forces constituting culture, such a change of meaning could only occur when these latter became to be conceived as essentially *objectifying* activities. Since, however, neither moral and religious systems, nor scientific theories or literary works of art are "objects" in the common sense of the word, this is hardly a "natural" way to comprehend them. And in fact the new, objectivational meaning-component of culture arose in the wake of a change in the meaning of a long list of related expressions like "science," "philosophy," "religion," "art," "literature" and so on, a change which could be observed occurring, essentially during the eighteenth century, in all the major Western European languages. "Science," for example, originally meant not a system of true propositions about some domain of (natural) objects, but an aptitude to exercise a higher type of insight allowing the individual to comprehend necessary and general truths. "Literature" designated not the ensemble of the works of literary art, nor the whole body of books and writings, but individual erudition and "polite learning" acquired through reading. "Art" simply referred to learned technico-practical skills of all types, and so on.[31] The process through which all these terms obtain a *supraindividual and objectified* sense, clearly distinguished from the related individual dispositions and capacities (which

[31] About the changes in the understanding of "science" and "philosophy" see my paper, "Changing Images of Science," *Thesis Eleven*, no. 33 (1992), pp. 1–56. About the transformation of meaning of "literature," see C. Cristin, *Aux origines de l'histoire littéraire*, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1973, pp. 86–100; and U. Ricken, "Le champ lexical science – littérature en Français et en Allemand," *Dix-Huitième Siecle*, vol. 10 (1978), pp. 33–43. See also all the appropriate entries in Williams, *Keywords*.

is often reflected also in newly made linguistic distinctions, for instance between *littérature* and *connaissance des lettres* or between *Wissenschaft* and *Gelehrsamkeit*), signals one of the fundamental transformations in Western intellectual history. Its preconditions and implications cannot be discussed here. In the most schematic and general way only the following can be indicated: this semantic and conceptual change pointed to the co-occurrence of two processes. On the one hand, there was the emergence of a heightened sense and appraisal of human creativity, with a strong, positive value-emphasis on novelty itself. On the other hand, there was a change of attitude toward the results of human activity which are no longer seen as merely fleeting externalisations of individual performances but as realities (be they material or "ideal") with a life and logic of their own that may be largely independent from the intentions of their creators. In both these aspects the semantic change ultimately expressed an altered, more distanced relation of the individual toward both their inherited tradition and their direct social environment.

The objectivational meaning-aspect of "culture" was formed in the German philosophical, historical and educational publicistics of the period in a rather imperceptible manner. Nevertheless, if one wishes to connect its articulation with a single name, it certainly ought to be that of Johann Gottfried Herder. "Culture" for Herder designated all that which distinguishes the human way of life from animal existence. The human individual, a creature of "weak instincts," has a "second genesis" which actually occupies its whole life after natural birth and consists in the acquisition and application of everything that is communicated (*mitgeteilt*) to it – in the broadest sense of the word – by the past generations. This is culture – all the inherited accomplishments (*Leistungen*) of the past, used and modified in the present, the sum total of objectively, socially transmitted abilities and experiences. And since for Herder cultivation as the second genesis of the individual encompassed the development of practical bodily skills, the refinement of human senses and the formation, primarily through the learning of a language, of specific mentalities (*Denkarten*) including both theoretical and moral constituents, his conception of culture was also formidably broad. At various points in his writings he listed as its elements the language of a people, the means and objects of subsistence, the instruments and ways of communication and commerce, all forms of art, science, political and legal institutions, the forms of religious

service and belief, and the whole diversity of customs and mores.[32] At the same time he underlined that all these various elements form an interconnected and structured whole: ultimately it was this whole that should be understood by the culture of a people or an age, "the blossom of its existence."

The emergence of this objectivational concept of culture introduced not only new complexities, but also further serious strains into the meaning of the term. First of all "culture" then appeared as one of the poles of a new dichotomy: in the sense of the sum-total of all human objectivations and accomplishments it became the opposite to *nature* itself. Certainly the societal meaning of culture – as it could be seen in the case of Pufendorf or Voltaire – already involved the counterposing of the "state of culture" to the "state of nature." This latter was, however, still identified with the way of existence of "savage or barbarous" people. Herder, however, consistently drawing the conclusions from his new culture-concept, directly attacked this identification:

> This chain of culture and enlightenment … reaches as far as the end of the Earth. Even the inhabitant of California or Fireland learned to make and to use bow and arrow; he possessed a language and concepts, had practices and arts which he learned just as we do our own. Insofar he was really cultivated and enlightened, even if only to the lowest degree. The difference between the enlightened and unenlightened, cultivated and uncultivated people is therefore not specific, but only a matter of degree.[33]

In this new understanding "culture" acquired the significance of that which all forms of human existence, and only they, share. At the same time, however, it also retained – as Herder's words equally illustrate – its earlier connection with the idea of both individual and collective cultivation and perfecting. It then signified both that in which the various social groups and societies differ from each other *and* what unifies them all. In this ambiguity,

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[32] See for example J. G. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791) in *Sämtliche Werke* (ed. Suphan), Berlin, 1877-, vol 14, p. 42; vol. 13, pp. 347–348; vol. 22, pp. 310–311, etc.

[33] *ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 348.

which replaces the earlier clearly drawn and fixed boundaries between the "We" and the 'They" (Hellenes versus Barbarians, Christians versus pagans, the civilised versus the savage and so on), it directly demanded and stimulated reflection upon the meaning of the unity of humankind and its relation to intra- and inter-social differences.

At the same time, however, the new concept of culture rendered deeply problematic the very notion that traditionally served as the pivot and main vehicle of all such reflections. When culture as the generic characteristic of all human ways of life became counterposed to nature as such, the meaning (and meaningfulness) of a conception of *human nature* was called into question. "We speak of art as distinguished from nature but art itself is natural to man,"[34] sums up the dilemma, according to Ferguson. The formation of the modern conception of culture signalled that the humanity of human beings itself had turned into a problem, its meaning no more safely fixed in the ideals transmitted by religious or secular traditions, but something for which to search.

Another strain in the newly formed and respectively enriched concept of culture added a further complexity to this quest. "Culture," with its metaphoric derivation from the idea of cultivation of the soil, always had a strong association with the notion of tending organic growth. In the German conception of *Kultur/Bildung* as the inner-directed, harmonious unfolding of our spiritual potentials, this connection received a particularly strong reinforcement. But with the semantic shift to an objectivational meaning (culture as the totality of human-made objects of whatever kind) an opposite tendency emerged: not what comes into being naturally and needs only a tending care, but everything that is *produced* by human effort, that is brought into existence solely by our makings and doings, pertains to the proper realm of the cultural. What, however, do all these doings do to us, the makers, who, nevertheless, always remain a "part" of nature – finite beings who come and mostly cease to exist not by our making, who are born with some pre-given complex of imperative natural wants and a limited reservoir of propensities, who are subject to natural influences and cannot escape its laws? What *happens* to us through our

[34] Ferguson, *Essay*, p. 10.

own *makings*? "Culture" becomes one of the central ideas through which philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attempt to formulate and answer this question.

The Value Dimension

As we could see in the case of Herder, the explicit extension of the concept of culture to embrace all types of objectifying activities and their products went together with the emphatic assertion of the interconnection among them due to which they form a single totality. "Culture" served to articulate the inner *coherence and unity* of the various social practices through which a society reproduces itself as a stable and self-identical whole. And here again one is faced with a paradoxical situation. For this conception explicitly emerges at a time when such a unity and stability was in fact to a large extent (at least *prima facie*) gone. The concept of culture was the product of a *dynamic and pluralistic* society in which the various significant practices acquired a high degree of institutional separation, became sharply differentiated from each other and thereby gained a degree of uncoordinated internal autonomy. Thus in respect of its native soil, the societies of Western modernity, "culture" – one of the most important conceptual vehicles of their self-understanding – represents rather a *utopia* or a *task*, the task of achieving genuine social cohesion and integration through the largely spontaneous interplay of diverse processes and practices of socialisation, but this task is articulated by it as *fact*, always ready, present and universally pertaining to every human society. This partly hidden and strained relation between normativity and facticity is constitutive for the concept of culture and can be traced back to its historical roots.

During the whole history of its variegated use, "culture," in all its relevant senses, was usually regarded as referring to some *positive value or values* of universalistic character. This was so even in the cases when the term was explicitly posited as applicable only to particular individuals, groups or societies, that is, when it meant the specific and differential "cultivatedness" and "refinement" of mind and/or conduct. Even then, however, culture was conceived as the state embodying or approximating to human perfection and excellence toward which everyone *ought* to aspire, though, for accidental or

essential reasons, only a few can in fact attain it. It was this underlying normative universalism of the concept which in a sense made the transition from its individualistic to its differential societal use, and then from this latter to its universalistic-generic employment an imperceptibly proceeding process of a gradual shift in meaning.

True, not all theories about culture shared this positive evaluation of it. The idea that "cultivation," both as the education of the individual and as the historical process of social refinement, could produce negative consequences (enfeeblement, oversophistication, decadence and so on) was commonplace, certainly predating any elaborate theory of culture. And the emergence of such theories was essentially simultaneous with the appearance of the first forms of a *radical critique* of culture (Rousseau, Linguet and so on). Indeed, these sharply opposed evaluations constituted an important source and aspect of that ambiguity which surrounds this concept even today. Nevertheless, in spite of these facts of dissent, all thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shared the conviction that culture designates something which is *inherently value-related*, and has a necessary relationship to the sense and worth that human life has or can acquire. Therefore they also implicitly presupposed that one cannot understand the phenomena of culture as culture without making a value-judgement about them.

It is this normative dimension of its meaning, its posited positive or negative relation to a set of universal human values, which makes the term "culture" significant when used in the *singular alone*, even long after theoretical attention has been focused on the historical diversity and variability of its "forms." The objectivational-generic conception of culture, with its emphasis on the idea that all people and nations have their own culture, necessarily brings into relief this historical and social plurality. In this respect Herder can again be taken as the representative case. No one protested more vehemently than he did against the evaluation of other epochs or nations according to the model and standards of our own time and society. The irreducible variety of cultures, each developing according to its own place and time, was for him not only an undeniable fact, but also a value in itself. Furthermore, he specifically underlined that culture was able not only to "form," but also to "deform" (*bilden/missbilden*), to truly cultivate or to corrupt. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, on no single occasion did he use in his truly voluminous

writings the term *Kultur* in the plural. And this was not accidental. For Herder "cultures" are essentially variations, graded modifications of the single "true culture" as ideal: the realisation of our humanness (*Humanität*) which is the historical vocation of mankind. Nor was this usage, and the view underlying it, idiosyncratic to Herder or to the German theoretical scene in the early decades of the nineteenth century alone, as can be illustrated by the following quote from a historian of American cultural anthropology:

> In extended researches into American social science between 1890 and 1905, I found no instances of the plural form in writers other than Boas prior to 1895. Men referred to "cultural stages" or "forms of culture" …, but they did not speak of "cultures". The plural appears with regularity only in the first generation of Boas' students around 1910.[35]

But the same inherent value-relatedness which for a long time succeeded in keeping the notion of culture in the singular, at the same time led to an internal and *hierarchically* conceived differentiation of all that was encompassed by this concept. The attempt to order the various components of culture according to their value, and more importantly, to make a principal distinction between those cultural activities which in their objectified accomplishments are value-creating, and therefore valuable in themselves, and those which constitute merely the neutral-factual basis for the development of the former, in other words to draw a line between "high" culture and the "general" or "common" one, has been from the very beginning present at least implicitly in the theories of the Enlightenment. An explicit formulation of this distinction was, however, offered only by Kant. In the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* he sharply differentiated between two separate aspects of cultural development. This latter involved, on the one hand, the evolving *culture of skill* (*Kultur der Geschicklichkeit*) which constituted the main subjective condition for acquiring the necessary abilities to realise whatever ends we might have, but which was "not adequate to assist the will in the determination and choice of its ends." Counterposed to it as a "higher culture" was the *culture of discipline* (*Kultur der Zucht*), represented by the progress of the sciences and the arts,

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[35] G. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 203.

liberating us from the "despotism of desires" and making us thereby "receptive to higher ends."[36] As our earlier quotation from his *Idea for a Universal History* illustrated, Kant in some of his extra-systematic, popular writings also included morality in the realm of high culture, so conceived. Since this flagrantly contradicted some of the basic presuppositions of his system, such as the noumenal character of morality which implies its atemporal character, his hesitations on this count demonstrate the pull of the idea to articulate the fact/value distinction as wholly internal to the concept of culture itself.

When we speak today as a matter of course about different cultures (in the plural), our talk reflects a further change in the meaning of the term directly connected with the attempt to consistently realise precisely this endeavour: the "scientisation" of the concept of culture in the early years of twentieth century. The emerging social scientific disciplines of anthropology and (partly) sociology explicitly and programmatically aimed at the concept's neutralisation and relativisation, at its divorce from a single binding set of human values. Accordingly they intended to completely dissociate the general ("anthropological") meaning of culture as a historical facticity and the object of their investigations from the necessarily value-marked concept of a "high culture." These developments again lie beyond the temporal limits of this essay. It ought, however, to be indicated that even within these specialised disciplines one can question the success of the effort at the complete discrimination and divorce of the two relevant concepts. One could, for instance, refer to the fact that even cultural anthropologists, when they apply their theories to the analysis of complex societies, "high civilisations," often give such a weight, and ascribe such a significance, to "high cultural" practices, which hardly seems to be justified in view of the general definition of culture they propose and of the disdain with which they tend to treat the "opera-house" understanding of culture.[37] In any case, insofar as our general

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[36] See I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskaft und Schriften* (1793), sec. 8.3, *Werke insechs Banden*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buch Geseilschaft, 1975, vol. 5, pp. 511–513.

[37] To take an illustrious example, one could compare A. Kroeber's general definition of culture in *Anthopology*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948, p. 253, with the weight he gives, and the extent of coverage he devotes in *Configurations*

and common discursive practices are concerned, the confusing intermingling of the two concepts of culture – one referring to a universal anthropological-sociological fact and one expressing the particular value our society ascribes to some highly specific activities – continues with undiminished intensity.

The concepts in terms of which we can articulate our world and self-understanding are not neutral tools of the intellect which we can change, make and dismiss as we will. In their sedimented meaning they transmit to us a history in which we ourselves are situated and from which we cannot step out to judge their adequacy from the Archimedean point of pure insight. We are not imprisoned in their ready-found circle: as we try to understand our own situation, to solve our own practical and intellectual tasks, we create new concepts, reinterpret or redefine old ones, but, on the other hand, a pre-given conceptual framework, even if in an indeterminate and fluid way, always already circumscribes the scope of what we consider worthy to understand or solve, and the ways we regard as rational for approaching such tasks. We make our concepts in the public practices of thinking, but they also make our thoughts, and in this way ourselves as well.

These are the trivialities which we know today when we are aware of ourselves as cultural beings, and of our thinking as belonging to a particular culture. Modernity, conscious itself as a "culture," seems to condemn us to this skepsis-generating chain of self-reflexivity. The concept of "culture," whose rapid linguistic and intellectual spread in the last two centuries was due primarily to the fact that it gave a concentrated expression to the faith of the Enlightenment in the boundless meaning- and value-creating power of the human mind, bears witness to the contradictions, strains and fissures of its contemporary meaning, as well as to the discouraging fate of this faith. We cannot cope with our intellectual perplexities except in its name, but we also cannot fail to realise that it is equally the partial cause or constituent of these same perplexities.

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of Cultural Growth, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1944, to the analysis of religion, philosophy, science, philology and art, when he outlines a general theory of cultural evolution.

Already Kant, faced with the antinomies of the Enlightenment, conceived the standpoint of "maturity of reason" as *a tertium datur* between the optimistic blindness of a dogmatic belief in the unlimited power of our understanding *and* the resigned or reconciled impotence of a paralysing scepticism. We can no longer share his view in the possibility of discovering, once and for all, those "limits of reason" that would allow us to firmly outline the shores of an island of rational certainty in the sea of our finite accidentalities. We can do no better than to undertake again and again the task of an inevitably *historical* self-reflection in the attempt to construct some fragile and, no doubt, provisional sense out of that process through which we became what we are, not to "plan" and "make" the future, but to participate as responsible and conscious human beings in that collective history of the present which is our life. For the ever elusive "maturity of reason" remains also our task.

Chapter Eleven

Condorcet: Communication/Science/Democracy

In the past few decades Condorcet's oeuvre has undergone a radical re-evaluaton. For a long time it had been relegated to the status of a final footnote to the history of the French Enlightenment. Condorcet is the "last Encyclopaedist," who defended – undoubtedly, with great personal integrity – the (somewhat simplistically understood) principles of Enlightenment at the very time of their practical defeat. At best he has been seen as a secular saint with a vast mind filled with rather narrow and short-lived ideas. Such was his canonical image in French culture, as the editors of his mathematical manuscripts – the most recent and encompassing (although far from complete) publication of Condorcet's work[1] – make clear.

The rehabilitation of Condorcet as a thinker concerned first of all his mathematical work. His publications and manuscripts on the project of an *arithmétique sociale*, earlier regarded as a mere curiosity, have now

[1] Compare J.-A.-N. Condorcet, *Arithmétique Politique: textes rares ou inédits (1767–1789)*, ed. B. Bru and P. Crépel, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1994, p. 375.

acquired a firm and illustrious place in the history of late-eighteenth-century mathematics. Keith Barker, Gilles Granger, Lorraine Daston and others have shown that – together with Laplace and in response to the crisis evoked by D'Alembert's critique – he consummated the development of the classical theory of probability. At the same time, the distinction Condorcet drew (even if in a convoluted and at times unclear manner) between objective and subjective probabilities also contributed to the overcoming of this crisis. His writings on voting raised and solved, one hundred and sixty years before Kenneth Arrow demonstrated his impossibility theorem, some of the basic problems of rational choice theory. In fact his project is now seen as encompassing – with various degrees of concreteness and clarity – almost all the contemporary disciplines of a broadly conceived probabilistic analysis, from mathematical statistics to cost-benefit analysis.

Simultaneously there has been a re-evaluation of Condorcet as a political theorist. He is even regarded today as the first radical "feminist," who raised the question about the equality of sexes – before Mary Wollstonecraft – not only as a juridical-political, but also as a social, educational and, in a sense, ideological-psychological problem. Condorcet's consistent critique of racist ideas and his anti-colonialism have attracted similar attention, while his project of a public insurance scheme – one of the practical applications of his social mathematics – is now appreciated as foreshadowing, in certain important respects, the idea of a welfare state.

Nevertheless, Condorcet the *philosopher* still remains in shadow. His main work, the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1822), is still essentially subsumed under the misleading shibboleth of being the first theory of the inevitability of Progress (with a capital P); a rather naive and simplistic precursor of the (rather naively and simplistically understood) theories of Hegel and Marx. As Peter Gay remarks, it is "as much a caricature of the Enlightenment as its testament."[2] In this respect it is significant that the extensive fragments of the envisaged great work, the fragments of the first, fourth, fifth and tenth epochs (to which the *Esquisse* was to have been a mere

[2] P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 2, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970, p. 122.

prospectus), are still only available in a 150-years-old, and textually quite unreliable, edition. Without knowledge of these fragments his theoretical views are, however, hardly comprehensible at all. Even today the *Esquisse* is primarily remembered and viewed through the pathetic/tragic aura of the conditions of its composition. It is an invocation of the total history of humanity, its past as well as its future, in the justification of the ideas and the conduct of a man now insecurely hiding himself from political persecution and a certain death sentence, a fate that he ultimately did not evade. Condorcet the philosopher is primarily a sentimental figure: "The Noble Philosopher," as the title of his relatively recent English-language biography puts it.[3] He is the nice guy of philosophy, with all the condescension such a characterisation entails.

I would not want to deny that Condorcet's philosophical views, in some respects, might legitimately be called naive. His anthropology rests on a rather straightforward generalisation of a Lockean–Condillacian theory of ideas accepted as proven truth. His standpoint, moreover, may be seen as anachronistic in comparison with his contemporaries Hume or Kant; this is not only in respect of Condorcet's adherence to the Lockean–Condillacian position, but also because of his view of the relationship between theoretical and practical cognition. But the most frequently and emphatically raised charge against him – his allegedly simplistic intellectualisation and reduction of human history to a continuous growth of knowledge, a reduction that serves as the organising principle of his whole Esquisse – is not simply a matter of naivety. It cannot be, since it is consciously directed against Condorcet's great (although never directly named) adversary, the one who first radically questioned the legitimacy of any such endeavour: that is, Rousseau. For in Condorcet's view, Rousseau was the spiritual father of the Jacobinism that was now driving the greatest revolution in history towards its ruin. However shaky its ultimate foundations, the *Esquisse* presented a sustained and complex argumentation against Rousseau's "brilliant paradoxes;"[4] it was

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[3] E. Goodell, *The Noble Philosopher: Condorcet and the Enlightenment*, Buffalo, NY, Prometheus, 1994.

[4] J.-A.-N.Condorcet, *Esquisse: Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of Human Mind*, trans. J. Barraclough, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, p. 142. All references to the *Sketch for a Historical Picture* are to this English translation.

a critique aiming to prove "that the progress of virtue has always gone hand in hand with that of enlightenment."[5] For, as Condorcet argues, science and the sole sociopolitical order in which moral conduct need not be a matter of individual excellence and personal sacrifice – namely, liberal democracy – mutually presuppose each other. In the exposition and legitimising of this fundamental idea he offers considerations that are not only original, but also prefigure theories that will have an illustrious post-history.

Two fundamental, paradigmatic principles of construction underlie the schematic picture of human history as progress presented in the *Esquisse*. On the one hand, it reconciles a thoroughly naturalistic understanding of human nature, invariant and unchangeable in its elementary capacities, with a view of history as unlimited by any natural constraints. Human history is a process of indefinite progression in so far as the social and individual effects or outcomes of the *exercise* of these human capacities are concerned. Secondly, he radically temporalised the idea of utopia, transforming it from an imaginary counterpoint into the consummation of actual history, making the comprehension of the past as something intelligible and the creation of a humanly meaningful future mutually conditioning each other. Since this latter aspect of Condorcet's thought has been convincingly analysed in Bronislaw Baczko's excellent book on Enlightenment utopias,[6] I shall only concentrate here on the first issue mentioned.

"[O]ur faculty of thinking is solely the result of the organisation of the body, of the manner the sentiment of the Ego is due … to a particular combination of the elements from which the body is formed."[7] So wrote Condorcet in one of his early manuscripts. This "militant materialism" is the point of departure for his anthropology. To the Lockean faculties of the human mind – sensibility, the ability to compare and combine ideas and reflection (in its elementary form tied to the mechanism of memory) – Condorcet adds the emotive-moral supplement of a limited empathy (Rousseau's *pitié*) with the sufferings of one's own kind, at least of those with whom a human being is in

[5] *ibid*., p. 54.

[6] B. Baczko, *Lumières de l'utopie*, Paris, Payot, 1978, ch. 4.

[7] Condorcet, "Sur la persistance de l'âme," in *Arithmétique Politique*, p. 320.

relatively frequent contact. All these fundamental constituents of human nature are equally present in higher animals. The difference is merely quantitative, a question of degree. And the latter point is primarily due to a fortunate combination of biological and behavioural characteristics, which may themselves be shared with certain other species. The list of these characteristics, provided in the fragment of the first epoch, is quite impressive even today: bipedalism, which freed the hand and the movement of the head; a variegated and non-fixed diet; exceptionally prolonged period of maturation; particular evolution of the organs of sound production and hearing; and, ultimately, higher development of the brain, especially of its finer structure.[8] All this ensured the "natural supremacy" of the human animal as far as the scope and variety of the combinatorial analysis of received ideas, their decomposition, recombination and comparison, were concerned. This ensured the (still quantitative) superiority of human beings in respect of the capacity of learning, that is, individual progression.

According to this so-conceived account of human nature, the elementary capacities and propensities of human individuals are constant, that is, unmodifiable by historical changes. Rousseau's historicisation of human nature – knowingly or unknowingly – can only serve as the theoretical legitimisation of an authoritarian, despotic radicalism. For if the social conditions of human existence can transform human nature itself, one cannot escape the following conclusion: that the human beings who emerge from actual history into the present are necessarily *depraved*, since this history has been predominantly that of despotism, inequality and obscurantism. And if this is so, then people can reach freedom only against themselves. They have to be forced to be free: either by the irrational, charismatic power of the Great Legislator, or, in a more mundane way, by the terror of the virtuous few. Only if each and every human individual is endowed, independently of gender, race or culture, with the immutable capacity of reason, can radical social change as the work of social and political emancipation be the result of the free and autonomous decision of the concerned individuals themselves.

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[8] Compare Condorcet, *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, 12 vols, ed. A. C. O'Connor and M. F. Arago, Paris, Firmin Didot frères, 1847-49, vol. VI, pp. 290-292.

Human nature is, however, not only immutable – hardly a promising premise for a philosophy of history – but the psychological mechanisms fixed in it also constitute, for Condorcet, the ultimate and sole explanatory principles of human behaviour and all its changes. At the very beginning of the *Esquisse* Condorcet writes about the lawful progress of humanity in history; but he immediately clarifies that this does not imply the existence of irreducibly historical or sui generis social laws: "This progress is subject to the same general laws that can be observed in the development of the faculties of the individual, and it is indeed no more than the sum of that development realised in a large number of individuals joined together in society."[9] The sole historical law that Condorcet ever mentions is a *soi disant* law only, since it refers not to a necessity but to a mere possibility: the "law" of indefinite human perfectibility. From a definite historical moment onwards (and Condorcet gives inconsistent answers as to which one) it will be transformed into a genuine law: the law of progress rendering human progression secure, regular and irresistible. But this becomes a law only under specific historico-social circumstances, which are themselves created by human activity.

The "law" of perfectibility asserts nothing but the possibility of the continuation of the learning process (the progression of the individual) beyond the life span of the single individual. This is the sole characteristic that makes human beings "distinct from the other species of animals": they are "no longer confined like them to a purely individual perfection."[10] For while the laws of individual development remain always the same, the material to be acquired in this development and the conditions of its acquisition radically change in history and can be characterised only in specifically social terms.

History is, for Condorcet, the gradual expansion of the scope of socialisation that – within the framework of his intellectualism – he identifies with cumulative social learning. And just because history is homogenised and ordered into a continuum under the aspect of the growth of (broadly conceived) knowledge, it also appears as radically punctured, ruptured by a series of transformations in the conditions of its acquisition and dissemination. The fundamental turning points in history are revolutions in communication,

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[9] Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture*, p. 4.

[10] *ibid.*, p. 6.

that is, in the ways in which knowledge can be accumulated, distributed and transmitted though time and space. The conjectural events of three such great revolutions determine the path of historical progress.

The first one had been the gradual evolution of an articulate, conventional *language* (indeed a significant part of the fragment of the first epoch is dedicated to the naturalistic explanation of its origin). It is synonymous – in conjunction with the habitual use of tools and the emergence of the earliest forms of small-scale but stable social organisations with rudimentary ideas of right and wrong – with the decisive ascendancy of humankind out of the animal kingdom. Human beings can now learn from the experience of others and can form a stable body of social knowledge deposited in oral tradition. But oral communication is restricted to a limited range of personal contacts and by the anthropologically fixed compass of individual memory. In general it is characterised by inertia. Moreover, in a barely disguised polemic against the Jacobin practice of engaging in an oratorical-demagogic mobilisation of the emotion-driven urban crowd, Condorcet specifically emphasises its lack of precision, its being devoid of the means of critical analysis – in short, its overall affective character.

The *invention of writing*, "the only method of establishing and maintaining a tradition, of communicating and transmitting knowledge *as it grows*," represents the second great revolution.[11] At this point, however, the path of history – Condorcet certainly hopes only temporarily – bifurcates. It takes a different course in the East and West, depending primarily on the divergent *social uses* of writing as cultural technique. In the great oriental empires, although they were actually the motherlands of this invention, the development of this new method of objectivation and communication of knowledge became arrested at its early, ideographic-hieroglyphic stage. The immense complexity of such a script rendered impossible the acquisition of literacy by most people. And it became frozen at this stage, because this new technique from the very beginning had been monopolised by the priests (those eternal antagonists of progress) and the "teaching castes." Therefore it had in fact been transformed into a new instrument of their domination. Great cultural achievements could have been reached on this basis, but knowledge turned

[11] *ibid*., p. 36, emphasis added.

into the privilege of a caste, artificially cut off from broader practical-social control, and one that ultimately and inevitably becomes ossified. The path of the Orient led to stagnation, which only an external impact can now overcome.

In its content Condorcet's perfunctory treatment adds nothing essentially new to the standard Enlightenment image of "Oriental despotism." It does shed light, however, on some fundamental principles of Condorcet's construction of history. Stagnation, decadence, cultural-political collapse, all these phenomena, so frequent – nay, prevalent – in the actual course of history, are not to be explained by some inherent tendency of, or "original fault" in, human nature itself; nor are they, however, just unfortunate accidents. These evils, which arrest or reverse progress – in this Rousseau was right – are made possible by progress itself. For neither error nor ignorance as such is to be blamed; they are in themselves natural and harmless concomitants of the growth of knowledge that in all empirical fields is merely probable, thus fallible. For each step forwards in its progress simultaneously opens up new realms of the unknown. Ignorance and errors are both due to the necessary "disproportion … between what it knows, what it wishes to know and what it believes it needs to know."[12] This is just what makes human progression indefinite: not error itself, but its fixation by powerful vested interests, its transformation into institutionalised superstition; not ignorance itself, but the artificially created gulf and social barrier between the ignorant many and the knowledgeable few that makes the former dependent on the latter. These are the obstacles that progress creates on its own path. They can be overcome only by further progress. The growth of knowledge produces these obstacles, however, not in and by itself but rather through the ever-recurring possibility of its monopolisation. Only if social conditions can be created that systematically exclude this possibility can progress become a genuine law of history.

Therefore, although its coming into being was due to the accidental coincidence of a number of disparate factors and events, there is nothing accidental in the character of the historical society that first fully realised the intellectual and social potential of writing: ancient, classical Greece. For here the most

[12] *ibid*., p. 10.

easily acquirable, "democratic," *alphabetic* form of writing, which made widespread literacy possible, met with appropriate social circumstances: a number of small, competing republican city-states without strong centralised political authority and without a unified priesthood, which at the same time were in contact with many foreign centres of culture. These were the preconditions of the Greek miracle: the creation of *philosophy* as critical-rational discourse in which everyone can argumentatively participate to communicate as an equal the truth that he found. The flourishing of classical Athens provides the first great historical example of the organic unity of democracy and the progress of thought.

This was, however; a short-lived flourishing. In his discussion of the limitations of Greek learning, Condorcet partly just repeats the usual *topoi* of the critique of the "spirit of systems," a subject elaborated by some of the leading representatives of the French Enlightenment. In part, however, he also points out the inherent weaknesses of *manuscript* culture. Owing to their rarity, manuscripts, even under conditions of a widespread literacy, make the formation of a unified, homogeneous public impossible. For just this reason Greek philosophy therefore remained a matter of "sects and schools." Owing to their fragility, manuscripts as a form of cultural transmission render such a culture also particularly vulnerable. When the political conditions of free public discussion are gone, it is apt to collapse; even its tradition can to a large extent be lost, to be followed by a long and dark epoch of decline.

Therefore the mere revitalisation of ancient learning – for the possibility of which Europe is indebted solely to the Arab world – would not have been sufficient by itself to explain the rise of modern, experimental-empirical sciences, that is, of science in the proper sense of the word. In the conjuncture of factors rendering it possible, the third communicative revolution played a particularly prominent role. This revolution was *printing*, "the means of communicating with people all over the world;"[13] the "preserving art of human reason," which makes each new discovery "the patrimony of all nations."[14] It first made accessible in principle to each individual the whole store of

[13] *ibid*., p. 100.

[14] Condorcet, "Inaugural Lecture at the French Academy," in *Oeuvres*, vol. I, p. 393.

accumulated knowledge, opinions and methods; it simultaneously allowed the emergence of a homogeneous public opinion, this "tribunal, independent of all human coercion."[15] It is in connection with the effects of printing that Condorcet first refers to progress becoming the true law of history. He means this, however, in a negative sense alone: "the doors to truth" cannot be "closed again."[16] With the spread of books a complete loss of cultural memory, the eradication of scientific achievements, became impossible.

This connection between printing and the rise of science is not a matter of historical accident, but is grounded rather in the very nature of science. For science in Condorcet's understanding is both an epistemic and social formation. As opposed to a doctrine or system, it is not the organised storehouse of established truths. True science exists only as the uninterrupted process of the critical, methodical and experimental inquiry into the laws of an inexhaustible nature; it is a particular manner of *producing* truths. By establishing a precise, quantifiable connection between the concepts of the theory and the data of observation, it not only makes the unobserved predictable; in this manner it also overcomes the unalterable anthropological limits of human intelligence. To use our contemporary idiom, by "chunking information" through the introduction of abstract theoretical concepts it allows an indefinitely expanding multitude of isolated observations to be retained and rationally handled in spite of the narrowly circumscribed capacity of human memory. The general method making possible such an accomplishment is, of course, nothing else but the combinatorial analysis of ideas grounded in the mechanisms of the human mind. Its fundamental principles were fully disclosed by Descartes, and Locke provided them with a firm "metaphysical" foundation. But the particular methods (in the plural) of the particular sciences – today one would say their "research programs" – are exhaustible and historical: "the methods which lead us to discoveries can be exhausted, so that science is somehow forced to stop, unless new methods appear."[17]

The picture of scientific development drawn by Condorcet has a distinctly proto-Kuhnean flavour. Periods of intense theoretical work, connected first

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[15] Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture*, p. 100.

[16] *ibid*., p. 140.

[17] *ibid*., p. 162.

of all with the creation of the appropriate instruments of mathematical analysis, are then followed by a prolonged stage of the accumulation of experimental-observational data, ultimately necessitating a "successful revolution" in the accepted method itself. The necessity of these revolutions follows from the probabilistic and approximative status of even the best-corroborated laws:

> We would not dare to assert [wrote Condorcet in 1783] that even the most regular law which we observe in phenomena will persist without any alteration for an indefinite time. We suppose in truth that there may exist a more complicated constant law, which for a time seems the same to our eyes as the first posited, and which subsequently deviates perceptibly from it, but it is easy to see that this is precisely the case in which the first law having ceased to be constant, we substituted another one which embraces both the phenomena encompassed by the first law and those which appeared to diverge from it.[18]

If the appropriate social conditions are present, one need not fear that this continuing process of the production of new scientific truths ever will stop for any length of time; for the empirical facts rendering the old method or theory no longer acceptable at the same time clearly outline a well-defined problem of analysis for the next scientific genius to solve. As Condorcet remarks, "The need for new methods in fact only arises in circumstances that give rise to new methods."[19]

But this will happen only if the appropriate social conditions are secured. For science is not only an epistemic formation, but also a social one; it is a particular form of *social organisation*. It needs an institutional framework ensuring the continuous exchange and confrontation of ideas beyond sectarian and national boundaries. Only this can render impossible the suppression of unforeseen facts and the transformation of accepted theories into dogmas. Such an "ethics of science" cannot be based, however, on the expectation

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[18] L. Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 281, quoting Condorcet, "Réflexions sur la méthod de déterminer la probabilité des événements futures."

[19] Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture*, p. 186.

(shared by Descartes and Leibniz) that each individual scientist will become a moral virtuoso. The compliance with its norms must be safeguarded by the way science functions and is socially organised. Science can have a stable, continuous existence only in the form of the *scientific community*, "the general union of the scientists of the globe in one universal republic of the sciences."[20] Such a community had already been spontaneously forming for a long time, especially in the physical sciences; now the task was to endow it with a stable organisational framework that would institutionalise the principles of its self-regulation and guarantee its autonomy. The "Fragment on the New Atlantis" represents an elaborate project regarding how to achieve both these ends.

The so-constituted scientific community is a social formation of a very specific character. It is a voluntary association of individuals, "in which neither birth, nor profession, nor position are thought to confer on one the right to judge what one is not in a condition to understand."[21] At the same time it is open to everyone who possesses the requisite understanding and submits himself or herself to its self-legislated norms. It certainly recognises the difference between the genius and the journeymen of science, and still confers on them equal rights of critical participation. It is a stable community formed by, and based on, rational argumentation, discussion and decision-making, and not on relations of power and submission. Although the particular principles of its organisation, as Condorcet underlines, cannot be simply transferred to society at large, it still represents in its general character "a model to emulate:"[22] it is the paradigm and the living proof of the possibility of a *democratic* social organisation.

Science, however, represents not only the model example of democracy; it is simultaneously a fundamental factor in the realisation of its possibility. The technical application of the discoveries of the sciences of nature can ensure that "everyone will have less work to do, will produce more, and satisfy his wants more fully."[23] Under such conditions social mathematics will provide

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[20] Condorcet, "Fragment sur l'Atlantide," in *Oeuvres*, vol. VI, p. 603.

[21] Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture*, p. 164.

[22] *ibid*.

[23] *ibid*., p. 188.

the reliable principles of a universal insurance scheme liquidating excessive inequalities, the mind-numbing poverty that makes an individual incapable of genuinely exercising the rights formally conferred on them. At the same time, the popularisation of the basic and simple results of this science can render public affairs generally perspicuous. This will allow individuals to form rational expectations concerning the long-term effects of their conscious decisions. And certainly not least, scientific philosophy has already disclosed the constitution of human nature and in this way provided an unshakable foundation for the idea of inalienable, equal, basic human rights. It has not only disclosed them, but by making use of the social potential of printing it has also disseminated them, creating a wide and enlightened public opinion freed from the prejudices supporting despotism. The demands of this public opinion represent an already existing powerful motivational force for democratic transformation. The appropriate organisation of the international scientific community with its decisions greatly accelerating the progress of science, necessarily will enhance its technical, social and cultural effects as well.

The connection between science and democratic society is, however, a mutual one. If the former renders possible and promotes the realisation of the latter, it is only the latter – the coming into being of a truly democratic social organisation and its ultimate spread across the whole globe – that can create the conditions guaranteeing the uninterrupted progress of science. The American and French Revolutions signal the beginning of this great sociopolitical transformation, and with them, Condorcet tentatively suggests, progress has become a genuine law of history also in the positive sense.

The dependence of science on democracy is again argued by Condorcet on the basis of both internal-epistemic and external-social considerations. On the one hand, the development of science demands constant interaction between hypothetical theoretical constructions and the controlling data of experimentation and observation. Theory, however, is always abstract: there are "a great number of conditions, relating to the needs, methods, time, expense, which are necessarily neglected in theory," and that only "enter into the problem when it is a question of real and immediate practical application."[24]

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[24] *ibid.*, p. 159.

Theory certainly should not become a handmaiden of practice; the fundamental directions of research should be autonomously determined by the scientific community on the basis of internal considerations alone. But "truths of theory are necessarily modified in practice."[25] Without a consistent striving towards technical and social application, a constant feedback from practice, theory is always susceptible to dogmatisation, to the actual restriction of its empirical basis to confirmatory instances alone. Such a constant nexus, however, requires that the scientific community itself be embedded in the much broader social stratum of those who do not actively pursue and create science, but who are able to understand its results and to apply them in practice.

This is, however, only one specific case of the problem concerning the role and place of science in society. Condorcet, a passionate opponent of Marat, consistently defends the autonomy of science and the principle of specialisation of scientific activities. Uniform and universally shared knowledge means nothing but universal ignorance. Democracy does not negate, it presupposes differential expertise and the social recognition of exceptional individual talent and performance. Its realisation does not require that everyone be an equal expert in everything. It only assumes of each individual that they have the minimal critical capacities and the necessary information enabling them to decide rationally who the genuine experts are relevant to a certain intellectual task and to evaluate their performance on the basis of its overall results and social effects. Science is surely a discourse open to everyone; but only to everyone who is "in a condition to understand."[26]

To be open, however, even in this sense, the very possibility of acquiring such an understanding must be effectively available to each individual who has the appropriate capacities and interests. If such access is in fact restricted to members of a particular social group with specific interests of its own (what Condorcet at times calls a "class"), then knowledge again becomes practically monopolised. Then there also still persists the acute danger of its being transformed into an instrument making others dependent on its bearers, rendering it a socially secret doctrine with the consequent tendency towards degradation and decline: "By establishing a veritable separation between those who

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[25] *ibid*.

[26] *ibid*., p. 164.

have knowledge and those who are deprived of it, this distinction will necessarily make knowledge an instrument of power for some rather than a means of happiness for all."[27] For the same reason, but contrasting with his earlier views, in the *Sketch* Condorcet also rejects the idea that scientists as scientists should assume some institutionally fixed, specifically political role. Only a thoroughly meritocratic and anti-authoritarian system of free public education offering the possibility of further learning to everyone who can profit from it – regardless of their birth, gender, race or religion – can immunise science against the twin dangers of monopolisation and stagnation. In 1792 Condorcet (unsuccessfully) presented the elaborate project of just such a system of public education to the Legislative Assembly. For there is only one guarantee able to secure that the scientific community, this voluntary organisation of the few, of the experts, pursues not its own, but the universal interests of truth: "if the boundary between the cultivated and uncultivated had been almost entirely effaced, leaving an insensible gradation between the two extremes of genius and stupidity,"[28] then the progress of science cannot thus be measured simply "by the number of known truths"; it is equally dependent on "the number of people who are familiar with the most obvious and more important truths."[29] And so the story of great discoveries and inventions does not exhaust the true history of scientific development. The latter is incomplete without the no less important concern with the facts relating to the social dissemination and distribution of knowledge. Therefore Condorcet rightfully can claim that his – no doubt, excessively intellectualist – conspectus of the history of the human mind breaks with the ordinary practice of historiography, which always "has been the history of only a few individuals," of the leaders and geniuses. It is the project of a new, genuinely philosophical history whose primary subjects are the common people, "the greater mass of the human race."[30]

With this Condorcet's case against Rousseau is complete. The opposition Rousseau draws between scientific-cultural and moral-social development is

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[27] Condorcet, *Selected Writings*, ed. K. Baker, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1976, p. 108.

[28] Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture*, p. 140.

[29] *ibid.*, p. 120.

[30] *ibid.*, pp. 170–171.

based on a fundamental error. It misses the social character of science and culture, which as social formations and practices both embody and help to realise the principles of true morality. In the long run true morality can flourish only in a democratic environment in which its principles become generally realised. Rousseau in fact accepts the same elitist conception of culture that he attacks. He does not comprehend that this elitism is not an inherent feature of cultural values themselves, but a consequence of their socially induced degeneration, a process that actually endangers their continuous existence. The overcoming of this cultural elitism cannot, however, mean a return to an artificially imposed primitivism or national traditionalism. It can be achieved only by making the real cultural values of human history, first of all the basic principles and most important results of science, truly popular.

Today we legitimately regard Condorcet's optimistic program with either nostalgic or sardonic disillusionment. And we cannot be unaware of the fact that its ultimate theoretical foundations (as I referred to above) are quite confused. Condorcet actually operates with two irreconcilable concepts of morality and its evolution. On the one hand he identifies moral progress – inevitably within the individualistic framework of his whole approach – with the progression of the "moral constitution" of individuals; with the transformation of their motives, dispositions and sentiments making the inborn moral feeling ever more refined, conscious, elaborate and universal. On the other hand, however, his treatment of the scientific community as the embodiment of an exemplary ethical model operates with a fundamentally different idea of progress. It presupposes the institutionalisation of norms through the particular structure and functioning of a social organism that in fact makes their effectuation largely independent of the idiosyncratic motives and dispositions of the individuals concerned. For Condorcet knows and makes very clear that scientists, taken as individuals, are often moved by the passions of vanity, envy and competition. And whenever he attempts to interconnect these two conceptions in some way, it becomes clear that any such linkage necessarily involves an elementary fallacy. For Condorcet tends to confuse the fact that the growth of science presupposes that its practitioners act (at least as a rule) according to a particular "ethics" with the idea that science can prove on its own the self-evidence of the general principles of morality; and moreover that through their dissemination science can also radically contribute to the broad acceptance of such principles of morality.

Science as the great, irresistible promoter of democracy, and the liberal-democratic political regime as the natural soil of all kinds of virtues: this is a dream that we have truly dreamt through. But for someone like me, who originally came from a country that in its misfortune had undergone in short succession the experiences of Fascism and Stalinism, the other aspect of Condorcet's argumentation – concerning the dependence of unhindered scientific development on the presence of broadly conceived democratic conditions – still sounds relevant. And all the more so because it is based not on a blanket assumption concerning freedom of thought, but on rather specific and, for its time, quite complex and sophisticated considerations concerning the character of the social enterprise of science that articulates problems still relevant for us today. But beyond the real or imagined actuality of some of Condorcet's ideas, the implicit dispute between him and Rousseau is still the first great historical example of that strife between the Enlightenment and Romanticism (understood here in Weber's ideal-typical sense), which accompanies the whole history of modernity as an unresolved and indeed irresolvable opposition, even up to the present day. It essentially belongs to the prehistory of our own confusions and quandaries concerning the relations between culture, science, politics and society. For this reason alone both of its protagonists deserve to be remembered.

One of the alienating features of the *Esquisse*, which may partly account for its philosophical marginalisation, is its heavy-handed rhetoric; this remains rather difficult to stomach for a contemporary reader. For it is not a rhetoric laced with irony, as with Voltaire or Diderot, nor fired by a passionate subjectivity, as with Rousseau or, let us say, Fichte. It is the stilted rhetoric of a man who spent a significant part of his creative life writing *éloges* for dead academicians. The reader may perhaps regard this paper itself as – with respect to its style – a belated eulogy for Condorcet. And as a final justification for such an enterprise, I would say that it is perhaps worth recalling, at a time when the Enlightenment is so often treated with disdain or hostility that if Condorcet is – as the cliché goes – its last Mohican, then the Enlightenment, whether taken in a moral or in a theoretical sense, has passed the bloody test of the French Revolution not at all badly.

Chapter Twelve

Money and the Book: Kant and the Crisis of the German Enlightenment

Kant was nearly seventy three years old when in 1797 he finally realised a project that had occupied him well over three decades and the near completion of which he foretold to a number of his correspondents at various points of time during its long gestation.[1] This was the project of a "metaphysics of morals" (*Metaphysik der Sitten*), an integrated and comprehensive exposition of his practical philosophy as a systematic whole – comprehensive exposition in the sense that it contained both his moral philosophy proper, the doctrine of virtue, and his political philosophy, the doctrine of right (at least as far as "the metaphysical first principles" of both are concerned). In this way it reaffirmed and clarified the fundamental distinction in Kant between morality and legality, now, however, also disclosing the systematic interconnection between them.

[1] The first, yet rather vague mention of the project of a "metaphysics of morals" occurs in a letter to Lambert in 1765. Three years later, however, writing to Herder, Kant already reports actually working on such a book, to be finished and hopefully also published in that very year.

In respect to the doctrine of virtue (*Tugendlehre*), it presents the well-known ideas of Kant's moral theory as it were from a new angle. It is essentially concerned with the *ends* of moral action and with the *a priori*, exhaustive and systematic deduction of duties as determined by such ends (virtue consisting in the strength of character to place the pursuit of such ends above all search for happiness). The transcendental principle of pure practical reason as the formal determining ground of choice unconditionally commands the rational agent, independently of the character of the intended action. All rational actions are, however, of purposive character, and the very effectivity of practical reason implies its ability to determine "materially" an unambiguously ordered system of moral ends and a corresponding system of ethical duties.

The Doctrine of Virtue thus very convincingly demonstrates the ungrounded character of the usual criticism of, and complaint against, Kant's moral theory concerning its empty formalism and rigourism. On the other hand, it may well give rise – in spite of the very impressive casuistic apparatus applied here by Kant – to fundamental doubts concerning his unshakeable belief in the impossibility of rationally unresolvable ("tragic") conflicts between equally obligating moral duties and ends.

The Doctrine of Virtue deals, of course, with the internal, *a priori* moral incentives, valid for all rational beings. It refers to the character of humans as finite rational beings only at some points, as it were illustratively, to show that the so derived virtues can be applied to, and demanded from them. *The Doctrine of Rights*, on the other hand, deals with a system of duties concerning the external actions of agents, duties that obligate them independently of their motives for action, due to coercive sanctions. It assumes the freedom of these agents, but freedom not in the sense of the self-legislating autonomy of practical reason as *Wille*, but as *Willkür*, mere freedom of choice. It presupposes, and in a substantive and fundamental sense, the idea of human nature. Or perhaps more correctly and specifically, the idea of the human condition: of the co-existence within a limited space of a multitude of finite rational beings – beings capable of being affected (but not determined) by sensuous impulses as well as by the categorical imperative as universal moral law, that is beings whose external actions can have influence upon, and who necessarily have to live in community with, each other. These are, of course, no matter how

general, nevertheless empirical facts, supported by and derived from experience.

This complex idea of the human condition is the sole empirical concept needed and assumed in *The Philosophy of Right*. For Kant does not deal in this work with any system of positive laws, subject to temporal change. His interest and exposition is strictly normative. He aims to establish "the immutable principles for any giving of positive law".[2] Therefore his exposition can also, and in his conviction it certainly does proceed in a strictly deductive manner, organised by consecutive paragraphs ordered by arabic numerals. He first formulates the universal principle of right,[3] to deduce from it the original conditions of legitimate private possession, the necessity of civil society and the character of any legitimate organisation of the state and government.

At one single point, however, Kant himself interrupts this strict deductive progression. Following the *a priori* division of all possible forms of contract[4], he makes a double interpolation that is even formally designated as inserts by roman numerals: "I. What is Money?" and "II. What is a Book?" He immediately justifies this seeming inconsistency by indicating that in his division of the forms of contract he actually mentioned both these notions, which could give rise to a basic doubt about the strictly *a priori* character of his exposition. Therefore he has to explicate that these two concepts, between which he immediately draws a strong parallel/analogy, do not designate in their

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[2] I. Kant: *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. J. Gregor, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant in Translation* (in the following: *CEWK*), volume *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 386.

[3] "Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law." *Ibid*, p. 387. The very formulation of this principle indicates its close connection with the categorical imperative, and thus the moral relevance of the whole system of rights. In this work of his old age Kant, however, does not completely succeed in unambiguously characterising and clarifying the exact nature of this relation.

[4] Kant: *The Metaphysics of Morals*, § 31.

fundamental, primary sense some kind of empirical things, but actually can "be resolved into pure intellectual relations".[5]

This is, however, a rather lame excuse. For in fact, while he does mention money in the relevant discussion, he does not mention the book at all. At best one can say that he has a sub-group of contracts, the *mandatum*[6], to which he refers when in the excursus about the book he discusses the character of the legal relation between the author and the publisher. Given, however, Kant's quite general definition of the book that also covers handwritten manuscripts, this seems to be a historical-empirical relation, which should not figure in an *a priori* discussion at all. Moreover this concept of the mandate as a specific form of contract – which Kant regarded as his own important innovative contribution to the general theory of contracts as elaborated by Savigny – is really a confusing one. When he was pressed by critics to clarify it, in an addition to the second edition of *The Philosophy of Right*, he invoked the contractual relation between a *pater familias* and a domestic servant within his household as the paradigmatic case of the implied relationship[7]. It is really difficult to understand how could Kant assume that the relation of an author to his/her publisher is even in the most general way analogous to a contract of such a type.

Be this conception of the "mandate" is legitimate or illegitimate, there remains the formal anomaly of the double insert, interrupting the deductive logic of exposition. The justification that Kant offers for it is unconvincing, but only as far as the book is concerned. For, as already indicated, the concept of the money is in fact invoked in the text dealing with the *a priori* division of all possible forms of contract. Actually this is not a merely a casual mention. For while Kant refers here to money only in relation to a particular sub-group of contracts, his later explication of the concept makes it clear that only monetary transactions can eliminate the basic difficulty that renders all other forms of contractual exchange insecure: the temporal discrepancy between a service actually delivered and the promise of its future reciprocation. Money, as he

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[5] *Ibid*, p. 434.

[6] "*A contract empowering an agent (mandatum)*. Carrying on another's affairs in his place and in his name." *Ibid*, p. 433.

[7] Compare *ibid*, p. 496.

understands it, makes the acquisitions simultaneous thus it plays a substantive role in a general theory of contracts.

Given the fact that Kant insists on the purely *a priori* character of his discussion of the forms of contracts, his emphasising the idea that the mentioned concept of money does not refer to some kind of empirical things, but represents a purely intellectual relation, seems to be needed and justified. So what is troubling is not the question why an insert at all, but rather why a *double* insert. All the more, since it is elementarily clear that the book has nothing to do with considerations concerning the basic forms of contractual exchange.

In view of all these uncomfortable facts, it is perhaps legitimate to assume that Kant makes this insert a double one because he ascribes a particular importance to the strict analogy, the far-reaching parallelism between the money and the book, on which his whole exposition here centres. It is this analogy that we have to look at in detail. To do so, however, we first have to consider separately how he conceives the respective terms of this relation, the money and the book. For his views concerning them are not necessarily the ones we today would assume as commonsensical.

There is not much to be said about Kant's conception of the *money*, since it is essentially unoriginal. His short explication of it as a "purely intellectual relation" – money is "the greatest and most useful means human beings have for the *exchange* of things, called *buying and selling* (commerce)"[8] – is essentially derived from Adam Smith. He makes this clear further on: " 'Money is therefore' (according to Adam Smith) 'that material thing the alienation of which is the means and at the same time the measure of the industry by which human beings and nations carry on trade with one another'."[9]

Kant – in opposition to Hegel – was not particularly interested in the newly emerged science of "national economy". He read a few of the physiocrats and later followed the economic disputes during the French Revolution with

[8] *Ibid*, p. 434.

[9] *Ibid*, p. 436. Actually this is not a literally accurate quote from Smith, though it correctly represents his idea in a substantive sense. Kant, as it was the general practice of his time, usually quotes from memory (and quite often, though not in this case, without the indication of the source).

some interest. But he had – and privately expressed – an admiration for Smith and knew *The Wealth of Nations* seemingly quite well. (It also seriously influenced his understanding of the role and significance of the division of labour within the intellectual-theoretical realm itself.) His interest in Smith actually originated with the latter's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that significantly affected his own conception of "unsociable sociability". While he understandably rejected the naturalistic-empirical grounding and orientation of Smith's moral and economic theory – he explicitly rejected the labour theory of value (which is in fact irreconcilable with his own conception of intelligible possession)-, he did to a large extent accept Smith's views on historical progress, its stages and the character of modernity.

When Kant insists on the *a priori* validity of money as an intellectual relation, that is considered only in regard to its form, irrespective of the changing nature of its material embodiment (gold, silver or paper–money), his actual emphasis is upon its role as the mediator between the purely subjective evaluations of things and performances to be exchanged, determined by the character of the persons involved and their momentary needs, on the one hand, and the objective impersonal validity of rights, on the other. Money provides an objective and permanent measure, relating subjective desires to the objective scarcity of available natural resources, making the exchange of goods and services stable and rightful, free of undecidable disputes and accidents. On this is based the unambiguously positive role that Kant ascribes to the "spirit of commerce" and "the power of money" in the essay "Toward Perpetual Peace" as "the most reliable of all powers (means) subordinate to that of a state",[10] driving towards the hoped for end stage of historical progress – the federation of republican states.

There are, however, some troubling questions concerning the whole of this Kantian conception. For he was deeply influenced not only by Smith but also by Rousseau. And at various points he repeated the latter's resolutely negative evaluation of the historical role of money, whose introduction deeply distorted human relations, resulting in a competitive alienation between human beings. Especially in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and in his

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[10] Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace", *CEWK*, vol. *Practical Philosophy*, p. 337.

Lectures on Ethics he again and again underlines that the invention of money constituted a particularly powerful impetus to avarice, this irredeemable human vice, for money does not so much liberate as enslave, both its own possessor and others, offering a power over their labour.[11]

It is the Kantian conception of unsociable sociability as the great mechanism of historical progress, itself a deep dialectical transformation and generalisation of the Smithian doctrine of "invisible hand", that offers a solution to this difficulty. It is, however, only divine providence as the object of our hopes that can provide the guarantee that this mechanism will ultimately lead to its reconciliatory end. The hard task of reconciling Smith with Rousseau ultimately falls to God and his incomprehensible omnipotence.

In regard to the *book*, Kant immediately explicates his rather unusual employment of its term. "A book is a writing (it does not matter, here, whether it is written in hand or set in type, whether it has few or many pages) which represents a discourse that someone delivers to the public by visible linguistic signs."[12] This certainly represents an exceptionally broad use of the term. It can refer to a single parchment or a manuscript of whatever length, insofar as they are in circulation (however restricted it may be), but it equally covers any broadsheet, pamphlet, journal article, even a newspaper editorial. This is not accidental. For this explication of the term intends to demonstrate that the *concept* of the book, in its Kantian understanding as a "purely intellectual relation", is completely independent of the great empirical diversity of its material embodiments. As to its concept, it is "the greatest means for exchanging thought"[13] and as such it is also the most important and powerful instrument of Enlightenment.

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[11] See *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, CEWK*, vol. *Anthropology, History and Education*, 2007, pp. 370–375, and *Lectures on Ethics*, trans L. Infield, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1963, pp. 177–182. And in some particular contexts he offers a quite negative evaluation of the "commercial spirit" itself as debasing the way of thinking of the people, resulting in "base selfishness, cowardice and softness". *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1987, §28, p. 122.

[12] *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 437.

[13] *Ibid*, p. 434.

This is certainly a decidedly modern understanding of the book. It breaks radically with the tradition, long dominating in the Christian West, that endowed the book with a semi-magical aura (not independent of its outward appearance) as the vessel of arcane knowledge, or as the great instrument helping fragile human reason to decipher and understand God's intention and message embodied in the world of creation, in the book of nature. This break certainly did not originate with Kant. Nor is the idea of the function of the book as the great mediator in the exchange of ideas particularly and exclusively his own. What, however, is specific to Kant, is thinking radically through of the consequences of this placing the book in the context of *communication*, which makes it the mediating middle between an author and the public.

For it means that the significance and actual impact of a book does not depend solely on the truth and wealth of ideas formulated in it by its author. It equally depends on whether there is an autonomous *public*, interested in and capable of understanding, but also critically evaluating it. For the book can be misused. It can be used as the source of precepts and formulas to be followed blindly, actually replacing the employment of one's own understanding and critical judgement: "I need not think, if only I can pay".[14] Books, a rich private library can also become just a mere external means of gaining prestige.[15] Even the greatest ideas, like those of Rousseau, can be misused with devastating consequences, when misunderstood by a "dumb crowd", of course not independently of the activity of the "false guardians", the tribunes of the people. The great historical task, formulated in the slogan of Enlightenment: *sapere aude*, actually refers just to this, the *self*-enlightenment of the autonomous public: "a public should enlighten itself"[16]. And Kant's optimism concerning the "almost inevitable" success of Enlightenment, if this public is left free[17],

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[14] Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment", *CEWK*, vol. *Practical Philosophy*, p. 17

[15] The evil, necessarily accompanying the very progress of culture, can transform even the sciences into mere objects of prestige and luxury, "as food for our vanity". *Critique of Judgment*, §83, p. 321.

[16] "An Answer to the Question…", p. 17.

[17] See *ibid*. True, Kant simultaneously justifies his optimism by reference to the fact that "there will always be a few independent thinkers, even among the established

certainly assumes that there is already such a public and necessarily raises the question as to its character and actual constitution. *Who is the adequate public*, capable of the autonomous and critical understanding of the "book" as the greatest means of Enlightenment? Before looking at his answer to this question, we must, however, first investigate more closely how he understands and characterizes the first term of this communicative relation, that of the *author*. This also will shed further light on his conception of the book.

"One who *speaks* to the public in his own name is called the *author* (*autor*)".[18] From our own, contemporary perspective several questions can be raised concerning this definition. Can the "voice of the narrator" in a fictional text (novel) be simply identified with that of the author? And is the author of a drama by necessity identical with one of the personages who actually speak in it?

These questions are, however, quite meaningless – they serve only to make clear what kind of "books" (in our understanding) Kant is talking of here as the sole object of his interest. For in spite of the fact that the novels of Rousseau profoundly influenced the formation of his own ideas, he had a disparaging, unambiguously negative view of the novel as a genre. Novels tend only to awaken passions, while simultaneously making the heart soft. "*Reading novels*, in addition to causing many other mental discords, also has the result that it makes distraction habitual."[19] Nor does drama fare much better. (*Lesedramen* actually still constituted in the second half of the eighteenth century the most popular form of literary production in Germany.) His definition of drama in the *Critique of Judgment* – he characterizes it as the combination of oratory with a pictorial presentation of its subjects and objects[20] – is not only embarrassingly inadequate, but given his attitude to the "treacherous art" of rhetoric that borders on hostility, it certainly implies an equally negative evaluation.

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guardians of the great masses", who will call of each individual to think for himself (*ibid*, 17–18). Is this, as Hamann ironically suggested, a reference to himself and a claim to his own historical mission and role?

[18] *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 437.

[19] *Anthropology…*, p. 314.

[20] See *Critique of Judgment*, p. 195.

All this, however, is quite consistent with the Kantian understanding of the book as an intellectual relation and with the assumed role of its author. To qualify as a book in this sense, there must be *ideas* delivered by its author – what may quite well serve the function of entertainment (and Kant was actually a quite avid reader of early English novels) does not make it a book in this, for him the only relevant sense.[21] He is therefore quite consistent when he specifies the communicative action of the author/writer essentially as informing or instructing the public.[22] And therefore it is not surprising that he sometimes seems to use the terms *Autor*, *Schriftsteller* and *Gelehrte* (author, writer and scholar) as if they were synonyms.

Such an author certainly *speaks* in a work on his own and in his own name (though he never should speak in a book of himself). A published book is the materialisation through linguistic signs of his speech as *action*, the use of his powers (*opera*) that unalienably belong to him. Such action in Kant's own time of course already involved a publisher, printer and so on; they, however, are mere mediators, "mute instruments", who bring the speech of the author to the public, legitimately, if (and only if) they have his/her mandate. Kant draws important moral-political consequences from this conception. He underlines that it is solely the author, and not the publisher, who bears the legal responsibility for all the ideas formulated in his/her book. And he condemns the widespread practice of anonymity, even under repressive political conditions.

The book therefore necessarily has a double nature. As to its true, foundational communicative function it presents speech as the inalienable action of its author to the public. It is, however, also a material artefact, a printed copy that represents the property of its (legitimate/mandated) publisher, to be sold. And its buyer, the potential reader has in regard to it all the rights of a proprietor over a lawfully possessed artefact. Of course, he or she is

[21] This does not mean that Kant has a depreciating view of the fine art of literature in general. Its highest form is for him poetry – and by this he seems to mean essentially lyric poetry. (He mentions Homer in the *Third Critique* actually once.) This later, however, can express not only sentiments and passions, but certainly ideas as well, and in such a poem it is the author, who speaks, delivers them in his/her own name.

[22] See "On the Wrongfulness of Unauthorized Publication of Books", *CEWK*, vol. *Practical Philosophy*, p. 30.

a member of the public – the adequate/expected relation is to read the work, attempting the autonomous understanding and evaluation of the authorial ideas that it delivers. But just by buying an artefact, one does not put oneself under any obligation to use it in the way intended by its maker, even if this is rational. The owner of a copy is completely within his/her rights to crudely misuse it, not only by transforming it into a mere object of exhibition as a sign of prestige, but, as Kant explicitly states, can even "burn it before the author's eye"[23]. This all may be despicable, even disgusting, but unobjectionable legally. What the buyer has, however, no whatever right is to reproduce it under his/her own name or without expressed authorial permission (as the work of the original author). For speech as action inalienably belongs to the subject/agent, and no one can dispose over it without his/her explicit consent, that is without being so mandated.

Due to its double nature, a book in the Kantian sense fundamentally differs from any work of fine art. For these latter are simply material artefacts, however pleasing, delightful or perhaps sublime they may be. And the rightful owners of some artefact may use (or misuse) it in any way they considers appropriate. So if it is a painting, drawing or print, they can copy it (whatever this should mean) and sell this copy as their own work, "without even having to mention the name of the originator".[24]

From our own, contemporary perspective this seems to endorse some quite questionable practices. It is, however, not the only instance, where Kant's ideas may today seem rather strange. He definitely states that the authors' rights are extinguished in respect of the translation, or the substantive edition of their work – these may be legitimately presented (without even mentioning their name as originator) as the work of the translator or of the editor.[25] On the other hand, he maintains that after the author's death the public (whatever this may mean) has a legally enforceable right to compel the "mandated" publisher to publish the work concerned in an edition no smaller than the demand for it.[26]

[23] *Ibid*, p. 35.

[24] *Ibid*, p. 34.

[25] *Ibid*, p. 34.

[26] *Ibid*, p. 35.

These ideas have to be seen against the background of the specific German conditions of the time. They simultaneously throw light also upon the somewhat baffling character of the whole insert on the book. Baffling, because after the two first sentences, in which he formulates theoretically really important and novel ideas (the book as the mediator in a process of communication and the specific role and character of its author), the whole remaining part of his longish discussion deals with an issue that is unrelated to this very conception and, in any case, concerns a quite subsidiary matter: the relation between the author and his publisher. Unrelated, because this, as indicated, already in view of his broad explication of the scope of the term "book", is a purely empirical, historically specific relation, having nothing to do with the book's genuine function as a "pure intellectual" relationship between its author and its public. In fact, almost the whole of this insert represents a longish polemic against the "unauthorized publishing of books".

It may well seem that Kant is obsessed by this problem. He had already published in 1785 a separate paper "On the Wrongfulness of Unauthorised Publication of Books" and touches upon this question again, after the publication of *The Philosophy of Right*, in one of his last essays, his "two letters" to Nicolai. This is, however, not some private mania of his. The issue was the matter of a wide discussion in Germany at the time. (Some authors definitely defended the practice, not only in the name of the interests of the public in cheap publications, but also explicitly denying any specific "authorial rights": if authors aim at the dissemination of their ideas, then just when they are successful, these became equally the property of the informed public, no longer their own.)

This was a burning issue in German intellectual life. For due to the prevailing condition of German *Kleinstaaterei*, there was a widespread practice of what we now call "piracy". Only there was nothing unlawful with this practice (insofar as the reprinting took place in another state). In these conditions Kant's argumentation in defence of authorial rights had to be formulated in terms, and depend on considerations of, natural rights and of his own theory of "legitimate possession" predating and constituting the basis of all valid legislation. Nor are some of his stranger ideas concerning these rights exceptional in his own time. For the German states were also in this respect "backward" in comparison with other developed Western nations. In England

copyright was codified in 1710 (the statute of Queen Anne), in France a decree of the Crown established the "privilege" of the author (to be held in perpetuity) in 1777, and during the French Revolution a copyright act was passed in 1793. In Germany (perhaps not independently of this latter fact) the first legislation that established (and even then only implicitly) the author's right concerning the publication of his/her works was enacted in Prussia in 1794. And it then took another forty years for this principle to be legally enshrined by all the larger German states.

This Kantian defence of authorial rights – this should be made clear – was not motivated at all by material-financial interests of the author. What he defends in this respect are the interests of the legitimate ("mandated") publisher. This is sincerely so and not by chance. Kant as professor of the University of Königsberg is a *Beamte* of the state, a life-long prestigious position, based on *Dienst- und Treuerverhältnis* – and providing, beside prestige, also a certainly not sumptuous, but secure and comfortable existence. He certainly did not depend on the (initially very moderate) *honoraria* he received for the publication of his writing.

This does not mean, however, that his passionate and repeated defence of the interests of the legitimate publisher is simply an act of benevolent altruism and a deep commitment to justice. He does have an interest in this matter, only not a financial one. What publisher would be ready to risk the significant costs and efforts connected with the publication and distribution of a book like the *Critique of Pure Reason*, if, in the improbable case of its real success, it could and probably also would immediately be reprinted in a cheaper form by a competitor in another state? Kant does have an interest in the financial success of his legitimate publisher, only his interest is not of material nature – it is an interest in his work having the chance to reach its intended public.

With this we returned to the second great term of that communicative relation: the *public*. What characterises the adequate public in general, and in particular what is more concretely that capacity of being "self-enlightening", which Kant ascribes to it? And then on what grounds does he assume that such a public already exists (at least potentially) in Germany, a presupposition without which his firm belief in the inevitable success of Enlightenment would be (as some will later argue) a completely unjustified illusion?

In regard to the first question, Kant himself will provide a clear answer. First of all, the courage to use one's own reason has nothing to do, it is in fact exactly opposed to that, which in his *Anthropology* he calls "logical egoism": the standpoint of someone, who, firmly convinced of the superior worth of his own insights, "refuses to test his judgment by the understanding of others".[27] For such an attitude ultimately can lead only to the uncritical reproduction of the untested prejudices of the age.

To make use of one's own reason, this great end of self-enlightenment, demands, as he more fully formulates and explicates in the *Critique of Judgement*, the actual satisfaction of three principles or maxims: "(1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) to think always consistently. The first is the maxims of an *unprejudiced*, the second of a *broadened*, the third of a *consistent* way of thinking."[28] There is, however, a rather striking ambivalence in Kant concerning the very nature of these demands. In the *Third Critique* itself they are addressed and the ability to satisfy them is attributed to common sense, to common human understanding. In *Anthropology*, however, he refers to the very same principles as precepts leading towards the possession of wisdom, this highest and the most rare human practical-cognitive capacity and achievement.[29]

This ambivalence, however, is not really accidental. For Kant gives a very strong interpretation of the second maxim, the principle of a broadened ("liberal") way of thinking. It demands that "we compare our own judgement with human reason in general", that is, that we compare it "not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgements of others."[30] Perhaps the first task, to take into account the expressed judgements of others in our narrower or broader community, is within the scope of competence of a person of sound common sense. But to compare it with the possible judgements of everybody in general – how could such a cognitive feast be expected from a person of good common sense? In fact, how could it be realised at all?

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[27] *Anthropology…*, p. 240

[28] *Critique of Judgment*, p. 160–161.

[29] *Compare Anthropology…*, pp. 307–308.

[30] *Critique of Judgment*, p. 160.

And this is a very troublesome question, since it is this second maxim of the "broadened" way of thinking that distinguishes the *Selbstdenker* of Enlightenment from the "logical egoist". Doubts about its practical realisability as something commonly achievable impugn the very project of Enlightenment.

Kant, however, has a clear answer to these questions. In fact there is no ambiguity insofar as his substantive views are concerned. The task of self-enlightening is an exceptionally arduous one, demanding extraordinary effort and rare human practical-rational capacities (wisdom), when it is undertaken by an *isolated, single* individual. "…it is difficult for any single individual to extricate himself from the minority[31] that has become almost nature to him… Hence there are only a few who have succeeded, by their own cultivation of their spirit, in extricating themselves from minority and yet walking confidently."[32]

And he continues immediately: "But that a public should enlighten itself is more possible; indeed this is almost inevitable, if only it is left its freedom."[33] Freedom to what? "…[f]reedom to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters."[34] It is here that Kant's conception of the "book" as the greatest and most effective means and mediator of communication discloses its full significance. For it is only through and due to the "book" (in the exceptionally broad meaning of the term intended by him) that the true publicness of communication can be achieved (as opposed to the always emotionally tinged oral communication, including public rhetoric, essentially good only for inciting the dumb crowd). And public communicability is the precondition not only of the success of Enlightenment. It is the precondition of the rationalisability of all human relations, practical-institutional as well as cognitive-theoretical. Publicness is an *a priori* requirement that any legitimate legal-political system ought to satisfy. And equally, nothing can guarantee the progress of

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[31] "*Minority* is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another." (Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment", *CEWK*, vol. *Practical Philosophy*, p. 17.) It is the heteronomy of reason.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 18.

knowledge or the correctness of beliefs in the absence of public disputability and criticism of their content, however firmly entrenched.

> Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism; should it limit freedom of criticism by any prohibitions, it must harm itself, drawing upon itself a damaging suspicion. Nothing is so important through its usefulness, nothing so sacred, that it may be exempted from this searching examination, which knows no respect for persons. Reason depends on this freedom for its very existence. For reason has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of *free* citizens, of whom each must be permitted to express, without let or hindrance, his objection or even his veto.[35]

Freedom to think is generally accepted as an inviolate and sacred human right. "Of course, it is said that the freedom to *speak* or to *write* could be taken from us by a superior power, but the freedom to *think* cannot be. Yet how much and how correctly would we *think* if we did not think as it were in communication with others to whom we *communicate* our thoughts, and who communicate theirs with us. Thus one can very well say that this external power which wrenches away people's freedom publicly to *communicate* their thoughts also takes from them the freedom to *think* – that single gem remaining to us in midst of all the burdens of civil life, through which alone we can devise means of overcoming all the evils of our condition."[36]

This is not just (as the above formulation may perhaps suggest) a prudential recommendation. Free and regular communication is the basic condition, under which we with our fragile, finite reason can acquire a critical, autonomous relation to our own beliefs and ideas. For this is only possible if we can and consistently do *compare* them with those of others, and this is practically possible only under these conditions.

> An *external* mark or an *external* touchstone of truth is the comparison of our own judgment with those of others, because what is subjective will not dwell

[35] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 766, trans. N. Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan, 1978, p. 593.

[36] Kant, "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?", *CEWK*, volume *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. A Wood and G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge, University Press, 1996, p. 16.

> in all others alike; thus semblance may be cleared up by comparison. The *irreconcilability* of judgments of others with our own is therefore an external mark of error and to be considered as a hint that we should examine our procedure in judgments, without however immediately discarding it. For one may well be right *in re* and only wrong *in the manner*, i.e. in presentation.[37]

These Kantian considerations explain why a task (that of self-enlightenment), which proves to be so hard and difficult even for persons of exceptional abilities in isolation, becomes "almost inevitable" under conditions of free and regular communication. This is so, however, only if there are subjects, who are capable and (at least potentially) ready to make use of these conditions. For even assuming that "there will always be a few independent thinkers, even among the established guardians of the great masses"[38], who will call upon others to have the courage to make use of their own understanding, the free spread of this message can only have the desired effect if there is some multitude of individuals able to understand it and to react to it adequately: if there is for it a *public*, a public capable of thinking "independently", "liberally" and "consistently" as demanded by the three great maxims of rational thinking. Kant's firm belief in the unarrestible, even if slow, progress of Enlightenment assumes the actual existence of such a public in Germany. This is, however, an assumption that was disputed in a forceful way in his own lifetime. It needs both legitimation and specification: *who* would constitute such a public.

Already in 1764 his former student at Königsberg, the young Herder has directly raised in an essay (originally a speech he gave in Riga) the question: is there a public at all in Germany of the time.[39] And the passionate comparison he draws with antiquity leads to the conclusion: "the public of yore has vanished for the *state*, for the *orator*, and for the *author*."[40] When people, once

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[37] Kant, *Logic*, trans R. S. Hartman and W. Schwarz, New York, Dover Publishing, 1974, pp. 62–63.

[38] Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment", p. 17.

[39] Compare. J. G. Herder," Do We Still Have the Public and Fatherland of Yore?", in his *Selected Early Works*, ed. by E. A. Menze and K. Menges, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.

[40] *Ibid*, p. 59.

a title of reverence covering all equal citizens, becomes habitually used to refer to the mob and riffraff in distinction to those who belong to one of the segregated estates, the very term "public" becomes an enigma. "[w]here does it have its seat and voice? Where one must stand to be judged by this public? In the market place or in private homes?"[41]

Nine years later Kant's eternal foe, Friedrich Nicolai offered a sober diagnosis of the emerging dichotomisation of the literary public. The *gelehrter Stand* is becoming increasingly self-enclosed, what one of them writes is primarily read by fellow members of this "guild", without evoking much interest or resonance from a broader public. And with the growth of Kant's fame and prestige, in the last decade of the century, his "optimism", his unshakeable belief in the irresistible progress of Enlightenment, became the direct target of criticism. A beautiful dream, writes Heinzmann in 1795, for the facts incontrovertibly disclose an unambiguous tendency: the growing predominance of books (*Bücherherrschaft*) goes in equal measure together with the growing decline of their orientative-practical effectivity (*Thatkraft*).[42] In 1799 even such an author as Johann Bergk, deeply influenced by and committed to Kant, especially to his aesthetic theory, laconically brushes aside his confidence in the power of the book as the great educational tool of independence – this is just a case of "empty optimism".

Is this criticism, however, quite legitimate? Of course, history unambiguously proved the "rightness" of the critics: Enlightenment, in its greatest and fullest ends, has failed. But was Kant's optimism just an unfounded dream, a mere act of faith without any support? What did actually Kant have in mind, when he assumed the existence (at least potential existence) of a public capable of understanding and responding adequately to the call of Enlightenment: think on your own? And was he able to offer some arguments for the prediction of the slow, but necessary growth and extension of this public in the future under the very impact of Enlightenment?

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[41] *Ibid*, p. 58.

[42] J. G. Heinzmann, *Appel an meine Nation über Aufklärung und Aufklärer*. Quoted in Ch. Bürger et al (eds), *Aufklärung und literarische Offentlichkeit*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1980, p. 106.

Who would belong to, who would constitute such a public in Germany? Seemingly an elementary question, since these are the very readers, to whom Kant's own Enlightenment-essay (one of his "popular" writings) is undoubtedly addressed. Nevertheless, the rather voluminous later interpretative literature directly dealing with this question offers the most diverse, contradictory answers – and not by chance. For Kant's own formulations in the essay itself seem to be on this point disturbingly vague and first of all inconsistent.

On the one hand, he repeatedly identifies this public ("public in the strict sense of the word") with the world, the world at large[43] – certainly the most inclusive term, referring in principle to everyone. On the other hand and in rather direct contradiction with such formulations, he at the same time maintains that at least for the time being "by far the greatest part of humankind (including the entire fair sex)", partly due to their own laziness and cowardice, are incapable of using their own understanding[44] and therefore cannot be regarded as belonging to an autonomous public in the required sense. Furthermore, elsewhere in the same paper he explicitly identifies the entire public with "the world of readers (*Lesewelt*)"[45], certainly a much narrower group in the Germany of the time than "the world at large"[46]. Lastly, though less explicitly stated, he rather clearly seems to identify the relevant public with "scholars" (*Gelehrten*) in the extremely broad sense, including officers, clergymen and tax officials that he uses this term in the Enlightenment-essay.

Perhaps, however, this confounding multiplicity of the answers seemingly contradicting each other is not so lethal, but merely a question of appearance. For when he refers in the given context to the world at large as the public, this

[43] Compare Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", p. 19 and 21.

[44] Compare *ibid*, p. 17.

[45] *Ibid*, p. 18.

[46] Around 1800 no more than 25 percent of the entire German population could be regarded as potential readers, i.e. genuinely literate in practical sense. Those who regularly read some kind of publications beyond the Bible, on the one hand, and calendars and chapbooks, on the other, constituted no more than 10 percent. (See. R. Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch*. München, dtv, 1977, p. 444ff.

should be understood in a negative sense: No one can and should be excluded, on the basis of any objective characteristics, be they of social status, citizenship or gender, from the realm of the potential public, thus denied in principle the capacity for the autonomous use of its own reason. As a demand this is implied by the very nature of rationality, therefore of being human – any restriction in this respect would contradict the principle of equal human dignity. This is, however, not identical with the question: who actually constitutes the autonomous public at the present, in these not yet enlightened times, which is nevertheless the Age of Enlightenment? And the answers to it: the *Lesewelt*, on the one hand, *Gelehrten*, on the other, may very well, given Kant's exceptionally broad use of this later term, designate in fact the same group. There is thus no contradiction or confusion whatever in Kant, one only needs to read his essay with sympathetic understanding.

This slightly casuistic interpretation would be perhaps quite convincing, if not for the fact that in some of his other writings Kant seems to answer the question about the actual public of "books" (in the sense intended by him) in ways that are incompatible with the benevolent position just outlined. There is, for instance, his repeatedly expressed view about *women* as readers. Kant, of course, regards the general extension of the *Lesewelt* without any reservation as an important and necessary constituent of the progress of culture, itself a precondition of Enlightenment. And he knows well that women represent a very significant fraction of the contemporary world of readers. Equally, the demand of the autonomous use of one's own understanding is of strictly universal character, directed at every (adult) human being. The failure to meet it is ultimately always the moral fault of the concerned individual. Nevertheless, he simultaneously regards women in general as being constitutively – on anthropological grounds – incapable of becoming a part of the autonomous public in the intended sense. And one should add that he is remarkably consistent in this inconsistency, in the sense that such views were formulated by him as early as 1764, in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, and repeated without fundamental change over three decades later in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), even though there had been a radical change in his basic philosophical orientation.[47]

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[47] On his view on women see especially: *CEWK*, volume *Anthropology…*, pp. 40–51 and 399–407.

The primary natural end of the female sex is the preservation of the species, and the pain and the risks connected with it make fear and timidity the defining sentiment of women, who therefore are dependent beings, needing the protection of the male. This fundamentally determines the direction of their cognitive interests. For while the potential scope of the understanding of both sexes is the same, "[t]he content of the great science of woman is rather the human being, and, among human beings, the man. Her philosophical wisdom is not reasoning but sentiment."[48] The education of women should therefore be essentially directed towards practical matters. In fact laborious learning and abstract speculative thought are not merely alien to women, but actually "destroy the merits that are proper to her sex"[49]. And Kant mocks "scholarly" women, whose claim to deep and original thinking is just a bad substitute for the charm that they lack. "As concerns scholarly women: they use their *books* somewhat like their *watch*, that is they carry one so that it will be seen that they have one; though it is usually not running or set by the sun."[50]

Secondly, Kant's late book, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) explicitly and in a radical way restricts both the intended and the actual public for books as genuine vehicles of ideas. True, in this work Kant deals with the activity and the intended public of scholars in the narrow, strict sense of the word: members of the various faculties of the universities, in particular philosophers. The very function of philosophy is "the public presentation of truth"[51], the free discussion of the truth of ideas. Members of the "higher faculties" – of theology, law and medicine – are "the *businesspeople* or technicians of learning (*Geschäftsleute oder Werkkundige der Gelehrsamkeit*)"[52] – they are the tools of the government, under its strict control. They address themselves directly to the people, or at least to particular groups of the commonwealth as a civil community, to ensure the lasting influence of the government – their books are

[48] *Ibid*, p. 42.

[49] *Ibid*, p. 41.

[50] *Ibid*, p. 404.

[51] Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. M. J. Gregor and R. Anchor, *CEWK*, volume *Religion…*, p. 260.

[52] *Ibid*, p. 248.

just temporary pedagogical instruments serving this purpose[53]. Their activity represents what Kant in the Enlightenment-essay paradoxically – or, as some would say, subversively – calls the private use of reason.

Of course, outside their official post and function, as citizens of the commonwealth these very same persons have the right (and ultimately the moral obligation) to give voice to the autonomous, public use of their reason that ought to be unhindered and free, and without which no progress of Enlightenment is possible. In case of philosophers, however, this is not simply the exercise of a universally valid right (or at least, what ought to be such a right), it is their professional obligation and function – the investigation and discussion of the truth of (practical and theoretical) ideas. To be a philosopher, worthy of this name, means to give voice consistently to the public use of reason.

To who is this voice, however, directed – who is its intended and real public? To this question *The Conflict of the Faculties* provides an unambiguous answer. It is addressed not to members of civil society in general, but to those of the "learned society", meaning primarily the members of the "higher" faculties, but including also some other literati and perhaps also amateurs. What is absolutely clear: it is *not* directed at the public in general sense, at the "people" (*das Volk*). For people in general are incompetent in respect of rational thinking, they are *Idioten*[54]. "…[t]he people naturally adhere most to doctrines which demand the least self-exertion and the least use of their own reason, and which can best accommodate their duties to their inclinations…"[55] They do not read, and in any case would not understand, the writings of the philosophers, this public voice of reason. Thinking on your own now appears to be a task that, at least as far as the present is concerned, is not only unfulfillable but also incomprehensible to the absolute majority. What then remains of the very project of Enlightenment?

There is an answer to this question in Kant, which in a sense is – from our contemporary perspective – perhaps the most distressing. For in some of his later writings he explicitly indicates that the true and ultimate addressee and

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[53] See *ibid*, p. 248–250.

[54] *Ibid*, p. 248.

[55] *Ibid*, p. 258.

public of the autonomous voice of reason is none other than the existing political power, the government. The voice of philosophers, he writes in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, "is not addressed *confidentially* to the people (as the people take scarcely any or no notice at all of it and of their writings) but is addressed *respectfully* to the state…"[56]. This idea is formulated even more clearly and emphatically in the famous "secret supplement" in his essay *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795). In it Kant presents the freedom in the public use of reason (for philosophers) as a convenient ruse allowing the government to seek from them "instructions" in matters of policy without demeaning its dignity and prestige, by acknowledging that in its "greatest wisdom" it still needs advice from some of its subjects. For such writings are of no interest whatsoever to a greater public, can never be suspected of spreading propaganda, but can be of great use to the state by informing it about its true, ultimate interests.[57]

It seems to me a rather hopeless enterprise to try to reconcile these diverse and even contradictory ideas concerning the actual and/or intended public addressed by the enlightened voice of reason. And this seems to be a rather devastating conclusion in respect of Kant's firm belief in the irresistible (however slow) progress and ultimate triumph of Enlightenment. For, as we have seen, this was necessarily related to the assumption that there exists an ever expanding public, at least potentially able "to enlighten itself" – a presupposition based not simply on pragmatic-political considerations, but organically rooted in Kant's "communicative" conception of reason. The inability to specify in an elementarily consistent way who could constitute such a public seems to render the very project of Enlightenment incoherent, just an "empty dream".

This is, however, perhaps too rash a conclusion. First of all, the different views referred to above come from writings published by Kant over fourteen years. And this was an extraordinary decade and a half. Not only did Kant's views change – the world changed around him. On the one hand, fundamental

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[56] *Ibid*, p. 305.

[57] Compare Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace", *CEWK*, volume *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 337–338.

political changes occurred both in Prussia (death of Friedrich II, the reactionary, definitely anti-Enlightenment turn under Friedrich Wilhelm II) and on the world stage (the French Revolution, Jacobin terror, emergence of Napoleon). On the other hand, an important transformation took place in the cultural climate and environment in Germany during this time with the gradual, but ever more influential emergence of Romanticism. All this deeply affected the activity of those semi-public organisations (*Lesegesellschaften*, Masonic lodges etc.) that were the primary organisational bearers of Enlightenment. Alterations in Kant's standpoint concerning such a practically relevant issue as the potential public of Enlightenment and its prospects could not but reflect and react to these changes.

On the other hand, one has to take into account that the different views referred to above were formulated in his extra-systematic, partly popular-"occasional" papers. Their very character (and often already their relative brevity) excluded the possibility of clarifying the strict conceptual distinctions between the different perspectives, from which the question concerning the "public" could be raised and answered, often within one and the same writing. Moral considerations, which did not allow Kant to deny on the basis of some objective characteristics – be they of economic position, social standing or gender – the capacity of any human being to the autonomous use of its own reason become intermixed with realistic estimations of the scope of an adequately responsive audience for books (in the specific sense he uses this term) in the present. Casual references to the intended and expected public of his own writings alternate without strict distinction with views theoretically grounded in long term, historical expectations (or hopes) about the prospective development of an adequate public in general.

Given all this rather confusing complexity, perhaps one has to change the approach to the question about the public, so important to the whole Kantian project of Enlightenment. Instead of collating and comparing his direct formulations related to this issue during this period of time, one should ask: Can one reconstruct (of course, in a non-arbitrary way) within the context of his broadly conceived practical philosophy a relatively stable and principled orientation that would provide a ground for his firm belief in the (at least potential) existence of a public capable of enlightening itself. To answer this question (which would also throw some additional light upon the complexity

of the Kantian concept of Enlightenment itself and its internal strains), we have to return to our point of departure: the analogy between the money and the book as "purely intellectual relations".

Conceived as such these two concepts have normative validity, and as such constitute the basis of two analogous practical norms: that of the *freedom of the trade* and of the *freedom of the pen*. And at least at one point in his late writings Kant explicitly draws this analogy. In a footnote to *The Conflict of the Faculties* he wrote: "A minister of the French government summoned a few of the most eminent merchants and asked them for suggestions on how to stimulate trade – as if he would know how to choose the best of these. After one has suggested this and another that, an old merchant who had kept quiet so far said: 'Build good roads, mint sound money, give us laws for exchanging money readily, etc.; but as for the rest, leave us alone.' If the government were to consult the Philosophy Faculty about what teaching to prescribe for scholars in general, it would get a similar reply: just don't interfere with the progress of understanding and science."[58]

The relation between these two freedoms and their bearers, however, goes beyond a mere analogy. Conceived in terms of the slow historical process envisaged by Kant regarding their (still incomplete) realisation, there is a *mutual supplementarity* between them. For only the expansion of the free "spirit of commerce" to the publication and distribution of books ensures that the book actually can fulfil its great communicative function as the means of exchanging ideas. The commercial publisher may be a mere mediator between the author and the public, but it is due to his activity alone that this relationship can become truly secured. For only by making the book a mere commodity, in principle available to everyone, is its function as an item of prestige and luxury destroyed, in the context of which it "mediates" only between the subordinate author as client and his high patron as its truly intended recipient. Nothing better illustrates this connection than the invention of that new forms of the "book" (in the broad, Kantian sense of this word) that were the direct result of its commercialisation: the *moral weeklies* and *journals*. In fact, at the higher, most sophisticated end of their spectrum their production and

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[58] Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, p. 249.

reception directly embodies – within their quite limited scope and reach – the actual working of Enlightenment. For on the one hand, the loosely organised groups of scholars and independent thinkers (mostly high officials), broadly associated with their publication, regularly engaged in free and broad discussion of general issues and ideas, in particular about questions concerning the true ends and the best strategies to promote the progress of Enlightenment. (The paradigmatic example of such a "learned society" was the "Berlin Wednesday Society", with its unofficial organ, the *Berlinische Monatschrift*.) On the other hand, each issue of such publications was often regularly discussed by partly formal (*Lesegesellschaften*), partly informal groups of their habitual readers in cities and towns, meeting at the home of one of them or at some public space.

Thus freedom of trade, in this specific case concerning the trade with books, can and does directly contribute to the end of the Enlightenment. Of course, it can do so only if all the illegal restrictions concerning commerce (contrary to the very principles of right) – feudal and guild privileges in general, arbitrary rules and acts of censorship concerning book-trade in particular – are swept aside as the consequence of the slow progress of culture. And where this concerns the book trade, then the interests and consequences of the two great normative principles, the freedom of the pen and the freedom of commerce, not merely supplement each other – they coincide.

Commercial freedom thus effectively serves the end of Enlightenment. Of course, it can do so in so far as the published and distributed books find an appropriate readership, recipients who are not only formally literate, but at least in principle capable of thinking on their own. We are thus back to the basic question: on what grounds does Kant assume the (at least potential) existence of such a public in Germany of his time? And who does or could constitute such a public? As we have seen, there is no consistent answer to this question in the writings of Kant. We can, however, perhaps find at least a hint to a possibly coherent and non-arbitrary response to it in his political philosophy, more concretely in his *republicanism*.

The peaceful, cosmopolitan federation of republican states represents for Kant the ideal end of cultural-civilisatory progress in its broad, supra-individual sense. The general principles of a republican constitution, as formulated by Kant, are clearly those of a liberal regime: freedom of the members

of society as individuals, their dependence upon a single, common legislation as subjects and their equality as citizens of the state.[59] These principles are "derived *a priori* by reason from the ideal of a rightful association of human beings under public law as such"[60] They have normative validity, and working incessantly toward their (perhaps never fully achievable) realisation is a morally grounded duty of all of us.[61] At the same time it is the only legal-political system which, once established, is truly lasting and enduring – safe from the danger of revolutionary upheaval and thus from the internal weakness that would make it an easy prey of conquest by other, hostile states.

The most fundamental constitutional characteristic of a republican system is the strict division between the three powers of the state – the judicial, the legislative and the executive power. Kant particularly emphasizes the separation between the latter two, so much so that at some points he simply identifies republicanism as a political principle with this separation.[62] For "legislative authority can belong only to the united will of the people", to "the concurring and united will of all, insofar as each decides the same thing for all and all for each, and so only the general united will of the people can be legislative"[63] (Kant's own version of Rousseau's *volonté générale*). In practice, of course, the people can exercise this authority only through their freely elected representatives. Executive authority, however, cannot belong to the people as such, for this would precisely contradict the necessary separation of powers: democracy in its ancient sense results in the worst kind of tyranny.

But though it is only laws expressing the united will of all people in a state that can have true validity, "it is not the case that all who are free and equal under already existing public laws are to be held equal with regard to the right to give these laws".[64] Accordingly Kant draws a distinction between

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[59] Compare Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace". *CEWK*, volume *Practical Philoophy*, p. 322.

[60] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 491.

[61] Compare *ibid*.

[62] See for example "Toward Perpetual Peace", p. 324.

[63] *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 457.

[64] Kant, "On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice", *CEWK*, volume *Practical Philosophy*, p. 294

active and passive citizens (though he himself admits that "the concept of a passive citizen seems to contradict the concept of a citizen as such"[65]). Participation (through their elected representatives) in the making of the law presupposes *civil independence* as a personality trait that only ownership of some *private property* (independent of its quantity) can ensure. Only the property owner can be regarded as being his own master (*sui juris*). Therefore anyone, who either "by nature" (as children and women) or by his social situation (as domestic servants, tenant farmers, employees and wage-labourers) "depends not on his management of his own business, but on arrangements made by another (except the state)"[66] – and this of course means the absolute majority of all citizens – is to be excluded from participation in the making of the laws, though these later ought to express the united will of each and all.[67]

These views of Kant were criticised already in his own time (e.g. by Hamann and Garve), and the contemporary interpretative-critical literature often underlines their conservative character even in comparison with the views of the representatives of the French and English-Scottish Enlightenment. These are completely legitimate and valid remarks, but not particularly enlightening. Even great thinkers are "children of their age" – their views are influenced not only by the general historical time, but also by the more concrete social space of their life that co-determines their experiences, always filtered through the prejudices shared there by everyone, prejudices which seem to be to the contemporaries the most straightforwardly true and indubitable

[65] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 458.

[66] *Ibid*.

[67] In respect of the exclusion of wage-labourers from the list of active citizens, one ought to indicate that Kant in Königsberg is familiar with the socio-economic institution of the factory only from some descriptions. He therefore tends to assimilate the relation between the capitalist owner and the wage labourers to that between the *pater familias* and his domestic servants. In general, in spite of his familiarity with and admiration for the writings of Adam Smith, his views to a significant degree are still influenced by the Aristotelian theory of the "great house", the *oikos* – one of the causes of the unclarity and relative lack of coherence of his related views. He is, however, himself aware of this difficulty: "It is, I admit, somewhat difficult to determine what is required in order to be able to claim the rank of a human being who is his own master." ("On the Common Saying:…", p. 295.)

empirical generalisations. Instead of looking at Kant's reasons (and the broader grounds) for the above exclusions, it seems to be more rewarding to ask: on what basis does he positively assume that the private proprietor is able to act, at least potentially, due to his personality as shaped by his social position and activity, as co-legislator in the demanded sense: to be the creator of laws expressing the general will of all?

This is the rather surprising assertion to be made by Kant. Private ownership can give rise to the passion, the "mania" (*Sucht*) for unrestricted accumulation – an incurable and despicable (and also evil) illness of the mind.[68] But even disregarding this extreme case, the difficulty remains. For precisely where private ownership is not parasitically used for mere enjoyment (and thus ultimately squandered), but employed for socially beneficent purposes, it gives rise to a conflict between the proprietors. For necessarily there is a competitive relation between the owners/producers engaged in the same type of activity. Their prudential self-interests clash. What is the guarantee that endowing such an internally divided class of citizens with the power of legislation would not lead to an anarchic instability as result of the never ending war of egoisms – the guarantee that they can raise themselves above their narrowly conceived, egoistic self-interests?

Well, they can and will do so, if they are *enlightened*. For Enlightenment means to think on your own, but from a "broadened", general standpoint. In the legal-political realm this means the ability not to follow the dictates of temporary and insecure personal gains, but to think from the perspective of the common good, that of the improvements in the situation and chances of each and all. Can private proprietors as a special social group be enlightened? Formulated in this way, this is, of course, a nonsensical question. Every human as a (finite) rational being can in principle be enlightened. The real question is: can members of this social group be enlightened *here and now*, do they have they some specific propensity making this possible and probable in this not yet enlightened age which is nevertheless the Age of Enlightenment? Are not private proprietors just a subgroup of the common people, the *Volk*, who by their nature tend to adhere to views and doctrines demanding the

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[68] Compare *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, § 80–85, pp. 367–374.

least use of their reason, tending just to follow, whenever possible, their thoughtless inclination, deaf to the call to self-enlightenment?

Of course a negative answer to this question is implied by the very distinction Kant draws between active and passive citizens in his ideal of a republican legal-political order. Private proprietors can be co-legislators precisely because he ascribes to them the ability to formulate and represent the general will of all. If this is possible only when they are enlightened, then he must equally assume that they have – in distinction from the common *Volk* – a specific propensity to become enlightened here and now, for this is the Age of Enlightenment. Kant must have assumed that it is this specific group that constitutes the adequate, responsive and responsible, already existing and ever growing public of Enlightenment, even though he never explicitly stated it.

Less philosophically inclined representatives of the German Enlightenment did directly formulate this idea. "The actual point where Enlightenment must begin is with the middle estate (*Mittelstand*) as the center of the nation; from there the rays of enlightenment will spread only gradually outward to the two extremes, the higher and the lower estates", wrote Friedrich Gedike.[69] The same explicit assertion was formulated, among others, also by Friedrich Schlegel (in his 1797 essay on Georg Foster, calling the *Mittelstand* "the healthiest part of the nation") and by Ch. Garve, who maintained that the ability to become enlightened, to be *öffentlichkeitsfähig* is a specific characteristics of the Third Estate.[70] And this seemed to be at this time an empirically valid generalisation. In Eighteeenth century Germany it is the *Besitzbürger* (and their family members) of towns and cities that increasingly become the typical consumers and readers of the expanding secular literature.

Kant, however, did not base his firm belief in the "almost inevitable" progress of Enlightenment (which presupposes an ever larger public capable of understanding and following its ideas in practice) upon such empirical

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[69] Quoted in the essay of J. B. Knudsen, "On the Enlightenment for the Common Man" in the volume *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed J. Schmidt, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California UP, 1996, p. 273.

[70] Compare *ibid*, p. 283.

observations and generalisations. As indicated, he does not state explicitly that it is the social group of private proprietors who in fact constitutes such a public. This, as we have seen, is only suggested by his remarks concerning the mutual supplementarity of the interest of Enlightenment (that of the pen and its freedom) and the interest of commerce (that of the money and the freedom of the trade). This usually only implied conviction is expressed most clearly in the essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim": "If one hinders the citizen who is seeking his welfare in any way he pleases, as long as it can subsists along with the freedom of others, then one restrains the vitality of all enterprise and with it, in turn, the powers of the whole. Hence the personal restrictions on the citizen's doing and refraining are removed more and more, and the general freedom of religion is ceded; and thus gradually arises, accompanied by delusions and whims, *enlightenment* as a great good..."[71] And he makes immediately clear that this enlightenment first arises among the active and critically thinking citizens, and only then can ascend "bit by bit up to the thrones and have its influence even on their principles of government".[72]

Much more important than such (quite rare) relatively direct formulations indicating the close connection between commerce and enlightenment is Kant's conceptual characterisation of this specific social group, the private proprietors, which explicates the grounds why they can and do constitute the adequate public for enlightenment. For this, however, we must first clarify whom Kant actually means by this social group. At this point one must first underline the radically and unambiguously *anti-feudal* character of Kant's views.[73] "Now since birth is not a *deed* of one who is born, he cannot incur by it any inequality of rightful condition and any other subjection to coercive

[71] Kant, "Idea for a Universal History...", *CEWK*, volume *Anthropology*..., p. 117.

[72] *Ibid*.

[73] As it is quite often the case with Kant, he almost immediately blunts the direct political edge and relevance of his substantively radical views through his "reformist" ideas. So he maintains that the rational way the state can and should deal with such, fundamentally illegitimate privileges is letting them continue, but not conferring new privileges and not filling vacancies in such positions, till they slowly disappear. Compare *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 471.

law than merely that which is common to him with all others, as subjects of the sole supreme legislative power; hence there can be no innate prerogative of one member of the commonwealth over another as fellow subjects, and no one can bequeath to his descendants the prerogative of *rank* which he has within the commonwealth and so also cannot… coercively prevent others from attaining by their own merit the higher levels of subordination…"[74]

"… a *hereditary* nobility is a rank that precedes merit and also provides no basis to hope for merit, and is thus a thought-entity without any reality", "a groundless prerogative".[75] And serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) which turns a human being into the property of someone else, treats him or her as a mere disposable object represents the outright denial of the dignity inherently pertaining to each human as rational being – it is not merely a groundless, but morally wrong and condemnable social institution.[76]

It is only when all the feudal shackles are removed, and each and every citizen has the legally safeguarded right to acquire by rightful means property and dispose of it as he wills, that social-economic inequalities, however great they may be, become legitimate. Because then they ultimately depend on the talent, industry and luck of each citizen, and are therefore in the long run fluid and impermanent.[77] At the same time there is a degree of vagueness in Kant's views concerning the question what does constitute the private property of a subject. According to him "any art, craft, fine art or science can be counted as property".[78] Therefore he considers all skilled artisans, artists and scholars as private proprietors (and thus active citizens), independently of their actual economic situation and social position. They "own" something, the fruits of which (over which they alone dispose) they can alienate, freely exchange with others as a commodity, without guaranteeing to somebody else the right of command over their labour.[79] They are thus their "own

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[74] Kant, "On the Common Saying…", p. 293.

[75] *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 471.

[76] *Ibid*, p. 471–472.

[77] Compare "On the Common Saying…"; p. 293.

[78] *Ibid*, p. 295.

[79] This view of Kant, however, is not easily reconcilable with his conception of (true) authorship. For the author of a book (in the peculiar, Kantian sense of this term) is not

masters", their well-being may depend on "luck", on the impersonal mechanisms of the market, but not on the will of somebody else.[80]

To be "one's own master" thus radically differs in Kant from the Aristotelian conception of "self-sufficiency". Self-sufficiency – be it of an individual household or of a whole society – necessarily condemns its subject to stagnation.[81] Producing for indeterminate others in competition with determinate others, this is what corresponds to and adequately enacts the finite nature of human rationality, man's unsociable sociability. And it is the interests of these small-scale commodity producers and entrepreneurs – since the social institution of factory, as already indicated, is essentially beyond Kant's grasp – which constitute and define the spirit of commerce, this great engine driving history progressively forward towards its end, the peaceful federation of republican states.

A particularly positive evaluation of this social group has a long history in Kant's writing. Already in the pre-critical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* he wrote about them with an undisguised admiration. These persons, driven by self-interest, "are the most industrious, orderly and prudent people; they give demeanor and solidity to the whole, for even without aiming at it they serve the common good, supply the necessary requisites, and provide the foundations over which finer souls can spread beauty and harmony."[82] And the preference given to them – as against any kind of large-scale commercial enterprises – returns, even if implicitly, in the later

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the producer of some alienable object. His work is the materialisation (through the mediation of linguistic signs) of his speech as his inalienable action, which it "allows" a third party, the publisher as mediator between himself and the public, to disseminate, making his voice "audible" to many.

[80] In accord with the anti-feudal character of his views, Kant equally rejects the client-patron relation between artist or scholar, on the one hand, and their aristocratic "benefactor", on the other.

[81] Accordingly Kant regards societies, which systematically confine their members to such a way of life and activity – the societies of hunters/gatherers and of herdsmen – in principle incapable of progress. They are – so to say – the dead-ends of history.

[82] Kant, *Observations…*, *CEWK*, volume *Anthropology…*, p. 39.

writings as well. There is, for example, a rather strange passage in his essay "On the Common Saying…". Kant there raises a question which should have been – given his unambiguous legitimation of large inequalities of wealth and property under legitimate conditions – just a rhetorical one. He does not answer it, but his formulation rather clearly suggests a surprisingly negative answer to it, no doubt motivated by his negative attitude to large-scale commercial enterprises. He makes there the well-known point about the illegitimacy of feudal privileges of unalienable land-ownership, but in an aside he asks (while he states that he does not really want to raise here this question): "how it could with right have come about that someone received as his own more land than he could himself make use of with his own hand…, and how it came about that many human beings who could otherwise have acquired a lasting status of possession were thereby reduced merely to serving him in order to be able to live?"[83]

This preference for *small-scale commodity producers* is not based, however, on some personal idiosyncrasy of Kant. He certainly does not deny that large private enterprises, based on accumulated wealth, may use their gains for benevolent public purposes – support for the arts and scholarship, contribution to charity, reducing social tensions etc. He is interested, however, not in the possible *social effects* of these institutions, but in the character of the typical *social actor/subject* that keeps them working.

The small-scale commodity producer/entrepreneur must work and simultaneously manage his business. He cannot leave the humdrum issues of management to some well-paid employee. He constantly must make his own decisions: what materials or instruments to buy, given their price on the market; how to use them for the production of which type of commodity; at what price to offer this commodity to potential consumers etc. etc.? He must think on his own, for he is his own master. But he must think on his own in relation to others: competitors, on the one hand, potential customers, on the other. And his judgments and decisions are constantly tested by the response of these others: they are the true, free arbiters of the correctness of his decisions.

[83] Kant, "On the Common Saying:…", *CEWK*, volume *Practical Philosophy*, p. 295.

As a social type the small-scale commodity producer is as close to being able to satisfy the three great maxims of self-enlightening as any empirically determined social group could be, at least at that time. It is the adequate public of Enlightenment - if the voice of Enlightenment can reach it at all, *if* freedom of the pen, of the public use of reason is assured. And it is, on the other hand, an ever-growing, both numerically and in regard to its influence, social group, *if* commerce is freed from restrictive privileges and arbitrary rules and regulations. The two freedoms, that of the pen and of commerce, the interests of Enlightenment and of trade, mutually complement and support each other and precisely this ensures their simultaneous, gradual, but ultimately irresistible success.

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Thus Kant's conviction concerning the "nearly inevitable" success of Enlightenment (if these two freedoms are granted) is not a beautiful, but merely empty dream. Granted his theoretical premises (if the above reconstruction is not arbitrary) it is well founded and coherent. And nevertheless his very essay on Enlightenment, which so clearly expresses this belief, precisely in this respect creates a strange impression. It is not merely the case that having emphatically raised the question concerning the public of Enlightenment, Kant fails to give any coherent answer to it (and he most definitely does not, even obliquely, refer to the convincing solution that is – as we have tried to show – offered by his theoretical premises.) For this essay, so decidedly optimistic about the gradual but inevitable success of Enlightenment, opens with a note of almost despairing accusation, the shadow of which then lingers on, primarily because it remains unclear who is the actual target at whom this accusation is directed.

"Far the greatest part of humankind" is accused of the deplorable *moral* fault of "laziness and cowardice", of a *self-incurred* inability "to make use of one's own understanding without the direction from another".[84] They gladly remain "minors" for life, uncritically following the guidance of others, of the "guardians". So the voice of Enlightenment falls, insofar as this majority is concerned, on disappointingly deaf ears.

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[84] Kant, "An Answer to the Question:…", *CEWK*, volume *Practical Philosophy*, p. 17.

The moral character of this accusation is not the result of some rhetorical overdrive. Enlightenment for Kant is not reduced to an ever wider spread of knowledge. Its slogan: *sapere aude* demands a true reform in the very way of thinking that necessarily involves a change in the practical attitude of the subjects. The courage to use one's own understanding has of course (given Kant's communicative theory of knowledge and truth) nothing to do with some solipsistic idea of thinking in isolation, irrespective of the thoughts and beliefs of others. It requires constant critical reflection upon one's beliefs from a universal standpoint that embraces the standpoint of others. It is precisely this *critical reflexivity* in relation to all ideas, be they "original", your own, or those of others that is demanded by the use of one's own understanding. And every adult and normal human being has in principle this capacity, as necessary constituent of his/her transcendentally grounded rationality as such. If it is not exercised by some individuals (the great majority in the present), if they passively allow others (the "guardians") to direct their thinking, they bear the (ultimately moral) blame.

This train of thought is prima facie consistent in Kant. But it faces serious objections that were almost immediately formulated by Hamann.[85] How can one blame individuals (the majority today) whose very life and existence depends – either on general anthropological grounds (women) or because of their actual social situation (servants, day and wage labourers) – on following the direction and commands of somebody else, for a deplorable lack of courage in using their own understanding? They do not have the practical possibility to exercise their own judgment in all the matters that really matter, above all in determining on their own the ends of their activity. Kant morally blames the victims for their victimhood and absolves those who are truly responsible for such a situation. Critical reflexivity may well be, as a "germ of nature", an abstractly given potential of human rationality, but for its regular/habitual exercise appropriate life-conditions must be present – and for the majority of human beings they are absent today.

But perhaps Kant himself was uneasy with such a broad moral accusation that opens his essay. Immaturity and maturity are in their fundamental sense

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[85] See especially Hamann's letter from the Eighteenth of December 1784 to Christian Jacob Krauss.

legal concepts and in this respect Kant defines maturity as the ability to support oneself by one's own activity, to be one's own master.[86] So perhaps his disappointment primarily concerns those, who – being their own master – are fully mature in this legal sense and nevertheless remain comfortably minors, following uncritically the guidance of others in their thinking and action. So the charge actually expresses his disappointment in the envisaged public of Enlightenment.

The essay on Enlightenment does not really clarify this question, but makes it in a sense irrelevant. For almost immediately what was originally characterised as a *self-incurred* inability appears as the intended result of the conscious action of others – the (bad/wrong) *guardians*. It is they, who "have made their domesticated animals dumb and carefully prevented these placid creatures from daring to take a single step without the walking cart in which they have confined them…"[87]. It is they who put the public under a yoke, implanting in it prejudices.[88]

This new charge, however, again remains in some respect indeterminate, because the object of blame, the notion of guardian, is left indistinct and hazy. It is, of course, again a legal concept. Guardian is a person who is legally entitled to act in the name or command the action of another person, deemed incapable for whatever reasons of making rational, appropriate decisions (being legally "immature") on his/her own.

Certainly this is the sense in which Kant primarily uses this concept. There are, he indicates, completely legitimate uses of the power of guardianship, not hindering, but actually promoting the cause of Enlightenment. The officer commanding a group of soldiers, the tax official demanding a particular payment from the citizen, the clergyman exposing the dogmas of faith in face of a group of believers rightfully expect obedience without any argument. They act in all these cases not in their own name, but as holders of a particular office/institution, whose unhindered functioning is in the interest of everyone, of the whole commonwealth. This is what Kant "subversively" call the

86 Compare Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, § 30, p. 431.

87 Kant, "An Answer to the Question::…", p. 17.

88 Compare *ibid*, p. 18.

private use of reason. And since the stability of the state and its essential institutions is for him a precondition of the progress of Enlightenment, such an artificial unanimity based on passive obedience is in full accord with its aims – *if* the same official can discuss as a "scholar", outside his official function, freely, critically all matters, including the appropriateness, rightfulness of the very obligations which he as office-holder upholds, that is, *if* there is an unrestricted freedom of the public use of reason, the freedom of the pen.[89]

But the guardianship, which – negatively or positively – can influence the actual course of Enlightenment, has little to do with its legal concept. It has no necessary connection with holding some office. There are "self-appointed" (i.e. without official position) guardians, who have kindly taken upon themselves the supervision of the "immature".[90] And of course books (at least books with ideas) can, as already indicated, play for some readers the role of guardians. Thus one has to suppose that their authors actually fulfil – wittingly or unwittingly – the role of guardians. Guardianship, in the sense relevant to Kant's argumentation, refers thus not to a legal position, but to a social-cultural function. And of course in this sense (never fully clarified by Kant) it can well have a positive effect of Enlightenment. "For there will always be a few independent thinkers, even among the established guardians of the great masses, who, after having themselves cast off the yoke of minority, will disseminate the spirit of a rational valuing of one's own worth and of the calling of each individual to think for themselves."[91] This lack of clarification seems, at least *prima facie*, to result in an explicit contradiction in the essay. On the one hand Kant categorically declares: "…[t]hat the guardians of the people (in spiritual matters) should themselves be minors is an absurdity that amounts to the perpetuation of absurdities."[92] On the other hand, however, he writes about some guardians, "who are themselves incapable of any enlightenment".[93] No doubt, the first remark concern spiritual guardians in the legal sense of this term, while the latter refers to the self-appointed tribunals of the people, who stir up the immature public to destructive revolt.

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[89] Compare *ibid*, pp. 18–20.

[90] Compare *ibid*, p. 17

[91] *Ibid*, pp. 17–18.

[92] *Ibid*, p. 19.

[93] *Ibid*, p. 18.

But Kant seems to shift from one meaning of guardianship to the other without any explicit discrimination.

Of course, this is a very short, "popular" essay (and perhaps the most famous, most often discussed essay in the whole history of philosophy). It is intended for a broader, non-professional audience, uninterested in such pedantic, petty-minded criticisms. The important thing really is the great, clear message of this paper: Kant's firm conviction in the success of true Enlightenment under clearly stated, achievable conditions.

This well may be true, but nevertheless it remains unsatisfactory. For this message emerges from, and actually gains its great dramatic power against the background of a deep dissatisfaction with the actual state of Enlightenment in Germany. The essay explicitly asks about the causes of this deplorable, frustrating state of affairs, but gives several, not only different, but seemingly irreconcilable answers to this question. The inconclusiveness of the answer about the causes of this frustration is in a sense a sign, an expression of the frustration itself. Ultimately it remains the task of the intended reader/public to rethink this problem, for it is also they, who – as active citizens, able to influence the authorities of the state – can do something about it, can foster the success of Enlightenment dependent on the freedom of the pen.

This frustration, however, is not something peculiar to Kant. In this respect one has to remember that his essay is only one in a series of partly earlier, partly simultaneous writings that attempted to answer the question, provocatively posed in 1783 by J. F. Zöllner: what is the true nature of Enlightenment, for without answering it the very labour of meaningfully enlightening a public cannot begin. And already the very first attempt to answer it in the Berlin *Mittwochsgesellschaft*, the paper by J. K. G. Möhsen (1783), opened with a clear formulation of this very frustration: "why enlightenment has not progressed very far with our public, despite more then forty years of freedom to think, to speak, and also to publish?"[94] [This is a reference to Friedrich's reforms, easing censorship, especially concerning questions of religion – G. M.] Some years earlier, in a satirical novel, Nicolai simply registers this failure: the

[94] Quoted in the volume *What is Enlightenment*, ed. J. Schmidt, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p. 3.

inhabitants of the most cosmopolitan German city, Berlin, are not at all interested and influenced by all these doctrinal innovations: "they shut the window in the face of all these 'enlightenened' spirits".

This frustration is a particular feature of Enlightenment in Germany. It is, no doubt, to a large extent the frustration of the *latecomer*. One ought to remember that even in the first half of the Eighteenth century the language of polite conversation in higher circles in Germany was French, while works of scholarly intent – even of genuine originality – in the first decades of the century were still predominantly written in Latin (or French), as was the case with the works of Leibniz. Vernacular German for a long time was simply not regarded as appropriate for such higher, more sophisticated purposes.

This frustration is all the more deep, because – in distinction to England and pre-revolutionary France – there is no centralised national state in Germany, which is also divided by significant religious differences and controversies. In this situation it is culture, cultural activities and their products, which are the sole bearer of the idea and ideal of national unity – successful if it can find an appropriate audience and broad resonance. (Whether Enlightenment, with its cosmopolitan inclination, can successfully fulfil such a function, will become one of the central issues of Romanticism's critique of the Enlightenment.) The question about the public of Enlightenment had therefore a direct social-political relevance.

This frustration of the latecomer explains also some of the particular features of the German Enlightenment. Enlightenment in France (and to a large extent also in Britain) was not so much a clearly stated program, but rather a self-confident practice. Not by chance – beyond the great project of the *Encyclopédie*, unifying all its diverse (and partly opposed) representatives (and also some of its opponents) – it found its most effective and influential expressions in novels and novellas – of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau. They are animated by the spirit of confidence in the maturity of the public to be able not merely to enjoy an entertaining story, but also to understand the message that it embodies and communicates.[95] German Enlightenment, on the other hand,

[95] In Germany the ideas of Enlightenment find an adequate literary expression again relatively late – Lessing's *Nathan* was written in 1779.

is characterised by the spirit of a *critical self-reflexivity*. Appropriately its most important "popular" genre is the *essay*.

The essay is again a latecomer in Germany – it becomes an important genre only in the second half of the 18th century (and even then there is no single term in German that would unambiguously designate it). But the essays of German Enlightenment have a specific character – in a sense they represent a new stage in the development of this genre. The essay as a modern genre originates with Montaigne. His works, through the discussion of a great diversity of topics, is a work of self-disclosure, or perhaps better: that of self-discovery. This distinguishes it from literary works that aim at some extraneous purposes. Its interest for any broader public consists in the paradigmatic exemplariness of the finding and elucidation of one's true subjectivity. The genre undergoes then a fundamental transformation in English-Scottish essays, from Bacon to Hume. Essays become primarily "counsels", instructing a (presupposed) wider public in respect of a number of theoretical and practical issues of import. They retain, however, a fundamental, constitutive relation to authorial subjectivity, for these precepts are essentially presented as based and validated by the personal experiences and insights of the author, and not by abstract, theoretical considerations.

The classical essays of the German Enlightenment are, of course, also written in a personal tone and voice. But they do not aim in any particular sense at self-presentation. (Kant certainly never thought to publish his collected essays in a single volume serving such purposes.) The German essays of the time are centred on one fundamental problem: the relation to the public[96], both as the diagnosis of the actual state of an audience for the Enlightenment and a program for its desired transformation. These essays are in this sense both manifestations of frustration with a deeply unsatisfactory state of affair and searches for change.

[96] This point is very convincingly and informatively made in a paper by V. Dell'Orto about the history of German essay as a genre in the Eighteenth century. Cf. his article: "Audience and the Tradition of the German Essay in the Eighteenth Century", *Germanic Review*, 1975, vol. 50)

All these frustrations, however, become secondary and lose their significance in view of a sudden, new development. It seems to be a desirable development for the success of Enlightenment, but in its actual effects it leads – as far as Kant is concerned – to devastating outcomes for this project. Contemporaries referred to it (usually with a pejorative accent) as the *Lesewut*, the "reading mania" (or even *Leseseuche*, "reading epidemic") of the later eighties in Germany. These are certainly somewhat hyperbolic designations, given the fact that the number of persons buying books or subscribing to journals/ weeklies with some regularity encompassed at the turn of the century no more than about one and half percent of the whole population. On the other hand this number itself (about three hundred thousand persons) actually meant a doubling of this public within a single generation. And no less importantly, as far as the population of cities and towns is concerned, this development was no longer socially localised, restricted to persons belonging to a particular class or status – in this respect it was heterogenous and open. It promised (certainly Kant conceived it in this way) to be the great take-off of the irresistible process of making reading into an indispensable and general need – a triumph of the Enlightenment.

This picture, however, changes radically, when the question is asked: *what* do people predominantly read now and how do they read? For the popular reading matters are not "books" in the Kantian sense of the word, that is writings communicating and transmitting "ideas" which demand a rational, disciplined and critical understanding. They are predominantly sentimental novels, tales of adventure and intrigue or ghost stories, read for the sake of mere entertainment and personal escapism.[97] And if earlier an intensive form of reading prevailed (mostly, of course, of religious works, but later to a degree

[97] This was also at the same time the period of *Sturm und Drang* and then of the emergence of German classicism in literature – that of the early works of Goethe and Schiller. Of course, the social context and condition of this activity made it essentially independent of the public success of the publication of the works – it was secured by princely patronage. In any case such public recognition arrived rather slowly – when Goethe published his *Literary Works* in 1787, this had only a very disappointing 550 subscribers. What concerns Kant, he seems to be if not unaware, then at least completely uninterested in all these developments.

secularised), this is replaced now by extensive reading, looking for something easily understandable, but new. From the viewpoint of the Enlightenment this appeared as a disaster. The Kant-follower J. A. Bergk reacts to it as to a deep moral failure: "To read a book merely in order to kill time is an act of high treason toward humanity because one is belittling a medium that was designed for loftier purposes."[98]

Kant addresses himself to this problem in one of his last essays that was still published by himself: "On Turning Out Books" (1798), which actually consist of two public letters addressed to Friedrich Nicolai. Nicolai – the author of a very successful satirical novel (translated into a number of languages), for a time the co-editor of *Berliner Monatschrift* and an influential publisher – was an old foe. He was the representative of the empirical ideas of Scottish Enlightenment in Germany and from this standpoint repeatedly criticised (and made fun of) Kant's transcendentalism.

Kant's first letter to Nicolai is a reply to one of the leading conservative adversaries of Enlightenment, Justus Möser, whose unfinished polemics with Kant was published posthumously by Nicolai. The second letter, dealing with Nicolai's activity as a highly successful publisher, though not referring directly to the situation created by the *Lesewut*, is certainly provoked by and concerned with it.

Kant describes with distaste the situation, in which works of serious theoretical intent become the object of cheap mockery and satire, to be replaced by publications slavishly following the dictate of momentary fashions and market demands. Now, however, he charges not the "self-incurred immaturity" of the public for this despicable state of affair, he regards it – not without grounds – as the result of the conscious intention of publishers like Nicolai, for whom turning out books is just a business activity.

There is nothing objectionable with such practices from a *legal* standpoint. Today "the turning out of books is not an insignificant branch of business in a commonwealth"[99] – within minimal legal constraints its freedom is just a

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[98] J. A. Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen*. Jena, 1799, p. 407.

[99] Kant, "On Turning Out Books. Two Letters to Mr Friedrich Nicolai", *CEWK*, volume *Practical Philosophy*, p. 625.

sub-case of the freedom of trade. And as a business it has to satisfy the greatest demand and ensure the quickest depreciation through a swift turnover of its products as commodities. In fact, suggests Kant, it is most successful when "it is carried on *in the manner of a factory*."[100] And this means that the really successful publisher will not simply wait for some skilled writer to offer his work for sale – he will *hire* writers and command them as to what and how to write on the basis of his own knowledge of the prevailing interests and expectations of the potential readers as consumers. In this way "prudence" in publication as a business becomes opposed to the "soundness" of publication, i.e. to the inner worth and significance of the published text as the great instrument of Enlightenment. Kant certainly describes this situation with a despairing irritation, to end with a rather unconvincing, empty assurance in the ultimate victory of Enlightenment: Making a cheap farce of all works of genuine theoretical claim and insight must finally become disgusting – it ultimately only "prepares the labors in the sciences which are all the more serious and well-grounded".[101]

But Kant perhaps himself does not realise how deep and non-transient this crisis of the Enlightenment is – on the basis of his own theoretical premises. His own conviction in the ultimate success of Enlightenment was based – as we tried to demonstrate earlier – on the mutual supplementarity of the interests of the pen and of money, on the way the two freedoms, that of the public use of reason and that of trade, complement and support each other. But what he now depicts is a *conflict* between the two. The rational business practices of publishing as a trade may directly and consistently infringe on the freedom of the pen. For if the most rational form of publication as a business is making it an "industry", by hiring writers, who are to be commanded and controlled as to what and how to write, thereby transforming the writer into a mercenary pen-pusher, then even the illusion of authorial freedom disappears.

But even disregarding this extreme case, the commercialisation of literature radically changes the role and function of the publisher in ways certainly contradicting Kant's ideas. For him the ("mandated") publisher's sole task is to

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[100] *Ibid*, p. 626.

[101] *Ibid*, p. 627.

act as the mere mediator between the author and the public. He is to be a "mute instrument", amplifying the "speech" of the author so that it can be "audible", receivable by a public. But the commercial publisher has a much more active and significant role. He actively filters and selects the writers, whom he allows to "speak". And this selection is governed solely by considerations of the momentary commercial success of the publication, preferring those authors, whose writings are best adapted to the fickle expectations and interests of an "immature" public.

Commercialisation of literature became an issue in the last decade of the Eighteenth century that began to divide the camp of enlighteners. Some, like Heinzmann, regard it as a complete disaster, undermining the whole project of Enlightenment. And some marginal figures in this camp even propose censorial intervention, to stop this mentally and physically unhealthy "mania" of reading. On the other hand some, mostly among the representatives of *Volksaufklärung*, greeted and supported this expansion of the book-trade, especially concerning its lowest forms, arguing that actually it the first time made secular printed matters available to rural populations. Some even proposed state support, encouraging the activity of such *Buchtischlers*.

Kant occupies a position between these two extremes. Commercial publication of books as a branch of industry is safeguarded by the freedom of trade, even though its result in the present (*Lesewut*) creates a situation of crisis, endangering the whole project of Enlightenment. To counteract this danger he calls upon the (ultimately morally grounded) cultural responsibility of the publishers, which in the long term will also be commercially validated. But his firm conviction in the irresistible success of Enlightenment in face of this crisis turns into a mere act of hope.

Kant's late writings in the nineties constitute the concluding chapter in the history of German Enlightenment. For Enlightenment as the dominant intellectual current and tendency of the time fades out in the nineties in Germany. The outbreak of the French Revolution not only greatly increases the conservative pressure upon the camp of enlighteners, it also leads to further internal divisions within this camp, depending on the different reactions and attitudes of its representatives to this great historical event. The wave of Romanticism, emerging in the nineties, will dominate – with its strongly

nationalistic orientation – cultural life for the next half century. But Kant remains. His philosophy still forms for the Romantics the fixed point of intellectual orientation and simultaneously the main target and object of criticism. This situation will change only with the appearance of Hegel on the intellectual scene.

Chapter Thirteen

The Hegelian Concept of Culture

In the whole history of ideas there are few carrier-stories stranger and more striking than that of the term and concept of *culture*. A word of venerable antiquity, which already occurs with Cicero, it remains till the end of the eighteenth century a little used, marginal expression of learned folk and the scholarly public. Today this word has not only invaded the talk of all of us, becoming in its many derivations an everyday catch-phrase, but constitutes one of those notions without which a systematic reflection upon our own situation, and the human situation in general, seems to be impossible. It is not fortuitous that Heidegger once mentioned the *concept* of culture among the metaphysical grounds of modernity.

At the same time, this story of phenomenal success is the story of fundamental failure. The present-day complexity of meaning of the term culture has been primarily established in the theories of the late Enlightenment. Here, however, it served – together with a number of competing synonyms – as

the articulation of a fundamental social-historical project. Today it requires the labour of remembrance, a work of historical reconstruction, to recall this practical-projective aspect of the use of culture to which, however, its original importance and popularity was primarily due. It is the loss of this meaning that to a significant degree conditions our situation today.

To refer in this context to *Hegel's* philosophy, is – I think – rather unusual. It is, of course, a commonplace that our modern conceptions of culture were largely elaborated within *German* philosophy. Anthropologists refer to Herder or perhaps Iselin as the true initiators of the contemporary culture-concept; philosophers will at least add Kant, and maybe even Fichte to this list. Hegel's name, however, is almost never mentioned in this connection. In fact, one of the best scholars of Hegel in Germany – Bruno Liebruck – not long ago published a paper attempting to explain why Hegel avoided employing the concept of culture, and failed to integrate it systematically into his philosophy.

With due respect to Liebruck's knowledge of Hegel (certainly superior to mine), such a way of posing the question seems to rest on a misunderstanding based on a number of factors that certainly ought to be mentioned and acknowledged. Firstly, it is a fact that Hegel used the *term* "*Kultur*" in a quite sporadic and accidental manner. Instead he employed another word, which, at least at the turn of the century, was generally accepted in Germany as the synonym of "*Kultur*" – the term "*Bildung*." The reasons for this terminological preference are, in all probability, quite innocent. The German word "*Bildung*," due to its associations with the noun *Bild* (picture) on the one hand, and with the verb *bilden* (to form) on the other hand, allowed Hegel to draw together the various meaning-aspects of "culture" through that etymologising reference to the unconscious spirit of language which he so much liked, and which we find so often irritating. This terminological choice has, however, proved to be quite fatal from the viewpoint of the later reception of Hegel. For in the second half of the nineteenth century the original synonymity between "*Kultur*" and "*Bildung*" was broken, and *Bildung* has acquired the more restricted meaning of *education* (and the contents acquired through the educational process). Consequently, Hegel's conception of *Bildung* has been predominantly treated in its individualistic pedagogic aspect alone. This has been reinforced by the fact that it is this aspect of *Bildung* with which Hegel himself dealt in the most extensive and explicit manner, though mostly

in his extra-systematic writings and largely due to accidental, biographic circumstances.

Nevertheless, such a *reduction* of the meaning of *Bildung* in Hegel to the process (or content) of the education/cultivation of the individual, represents a distortion of his views. Not only is such an interpretation unable to account for many of the ways in which he actually uses this term in his systematic writings, but it goes against his explicit strictures and, even more importantly, against the basic intentions and insights of his philosophy. *Bildung*, he writes explicitly in the preface to *Phenomenology*, if

> regarded from the side of the individual, consists in his acquiring what lies [as product of past experiences – G.M.] at hand … and taking possession of it for himself. But, regarded from the side of universal spirit as substance, this is nothing but its own acquisition of self-consciousness, the bringing-about of its own becoming and reflection into itself.[1]

The point Hegel makes here is not only a metaphysical one, concerning the dialectic between the individual-subjective and the universal spirit; it has a direct historical-practical significance. Because the reduction of *Bildung* to the consciously undertaken intellectual-educational activity of the individual, and the ensuing treatment of it in terms of *acquisition*, *possession and mastery*, is a characteristic feature of the narrow standpoint of *understanding* (*Verstand*) – a standpoint, the elaboration of which is a necessary *precondition* for the emergence of modernity and, simultaneously the greatest *hindrance* for coming to terms with its phenomena.

To outline Hegel's concept of *Bildung* as culture in all its complexity (within which *Bildung* as education represents only one meaning-aspect) is, however, a formidable task. For, and this is certainly the second factor that underlies a reductionist understanding of his conception, Hegel undoubtedly never elaborated a *theory* of *Bildung*. He constantly *uses* the term and concept, and does it at the most diverse and disparate places in his system, without ever attempting to give an analytic account for the implied diversity of its meaning and the interconnection between its various constituents. Consequently, his use

[1] Hegel, *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 1952, p. 27.

of the term appears *prima facie* at least baffling, if not confused, since the various constituents hardly seem to be compatible with each other. It suffices to say that even within one single work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* alone, *Bildung* means, on the one hand, the process of education through which the uncultivated individual can reach the standpoint of contemporary science. On the other hand, it is used to conceptualise the whole of world history which is conceived as a *Bildungsgeschichte*, as the formative cultivation of consciousness. At the same time, however, it is employed also to characterise one *single epoch* in this history, since it is emerging modernity, and modernity alone, which in this work is categorically described as the world of *Bildung* (and alienation). Hegel, however, treats this concept also as the attribute of what seems to be one of his most fundamental and universal metaphysical categories – *Spirit*, "*Geist*." Spirit, he says, taken in counterdistinction from nature, is defined not simply as having a *Bildung*, but as being nothing else but *Bildung*.

Bildung is undoubtedly – using the terminology of later-day phenomenology – a merely *operational* concept within Hegel's philosophy, a concept belonging to its cognitive *horizon*, but not made truly *thematic* within it. Its reconstruction, nevertheless, constitutes a task which, in my opinion, has a significance beyond the matters of Hegel interpretation and philology. For the confusing complexity of the Hegelian idea of *Bildung* is the direct outcome of his striving to uphold and to defend that fundamental social-historical project – Enlightenment – designated by the name "culture;" to defend it while accepting many of the insights that an incipient *critique of culture* (from Rousseau and Diderot to German Romantics) had developed concerning its limitations and antinomies. As a result, Hegel offers a conceptualisation of "culture" which is not only among the richest in the history of Western philosophy, but also brings to the fore what is at stake in the original conceptions of culture – and the type of fundamental aporias and difficulties they involve.

What follows cannot be more than an attempt to outline the bare skeleton of the Hegelian *Bildung*-concept, to indicate – in a highly schematic way – its basic meaning-dimensions and their interconnections. These are essentially four. In a rather arbitrary and modernising way, I shall call them: the pedagogical, the historical, the sociological, and the metaphysical-culturological concepts of culture.

"Man is" – writes Hegel in the introduction to his lectures on philosophy of history – "what he ought to be, only through cultivation, '*Bildung*' and discipline … The formation of the animal takes a short time … Man, on the other hand, must make himself to what he ought to be; he must first himself acquire everything, just because he is Spirit; he must cast off the natural. Spirit is its own result."[2] This anthropological thesis of a fundamental human historicity implying both freedom (man is what he makes himself in, and by, his own activity) and dependence (he can make himself only through the acquisition and transformation of what has been created by, and inherited from, the past), is the point of departure for Hegel's conception of *Bildung* as education. As historical being, the child is both in need of, and – as his *Philosohy of Right* underlines – has a *right* to education.[3]

In the most general sense Hegel defines education as the process through which the natural singularity of the child becomes transformed into societal individuality, through the appropriation and interiorisation of what is universal. Through *Bildung* as education the individual becomes – through his own activity and in his own fashion – a "picture," "*Bild*," of his world, and thereby makes himself capable of acting meaningfully in it and also forming it (*bilden);* he becomes an autonomous member of society.

This education is, for Hegel, a process with twofold and contrasted characteristics – a conception which has a clear polemic intent against what he ironically calls "pedagogical philantropism," against Rousseau and Pestalozzi on the one hand and, on the other hand, against the traditionalist view which equates education with externally imposed training, "*zweckmässiges Dressieren*," to fixed, status-determined social functions and ways of life. As against the first, he emphasises that education is neither play, nor the free-natural blossoming of inborn capacities; it is a process of *disciplining* which breaks down the "self-will" of the child, infantile narcissism. "Education," says Hegel, "is the hard struggle against the pure subjectivity of demeanour, against the immediacy of desire, against the empty subjectivity of feeling and

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[2] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, vol. I, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1970, p. 58.

[3] See Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1956, § 174.

caprice of inclination."[4] It is a process of alienation and practical abstraction from what is merely natural and immediately singular. Someone is uneducated who judges and understands everything from the viewpoint of his/her momentary concerns and limited interest. Being educated means developing an ability to comprehend the thought and standpoint of *others*, and developing a feeling for, and interest in, "the free, objective specificity of the very thing," "*die Sache selbst*," whatever it be.

Consequently, education is not mere training, or mechanical learning of foreign contents – repressing all pre-given inclinations, abilities and needs. As the learning of other, broader *horizons*, it is a process of *interiorisation* of what originally appeared as alien, and so it can be realised only in self-activity of the child. The discipline of education is not that of taming but, as Hegel says, that of cultivating the imagination and the hard labour of thought – a socially stimulated, controlled and directed working out, and mastery of, one's own abilities. Education is therefore also a series of successive achievements, and a process in which these achievements – the formation and the character of the socially valuable abilities, the direction of the voluntarily chosen interests – can also be best judged, first of all by the growing child itself. Therefore it is a broadly based and increasingly differentiated system of education, freed from all status-privileges, that is the most appropriate social channel to affect the selection of the growing-up members of society for the various professional-occupational roles, to distribute them among the various spheres of social activity. In such a way *Bildung* as the "second birth of man" realises not only the transformation of a natural singularity into a free individuality who is able to act rationally in his or her social world, but at the same time, it also prepares for the fulfillment of some socially recognised and valued *function* on the basis of achievement and conscious choice. Certainly, Hegel harbours no illusions about the limits of the freedom of this choice, severely restricted by the contingencies of both nature and society. But human freedom as freedom in finitude never can mean a complete emancipation from contingencies, appearing as external necessities. Education is the way of reducing the role of the latter to a minimum, and thereby creating a rational *correspondence* between the appropriately cultivated personal

[4] *ibid*., § 187.

inclinations, interests and abilities on the one hand, and the highly variagated, impersonal requirements and demands of a complex society, on the other.

This Hegelian variant of a liberal and neohumanist conception of education is, however, from Hegel's own standpoint, a limited one, insufficient to capture the full meaning of *Bildung* even if it is taken only in the sense of the cultivation of the individual. The internal limitations of such a conception of *Bildung* can be seen in two respects. Firstly, it makes education into a finite process which is closed when the school is finished – a superficial view which completely misses the unending character of the cultivation of the individual, the fact that the objectivity of the very thing, "*die Sache selbst*," cannot be experienced and learned but in the "severity of a full life" alone. Secondly, such a conception is inadequate for encompassing even *Bildung* as the social maturation of the child. For the so-conceived education cannot take place but on the basis, and in the continuous presence, of another cultivating process to which, however, its own principle is sharply opposed: *family upbringing*. If education is based on the principle of achievement and merit judged by universal criteria, upbringing within the family is based on love directed at the child as a particular. The very fact that the real process of education is dependent upon another (contrasted) one, demonstrates that the former can only be understood within a broader context which alone decides about its real meaning as a purposive activity: the realisability of its end, the creation of a rational correspondence between cultivated personal inclinations and interests on the one side, and social requirements on the other.

This broader context, which determinates the true meaning of *Bildung* as education, ultimately turns out to be a *historical* one. What has been offered as the general concept of education of free individuality turns out to be at the same time a historically particular form of it (which is, by the way, completely consistent with the Hegelian historicised teleology of the Concept). *Bildung* is a possibility and necessity only within a *historical world of Bildung*, within the *world-epoch of cultivation*.

This world of *Bildung* is analysed in a long chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which encompasses – from a definite viewpoint – the whole historical process of formation of modernity. It is primarily here that Hegel not simply employs, but philosophically generalises and radicalises, all the results and

ideas of early critiques of culture. I cannot analyse here – even schematically – the content of this chapter. All I can do is to indicate its main idea.

Speaking about the world of cultivation, Hegel means ultimately a historically created and specific double relationship between the individual and their social reality, the objective order of social institutions (in his terminology: between the subject and the substance). On the one hand, the individual is posited here as having worth and deserving social recognition only insofar as they makes themself by their own effort and work "cultivated" and "educated," that is, able to act and conduct themselves according to the learned standards, roles and norms of social institutions. On the other hand, these institutions are posited not as parts of a cosmic or divine order, but as "culture," that is, as "man-made," creations of the equal and autonomous individuals. In his lectures on the philosophy of religion, Hegel very graphically describes this attitude:

> We do indeed start from what is, from what we find present; but what we make of this through our knowledge and willing, that is *our* affair, *our* work, and we are aware that it is our work, which we *ourselves* have produced. These productions, therefore, constitute our honor and glory; they make up a vast and infinite wealth – the world of our insight and knowledge, of our external possessions, our rights, and our deeds. Thus spirit has been entangled into the contradiction – naively, without knowing it …[5]

One could say that the situation so characterised implies a kind of double bind: the worth of the individual solely consists in their ability to function within the framework of some pre-given institutions; but the worth of the institutions rests solely in the judgement of the individual, since they are merely changeable facticities made by the individual or by their equals. As Hegel's analysis shows, such a situation can come about only when the various dimensions or spheres of social totality – sacred and secular authority including the institutions of the state and those of wealth – not only are differentiated from each other, but each "makes itself absolute;" that is, sets universal but competing and irreconcilable claims upon the individuals.

[5] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Stuttgart, Frommans Verlag, 1959, vol. I, p. 14.

The individual is then set up as the judge who must make a choice about their legitimacy on the basis of his or her reason alone. Making this choice correctly and realising it consistently is the sole act that determines the worth of the individual.

In a phenomenological analysis, reconstructing the main stages and configurations of modern Western cultural history, Hegel attempts to demonstrate how the so-constituted "world of cultivation" sets into motion an inescapable dialectic of Enlightenment – the logic of a progressing alienation. The emergence of modernity is the world-historical process of the emancipation of the rational and self-determining individuality, for whom the cultivation of reason and will is a value-in-itself; nay – in Hegel's own words – an "infinite value." But this same process is that of the progressive emptying of the individual from all substantive contents and aims, and therefore also the progressive transformation of each sphere of the institutional order into an autonomous mechanism which, driven by its objective logic, makes more and more narrow, rigid, and impersonal requirements and demands upon the individual.

In the world of *Bildung*, *Bildung* as true cultivation – as the creation of a common bond between the individual subjects and their social world, making it into their home – becomes impossible. Cultivation turns into *Überbildung* (overcultivation) and *Verbildung* (miscultivation). It turns into its own opposite: instead of transforming what is social and historical into the habitual nature of the individual, it makes everything habitual to appear as non-natural, as violence upon the nature of the individual. "Culture" as the "second nature" of the individual turns into "anti-nature." The more cultivated a person becomes, the more they yearn for an alleged natural simplicity and harmony. In a world that made *Bildung* into an ultimate value, it cannot have but a merely instrumental value: *either* as the instrument of society for transforming the individual into a well-functioning cog within the great machinery of its institutions, an *instrument of adaptation*, making the individual a mere object; *or* as the instrument of the individual to get at the top of his society, *an instrument of mastery and domination*, making social life and the other individuals a mere object. Such a world of diremption and alienation has no substantive sustenance – it must collapse. It does collapse for Hegel in the French Revolution.

But this collapse is only that of the *ancien régime*, and not of the culture modernity. If the radical critique of culture leads to the conclusion of its historical untenability, then history proves it wrong. What emerges out of the ruins of the old regime is neither a return to the alleged harmony and simplicity of a "natural" life, nor the rebirth of the ancient polis-republic, but the truly modern state. This is a state whose "prodigious strength" can unify the differentiated societal spheres not by liquidating their tensions and contradictory tendencies, but by allotting to each an appropriate place in its rational constitution; so that these contradictions can be reconciled in their *movement* keeping society in change. In this sense modern society represents for Hegel the "end of history:" it is an institutional system which incorporates the principle of expansion and progress into its very working, a society which can and must change without being overcome or overthrown.

In view of this *reality* of reconciliation, the earlier outlined standpoint of a critique of culture again turns out to be based on a one-sided and insufficient abstraction. Anachronistically fixing, what from Hegel's point of view are the birth-pangs of modernity, it both recognises and misrecognises what culture, *Bildung*, is. The view which regards modernity as *the world of Bildung* contains the correct insight that only modern society knows itself *as* culture, recognises its institutional world as one which came about in, and is sustained by, human activities. It is therefore in need of rational legitimation and ought to be changed in its absence. But this view at the same time misses the fact that *all* historical worlds are worlds of culture, even if they do not know it. As long as *Bildung* is taken merely in the sense of *cultivation* as the consciously undertaken effort of the private individual – be it either the pedagogic process of acquisition of teachable knowledge and skills, or the deliberate mastering of institutional norms and roles judged to be right or useful – the universal scope of this concept cannot be recognised, since these former are according to Hegel truly modern (and solely modern) phenomena. And – even more importantly – such a view misses the point that every such conscious effort presupposes already culturally formed abilities that were, however, not formed in the way of "cultivation" in the above sense. As long as "*culture*" is identified with that *which can be willed and "made*," as long as the relationship between the individual and its social world is identified with the relation of the subject to some object as the mere material of its activity, and thereby it is

conceived according to the paradigm of "making" or "fabricating," the phenomenon of culture cannot be understood in its full meaning.

At this point Hegel introduces his third concept of *Bildung*, which perhaps should be translated as "acculturation" (and "culture" in the sense of its results). Here *Bildung* means what all the individuals acquire due to their inescapable *participation* in the pervasive social institutions of their time and which they *share* as members of the same society. *Bildung* is the *common-general* stock of attitudes and aptitudes, ideas and values which are formed in the individuals because they live in one historical world that is not a world of independent and neutral objects. Rather, it is a world of *objectivations*, existing only through individuals' participatory activities. Only the so-conceived *Bildung*, acculturation, makes meaningful intercourse and mutual understanding between the members of a society possible – and the achievement of a definite level of it is also the precondition of any deliberately undertaken self-cultivating effort on the side of the individual. The modern subjects can make themself – through their own choice and deliberate activity – into an individuality who is both worthy of social recognition and at the same time unique, *because* they are – in a largely unconscious and unwilled way – already stamped and imbued with characteristics pertaining to their *whole community*.

Bildung, in this "sociological" sense, is for Hegel a complex hierarchically articulated formation within which he distinguishes a number of layers and constituents. Its most fundamental and elementary level is that of *practical culture*, encompassing a historically specific system of needs, the development of all the skills necessary to use purposively the objects of these needs, and also the very habit and discipline of meaningful, will-directed activity as labour. Upon this practical culture Hegel bases what he calls *general culture "allgemeine Bildung"* embodied primarily in language. From the formal side, it designates a definite *niveau* of psychological abilities, the historically required level of the "flexibility and rapidity of mind, the ability to pass from one idea to the another, to grasp complex and general relations."[6] From the side of its content, general culture contains those most general presuppositions and determinations of thought which an epoch – unreflexively

[6] *ibid.*, p. 129.

and unconsciously – accepts as conditions of thinking in general, as dogmatic premises of intelligibility, ultimately a specifically structured system of categories. General culture

> consists in those universal ideas and ends, in the scope of those spiritual powers, that rule consciousness and life. Our consciousness has these ideas, maintains their validity as ultimate determinations, follows the interconnections indicated by them in its course but it *knows* them not: it does not make them the subject-matter and interest of its investigation.[7]

Lastly, *Bildung* in the relevant sense encompasses the forms of "We-consciousness" – the affectively interiorised communal norms and ends, in terms of which social identities are formed. Among them the most important for Hegel is what he calls *political sentiment*, "*politische Gesinnung*," the specifically modern form of which is represented by patriotism.

But education, cultivation and acculturation, even in their interaction, do not exhaust the Hegelian concept of *Bildung*. Individuals are *not* autonomous makers of their social world on the basis of their subjective insight into what is good and rational. Neither are they simple playthings of their social environment which through the process of acculturation would imbue them with unreflexively shared norms and premises – thereby insulated from any conscious criticism. Each historical culture also formulates directly, and in an unconditionally universal way, the ends which it regards as ultimate and binding; it articulates a definite understanding of the world in the light of which the meaning that human life can and ought to have becomes explicit. In this way it sets up a *historically immanent standard* as an ideal or as an idea by which the concrete norms of its actual institutions and objectivations can be judged. This is accomplished in, and by, *spiritual culture*, "*geistige Bildung*," culture as the direct manifestation of the Spirit, of the Absolute.

This fourth meaning of culture directly links up with Hegel's metaphysics – a connection which cannot be explored here. All I can do now is to refer briefly to the significance of some of the historically immanent elements of this Hegelian conception.

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[7] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Leipzig, Meiner Verlag, 1940, vol. I, p. 41.

Spiritual culture is what, in other systematic contexts, Hegel calls the *forms of absolute spirit*: art, religion, and science understood as philosophy. These forms have one and the same content and underlying principle: the expression and manifestation of what is absolute and divine; what represents the ultimate meaning and highest end for a people in a universally valid form. As such the forms of absolute spirit are both time-bounded and timeless: they manifest a historically conditioned comprehension of the superhistorical in a form claiming validity upon everyone – and so adequate only if comprehensible for everyone. Since the history of these forms reveals the path of self-consciousness to the comprehension of the Absolute – to the comprehension of itself as Absolute – what is once achieved in them – in the classical works of art, in the fundamental forms of world religion, in the great systems of philosophy – remains paradigmatic and lasting. These constitute that basic tradition, upon which true education to free self-consciousness as acquisition of growingly broader cognitive and normative horisons must be based. Spiritual culture is the realm of cultural *values*, *historically* formed but remaining with us as valid *always*.

But the identical content – the Absolute – is expressed in the three great configurations of spiritual culture in different forms: as sensuous presentation in art; as imaginative representation in religion; and as conceptual thought in philosophy. This difference in their formative principle, determining the structural specificity of each of these spheres, establishes a hierarchical relation between them. Furthermore, it also orders them into a corresponding sequence of historical relevance; it establishes an inherent limit beyond which they cannot function as the vehicle of ultimate truth about the ultimate matters of life for a historical community. For it is only in this function alone that they constitute elements of a spiritual culture. When Hegel explicitly maintains the "end of art" and, implicitly but clearly, suggests the end of religion as well, he is not suggesting the cessation and disappearance of concerned activities. What he maintains is the loss of their cultural creativity and significance in the above sense – their becoming derivatively dependent upon other cultural spheres in their development *and/or* sinking down to the function of a privatised entertainment, or – respectively – private piety. Under the conditions of modernity, with its explicit demand for reflective-rational legitimation, only discursive-conceptual thought, "science," can formulate an insight into the real, of what is universally binding for everyone.

Only philosophy is able, and it *is* able, not to stylise away the contradictions and tensions of modernity into a simple harmony (be it the sensuous presence of a beautiful ideal or the imagined form of *parousia*), but to grasp the resolution of these contradictions in their incessant movement. Only philosophy is the cultural form which can reconcile us with the essential characteristics of modernity and at the same time offer a critical standard in respect of its particular historical realisations because philosophy does not endow the senseless and the accidental with imaginary meanings, but discovers the higher meaning, superindividual reason in the necessary and lawful play of these very accidentalities.

The theories of late Enlightenment, to which we are indebted for our concept of "culture," seem – from our present standpoint – to be implicated in deep confusion. On the one hand, in its struggle against the binding force of mere tradition, the Enlightenment discovered the historical relativity of all traditions and in this process elaborated a seemingly universalistic concept of culture as descriptively designating a fundamental characteristic of human existence in general; a concept equally applicable to all times and societies, and encompassing all that – from ways of subsistence to religion – which, as human-created work and insight, makes possible and directs meaningful human activities. At the same time, however, the thinkers of Enlightenment used the concept of "culture" in a directly value-laden way, applicable only to some "higher" intellectual activities which – at least as autonomous activities – have an essentially modern character, primarily the sciences, the "religion of reason" and the arts.

This conceptual confusion – the remnants of which still characterise our everyday use of "culture" – has not been, however, a mere accident. The incompatible meanings of "culture" arose from the *unity* of that project for which the Enlightenment stood. Its struggle against the conservative force of the tradition, which the universalistic notion of culture attempted to relativise and thereby neutralise, was a struggle not only for a dynamic, future-oriented "progressing" society. It was simultaneously animated by the faith that in such a society the *direction* of change and progress can be determined by those forms of autonomous-creative activities alone, which are ends in themselves for rational human beings. They represent the only "true and real" culture, the only actually binding tradition which is kept alive not by *immitatio* but *invention*. The faith that in a society of free autonomous individuals "high

cultural" (as we would call it today) activities will be able to overtake both the traditional socially integrative and orienting functions, fulfilled primarily by sacralised and therefore ossified traditions, is central to the whole Enlightenment. The battle-cry of "culture" served to express this faith.

Hegel's conception of culture attempts to articulate in a complex and coherent manner a concept of *Bildung* which is capable of expressing and legitimasing such a project. He also defends it in the face of such criticisms, the relative justification and force of which he not only recognises, but also attempts to incorporate into his own philosophy. In this way he is the heir of Enlightenment. But his defence is already characterised by signs of a deep resignation. Philosophy is the sole form of spiritual culture able to provide an adequate self-understanding of the modern society. But, while it is able to *comprehend* the reasonability of change in the seeming chaos of this dynamic world, philosophy (as the "owl of Minerva") is not called upon to *teach* the world what to do and how to change. Philosophy is for Hegel a "segregated holy place and its servants represent an isolated priesthood."[8] The only spiritual-cultural form which, according to Hegel, can provide a rational reconciliation with, and justification of, the phenomena of modernity, is accessible only for the few. In discussing the relation between religious representations and philosophical concepts, Hegel remarks: "Man not only begins the knowledge of Truth by the name of representation. He is also as a living man, at home with it alone."[9] If religious representations lose their power over the people, then there are no longer cultural forces which can provide meaning for the life of the majority and stop the growth of a destructive nihilism. Hegel's concept of modernity is therefore deeply paradoxical: the only society which makes dynamic progress into its own inherent principle, and thereby "ends history," can progress only on the basis of a *dead* cultural tradition, a tradition which its development robbed of spiritual creativity and forced into the merely private sphere. In this paradoxical diagnosis Hegel is the remote forerunner of many contemporary theories of cultural crisis, from Daniel Bell to Habermas. His philosophy stands at the turning point where the historical faith in culture ends, and our discontent (and bewitchment) with culture begins.

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[8] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, p. 356.

[9] Hegel, *Berliner Schriften, 1818–1831*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976, p. 378.

Chapter Fourteen

Hegel and the End of Art

> Art no longer affords the satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone … Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. [It] invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is.[1]

This (abridged) quotation is perhaps the best known from all the 1,200 pages of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. It is certainly a strange statement. On the one hand, it still strikes us as bizarre, a senselessly irritating provocation which (as the English translator suggests) simply cannot mean what it says. It surely struck Hegel's students and followers in that way –including, unfortunately, the editor of his lectures, Heinrich Hotho, who undertook some radical editorial interventions to tone it down and make it more palatable.[2] Felix Mendelsohn, who in the late

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[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Th. Knox, Oxford, University Press, 1975, pp. 10–11.

[2] From the mid-1980s onwards, radical doubts have been raised about the authenticity of Hotho's text, still the only one available to us. The editor of a forthcoming

1820s listened to these lectures in Berlin, in a letter to his sister, wrote of the sheer madness of declaring art *mausetot* (stone dead) only a few years after Beethoven's death and a time when Goethe and Thorwaldsen were still living. Thus the best way to deal with Hegel's aesthetics is perhaps just to forget about this madness, as is done for example by its most recent English interpreter, Stephan Bungay.[3]

But it is not so easy to forget the "end of art" when dealing with Hegel. This is not only because (together with its supplementary, the paradigmatic character of Greek art) it constitutes one of the most basic structuring principles of the *Aesthetics*, so that its omission inevitably transforms interpretation into a proposal of rewriting (as with Bungay, who declares about half of the text philosophically irrelevant). Equally, the idea has become a cliché, or at least a historical topos which returns in judgements about contemporary art again and again, seemingly easily applicable to the constantly and radically changing character and circumstances of art. It returns from Heine's prediction of the end of the art-period with the death of Goethe, to Arthur Danto's locating it sometime after World War II. And, of course, it is this judgement of Hegel,

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text (based on the original student notes and on transcripts of the original lectures), Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, first in her dissertation ('Die Funktion der Kunst in der Geschichte. Untersuchungen zu Hegel's Aesthetik', *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft, 23, 1984), then in a series of subsequent papers dealing with more particular topics, has underlined sharply that Hotho's edition significantly changed, even directly distorted, Hegel's views and superimposed upon them his own more conservative, nationalistic and religiously oriented aesthetic ideas. In the absence of the new edition it is not possible to evaluate this claim – which leaves the interpreter of Hegel's *Aesthetics* in an unenviable position today. In this paper I have relied, of course, on the available text. I have however taken into account some of the "corrections" indicated by Gethmann-Siefert, especially when they were amply substantiated by quotations from the yet unpublished lecture transcripts. In this I relied particularly (beyond her dissertation) on the following publications: "Hegel's These vom Ende der Kunst und der 'Klassizismus' der Aesthetik," *Hegel-Studien*, 19 (1984); "Das 'moderne' Gesamtkunstwerk: die Oper," *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 34, 1992; and "Hegel über Kunst und Alltäglichkeit," *Hegel-Studien*, 28 (1993).

[3] See *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*, Oxford, University Press. 1984, esp. pp. 51–61.

in a reinterpreted, weakened form, that stands behind all theories of artistic decadence, be they Marxist in origin, as with Lukács and Adorno, or Heideggerian. For Heidegger, this judgement remains in force as long as *Geschick* does not decide otherwise about the truth of our whole world understanding, which originated with the Greeks.

In view of the many voices of dissent and reinterpretation I would like to present here a rather orthodox defence of Hegel: that what he meant by the thesis of the "end of art" is quite true, and discloses something of genuine importance about the situation of the arts in modern times. There is, of course, a catch in this simple-minded confession to a straightforward Hegelianism: that what Hegel *really meant* is strictly true. To unravel this meaning it is worthwhile to recall that Hegel declared not only the end of art, but in the same breath the end of religion and the end of history too. By reminding ourselves of what is implied in this last, the seemingly most outrageous claim, we can perhaps gain a better understanding of how to approach at all the presumed end of art.

When Hegel affirms the end of history in normatively conceived modernity, he certainly does not mean thereby some apocalyptic ending of all times. History in its empirical meaning, as a sequence of irreversible changes brought about by human actions and activities, will continue into an indefinite future without foreseeable end. What ends is what the philosopher – always searching for reason in the play of accidentalities – understands by history: a progressive process towards the full comprehension of the meaning, the requirements and the conditions of the realisation of freedom. This history has been realised in the past in the successive radical transformations of the forms and constitutions of states, always the results of the deeds of world-historical individuals who were able to hit upon the solution to the crises of their age. These crises were rooted ultimately in the expectations of freedom that a social-political system evoked in its members, and the barriers to their realisation which were imposed upon them by the same institutional structure that brought these expectations to life. And this history ends when its end, its *telos*, becomes achieved. That is in modernity, with its complex system of institutions, in principle able to reconcile the demands of self-realisation of developed personalities with the functional requirements of social-political integration – insofar as that is at all possible under conditions

of human finitude. There is nothing utopian – as any reader of *The Elements of the Philosophy of Right* will know – in this end of history: finitude involves the uneliminable role of accidentality in the life of individuals, and Hegel discloses a whole series of contradictions even within the normatively conceived framework of modernity. But these contradictions can be, not eliminated but pacified in their systematic effects, constrained by the very working of modern institutions in the course of their continuous adaptive change through rational reform. It is this which is the end of history. For even everyday consciousness vaguely presumes that history is what happens to us, and happens owing to some memorable deeds deciding the fate of nations and states. From now on, however, history is made, and made rationally, by the anonymous many. It is rational, not so much because of the depth of their insight or the energy of their will, but because of the inner logic of their positionally determined, interlocking activities. History ends because the distinction between the philosophical and empirical concepts of history disappears. What philosophical inquiry had to discover through the hard labour of thought in history, acts of freedom for the realisation of freedom, from now on becomes prosaic, empirical reality. *Die Vollendung ist das Ende* – reaching the end is the ending. The vocation is now fulfilled; what remains is its everyday exercise.

This parallel with the end of history may bring into focus that one can only comprehend the Hegelian idea of the historical end of art through the understanding of what Hegel regards as the teleological end, the "vocation" of art. Art in its empirical sense certainly will not disappear: "we may well hope," he writes of his present, "that art will always rise higher and come to perfection."[4] What is ended is what philosophy discloses as the meaning of art, and it is ended because its task has been fully realised. In the course of its historical development art has become fully and solely art, and thereby lost its deepest sense and highest vocation.

What is this vocation, the philosophical concept of art? Hegel discusses this question in the whole first part of the *Aesthetics*. But he does so in a rather strange way: he does it twice. In the first part he offers a systematic "deduction" of the concept and essential characteristics of the work of art from the

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[4] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 103.

metaphysical idea of beauty. But before that, in the long Introduction, he presents a reverse train of thought. In an informal manner, largely through criticism of some popular theories of art, he deduces from the empirical concept of art that beauty is the sui generis value criterion of the aesthetic sphere which works of art ought to satisfy. These two "deductions" should be strictly equivalent, but they are not. What in fact is deduced from the metaphysical idea of beauty is not the work of art in general but the classical work of art. And what is derived from the empirical conception of art is not really beauty as such. It is the idea of a necessary correspondence between sensuous appearance and meaning content that is satisfied not only by works of beauty, even though it is these which fulfil its norms most fully and in a perfect way. In fact Hegel ends his relevant considerations in the Introduction with an emphatically sharp formulation. Not everything which is beautiful is a work of art; and the lack of beauty is not necessarily an artistic defect, the sign of an "unintentional lack of technical skill or practice,"[5] but may well be something demanded by the character of the aesthetic content, making the product a valid work of art though no more corresponding to the Ideal.

This incongruence between the two "deductions" offers the key to the Hegelian understanding of the end/vocation, the philosophical concept of art. Art is rooted in the same human need that gives rise to religion and philosophy: to find and disclose an abiding meaning in the seemingly senseless accidentality and contradictoriness of finite existence, in the externality and alienness of the world of life; to make the world ultimately man's own home. Art solves this task not through elevation in thought over the particularity and finitude of empirical reality but within this world of appearances itself, by creating sensuous or imagistic existents that display this meaning for immediate apprehension. "Thinking is only a reconciliation between reality and truth within thinking itself. But poetic creation and formation is a reconciliation in the form of a real phenomenon itself, even if this form be presented only spiritually."[6]

This already determines two fundamental features of the *Aesthetics*: its being an anti-mimetic work-aesthetics. Anti-mimetic, since the vocation of art is to

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[5] *ibid.*, p. 74.

[6] *ibid.*, p. 976.

create something that never can be pre-given, for it is called upon to overcome the defining feature of any finite natural existent, its non-correspondence to its own concept. And it is in opposition to the Kantian aesthetics of reception and the Romantic aesthetics of production a work-aesthetics because in its understanding the aesthetical is properly present only in those artistic objectivations which as art-worlds satisfy the indicated need in a requisite way. The task of a philosophical comprehension of art is to disclose their structure in art's historical change and in the various modalities, kinds, of art.

From this, clarification of the empirical concept of a work of art follows directly. It is an intentionally created individual sensuous object or image configuration which, in and through its concrete, apparent characteristics, directly displays a unitary meaning for immediate apprehension. This, on the one hand, defines the ontological status of the art work as the untranslatable *Schein*, an inwardly reflected immediate existent which is what it is only owing to a pointing to (*Verweisung*), an expression of, something else as its own essence. On the other hand, it also posits the work of art in two different, though interrelated, normative dimensions. The first is the complete unity, full interpenetration, of the outer and the inner, of sensuous or imaged externality and immanent meaning: the value standard of beauty. It requires that every sensuously discernible component of the work has some meaningful significance, contributes something to its overall meaning, the unity of which is disclosed in the free, unenforced harmony of all the particular aspects and constituents. Since it is the human eye that most adequately reflects the soul, the inward essence of an individual, in this respect Hegel compares the art work to "a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and spirit is seen at every point."[7] This simile will find its resonance almost a hundred years later in one of the great poems of German literature, Rilke's "*Archaïscher Torso Apollos*":

> *… denn da ist keine Stelle,*
> *die dich nicht sieht. Du muss dein Leben ändern.*

Beauty is the sui generis value of the aesthetic sphere, and in this sense the central concept of aesthetics, the concept of artistic perfection, But the work

[7] *ibid.*, pp. 153–154.

of art necessarily (in view of the very need of art) stands in another normative context as well, the decisive one for its philosophical comprehension. This is the requirement of full correspondence between the particular and its concept, the universal which is Hegel's ontological definition of truth. This is the viewpoint, not of perfection, but of significance, in respect of which one must first of all ask the question: what is the meaning-content that an art work can bring to sensuously immediate expression? This is, however, a badly stated question, akin to asking: what can be said by words, or thought in general concepts? Everything and anything: the work of art can bring forth "every possible kind of content and worth."[8] It belongs to the *Schein* character of the art work that it is endowed with an illusion-creating power; beauty can confer the aura of significance upon even the trivial and inessential. The real question is: what is the highest possible accomplishment, the most significant truth-content, still expressible in such a sensuous form? And to this the answer is that it can disclose the highest truth: the "truth of determinate being [*Dasein*]," the objective rationality which rules over the course of the world and life, the Divine, the Absolute as Spirit. And only when it does this, does the work really meet the need that gave rise to art, the "vocation" of art. In its philosophical meaning, art is a form of the Absolute Spirit, of the self-comprehension of the Absolute in human consciousness and activity. In Hegel's historicist conception of truth this means primarily that a genuine work of art makes manifest what was or is, for a people or epoch, the Absolute – that is, that which is for them unconditionally and universally valid or significant, the centre of their highest interests. The work discloses how they conceived the ultimate powers ruling life, the way of their world- and self-understanding. The artwork makes this manifest in a sensuous, immediately comprehensible form, therefore in a way available, understandable, for everyone. In its philosophical concept it is an effective way of forming a collective consciousness, a force of social-political integration: "a point of unification for men." In respect of art, questions of cognitive significance and of social relevance are directly linked by Hegel. His aesthetics is work-aesthetics also in the sense that philosophical interest in art centres on the question of how art "works"; on the question of its possible cognitive/cultural and social-political functions.

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[8] *ibid.*, p. 47.

The twin values and requirements of beauty and of ultimate truth (with its associated social relevance) are in no way incompatible. The case of their joint satisfaction, that of Classical art, represents the fullest flowering, the realisation of the highest potential of art. Such a unity, however, cannot be sustained all the time. Under some conditions it falls apart, not because of accidental circumstances but owing to the very character of the content expressed, of the historically specific comprehension of the Absolute. If this comprehension is inherently abstract and undetermined, then any concrete sensuous representation of it will be overdetermined, and therefore the form only ambiguously related to its content. This was the case with the "Symbolic" art of the Orient: a not yet beautiful art. If, on the other hand, the understanding of the Divine by its very nature transcends the possibilities of being fully expressed by any sensuously individual configuration, the form will become underdetermined in relation to the content. This is the case with "Romantic," that is, Christian, art, a no more beautiful art. The development of this leads necessarily to the end of art as a form of Absolute Spirit.

This is, in the most simplified form, the conceptual background of the Hegelian idea of the "end of art." This very background, though, may give rise to some not infrequently encountered misunderstandings of what Hegel meant by his thesis.

Since Hegel regards art in its highest vocation and philosophical concept as the disclosure of the Divine in individual configurations of sensuous or imaged nature, it may be plausible to think that he means by its end nothing more than its secularisation, in the simple sense of the gradual disappearance from art of religious themes and subjects, first of all of representations of the godhead. Hegel, a thinker of onto-theology, identifies this with the loss of art's genuine significance. The *Aesthetics* clearly points to such a process and portrays it as necessary. Its necessity, however, is consequent upon the fact that the epoch of the end of art is that of the end of religion as well. Under conditions of modernity, organised religious life becomes a social formality, genuine religiosity retreats into pure subjectivity of feeling and private piety, while the dogmas of faith, constituting the cognitive content of religious imagery, become a topic one cannot mention without embarrassment in polite society and are treated even by theologians in a historical manner. Therefore, "we must take refuge in philosophy, if we wish to learn anything

about God."[9] Thus if one thinks that in Hegel the end of art is synonymous with the disappearance of religious thematic, then one has to conclude that modernity not so much lacks genuine art but rather lacks the presence and the consciousness of the Divine itself; of the Spirit. This is hardly Hegel's view.

The equation of the disclosure of the Divine with the representation of God or gods rests, however, on a basic misunderstanding, It conceives (just as the imagery-thinking of religion does) the Divine as Deity, as some Supreme Being or beings transcending the world of empirical existence. But for Hegel the Divine is the Absolute Idea, the objective Logos of Being which is externalised in an alienated form in nature and comes to self-comprehension only in the collective historical consciousness of human beings. The finite is the infinite insofar as it overcomes its finitude. And since the vocation of art is the disclosure of the Divine in the form of sensuous, therefore finite, reality, it can most adequately fulfil its task if it takes for its central object of representation not the Absolute, Spirit as such, but "the human element in spirit,"[10] the human being in their spirituality, in their relation to the Absolute. Hegel's conception of art is not theocentric, but explicitly anthropocentric.

> Since the objective and external, in which Spirit becomes visible, is … determinate and particularised throughout, it follows that the free spirit which art causes to appear in a reality adequate to it, can in its shape be only spiritual individuality equally determined and inherently independent. Therefore humanity constitutes the centre and content of true beauty and art.[11]

Art is foremost the cultural form of human self-discovery.

This radical anthropocentrism finds perhaps its clearest expression in Hegel's discussion of the limitations of Classical art, the art of beauty. The usual criticism of Greek religious art emphasised its anthropomorphism, its inability to

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[9] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction*, trans. H. B Nisbet, Cambridge, 1980, p. 37. The idea of an "end of religion" was most radically formulated by Hegel in the concluding discussion of his 1824 lectures on the philosophy of religion, concerning the "dissolution (*Vergehen*) of religious community."

[10] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 249.

[11] *ibid*., p. 432.

comprehend and express the diremption (separation) and contradiction between nature and spirit, the finite and the infinite. On this view the Greek gods and their artistic representations in sculpture and poetry are and can be beautiful, because they are "not really other," but only idealised human characters. Hegel accepts this criticism and regards it as superficial. For the fundamental limitation of Greek art-religion consists in the fact that it is not sufficiently anthropomorphic; more exactly, "it is anthropomorphic enough for art, but not enough for higher religion."[12] The Greek gods are only idealised human characters; that is, in their image all that constitutes the finitude of the finite is idealised away. They do not know and express the contradiction between the accidental particularity of the concrete individual and the freedom and universality of inward thinking awareness; they lack self-consciousness. In fact they are not "really the same." "The anthropomorphism of Greek gods lacked actual human existence, whether corporeal or spiritual."[13] And so therefore Christian-Romantic art – the art of a religion of *Menschenwerdung Gottes*, of God incarnated into the pain, shame and death of finite existence, to be resurrected in the spiritual faith of religious community alone – is more radically anthropomorphic and anthropocentric than Classical art. This makes it no more beautiful, no more perfect, but a more true art.

This leads directly to another, even more frequent, objection to Hegel: that the thesis of the "end of art" is based upon the profound classicism of his art theory, on a completely idealised conception of the accomplishment of Greek art which then overcharges art with a function that it never did or could fulfil. No doubt this thesis is directly related to its counterpart and supplementation, the idea of the unsurpassable perfection of Classical art, of which Hegel says, "nothing can be or become more beautiful."[14]. This perfection, however, is not meant by Hegel in terms of a purely formally characterisable (and therefore in principle recreatable) beauty. In fact for the naive reception found in modern times (a subject-attitude that alone is truly adequate to art), these works do not appear as perfect at all. They seem to be cold and lacking individuality, especially in comparison with the inner warmth

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[12] *ibid.*, p. 435.
[13] *ibid.*, p. 505.
[14] *ibid.*, p. 517.

of Romantic painting. "We cannot take it amiss if people do not show that profound interest in profound sculptures which they deserve. For we have to study them before we can appreciate them."[15] Their full appreciation today demands the historico-hermeneutical reconstruction of their original meaning in its thoroughgoing unity of the aesthetic, religious and political significance. And while this idea may reflect Hegel's idealisation of the reality of the Greek polis as the "beautiful work of political art," at least he makes a plausibly argued case for it. It was the epic poets of Greece who first transformed the amorphous and incoherent multitude of local myths and legends into the Pantheon and theogony of Olympic gods, the framework for the consciousness of the cultural unity of a nation. It was the plastic representations of these gods that endowed them with a determinate shape and character for religious imagination, and due to the presence of these sculptures the temples were not only places for worship but the abodes of deity. These temples of tutelary gods defined the public space of the polis, the place for its communal meetings and institutions, from which its political unity acquired a physical presence and reality. More importantly, it was the epic and tragic portrayal of gods and heroes as ethical powers and ethical individualities, each with its particular *pathe* that created tradition-fixed clusters of exemplary conduct pertaining to appropriate situations. In this way – through the aesthetic power of affirmative identification – individuals were directly, practically, oriented in their public behaviour. Hegel may well have overestimated the practical effectiveness and political significance of such an aesthetically constituted world view, but this at least was not based on any "classicist" bias on his part. For he applied the same considerations, though in a less elaborated way, to the "Symbolic" art of the Orient as well, with reference to a lack of clear discrimination between sacred and literary texts (for example in the case of Indian epic). This was done first of all through an analysis of monumental architecture (the dominant art of the Symbolic art form) as the embodiment and physical manifestation of the unifying political power of the state. (Appropriately for Symbolic art, he undertook its analysis in a symbolic form, through discussion of the tower of Babel.) As a result Hegel regarded the question of the instrumental versus autonomous role of art as devoid of

[15] *ibid*., p. 797.

meaning in respect of either its Symbolical or Classical form, for in both cases the spheres of art, religion, and politics are not clearly demarcated. It is, however, this question which becomes determining for the development of Romantic art.

Christianity as revealed religion is no more created or co-constituted by art. The content of the faith is independent of, and pre-given to, artistic representation. This representation becomes something secondary and superadded, no more essentially demanded by religious consciousness. But this relegation of art to an instrumental, illustrative position in respect of religion primarily follows from the character of the content of the faith. Christianity as the religion of inward, spiritual reconciliation withdraws from the externality of appearances into the depth of subjectivity. From this viewpoint, all sensuous-natural things constitute "not the presence of God but only powerless accidents which in themselves can only attest to him, not make him appear."[16] This content cannot therefore be brought, at least not in its entirety, to that concrete, individual, sensuous presence which art by its very nature demands. Only some particular aspects of it are suitable for aesthetic purposes at all, and even they do not generally satisfy the requirements of beauty.

The whole process of the development of Romantic art is portrayed by Hegel as a process of its emancipation from this instrumental functionalisation, as the liberation of art to that full autonomy which belongs to its very concept as spiritual activity. This is a process of secularisation which, of course, runs parallel to the already indicated *Verweltlichung* (becoming worldly) of religion, with the loss of its community forming cultural power. This secularisation of the arts is not, though, to be understood only in its negative aspect, as the disappearance of religious thematics. It means an ongoing conquest by art of the object and content which, by a conceptual necessity, always constituted the centre of its interest: human life, in its whole complexity and diversity. In our time,

> art strips away from itself all fixed restrictions to a specific range of content and treatment, and makes *Humanus* its new holy of holies: i.e, the depths and heights of the human heart as such, mankind in its joys and sorrows, its

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[16] *ibid*., p. 374: my correction of translation.

> strivings, deeds and fates. [N]othing that can be living in the human breast is alien to that spirit any more … [Art] does not need any longer to represent only what is absolutely at home at one of its specific stages, but everything in which man as such is capable of being at home.… It is the appearance and activity of imperishable humanity in its many-sided significance and endless all-round development which in this reservoir of human situations and feelings can now constitute the absolute content of art.[17]

The development of Romantic art thus leads to the realisation of the concept of art, of art becoming fully and solely art. But this is the very end of art, the end of art in its "highest vocation" and philosophical concept as a spiritual-cultural power able to form collective consciousness and legitimately claiming universal significance. In the Introduction Hegel argued that when art aims to bring home to us "everything which has a place in the human spirit,"[18] simultaneously it loses the capacity to disclose that "common" and "substantial end" which can confer unity on diversity and difference. One could argue, in the spirit of Hegel, that under conditions of modernity (as he conceives them), the deepest need that gave rise to art disappears: the need to create a sensuous reality in which particularity and universality are reconciled. The need disappears because in the modern world as the end of history, this reconciliation becomes an empirical fact. Human beings no more need the world of art to possess some concrete imagery in which they are at home; they are, or at least now can be, at home in the world of social actuality. But art is not only not needed for this task of reconciliation; by its own means, no more can it bring the reconciliation to an adequate, if imaged, presence. For it is "the firm and secure order of civil society and the state,"[19] the impersonal working of this vast institutional structure as the rational mediating mechanism of social objectivity, that now effects, in principle, a reconciliation that can be penetrated only by speculative thought. The developed individuals of modernity, who do not identify themselves with, but have a distanced, reflexive relation to their social position and function, are no more representatives of

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[17] *ibid*., pp. 607–608.

[18] *ibid*., p. 46.

[19] *ibid*., p. 592.

the social whole or of its distinct "ethical powers"; their deeds and fate no more can disclose the ultimate truth of the totality:

> in the world of today the individual subject does not appear himself as the independent total, and at the same time individual living embodiment of this society, but only as a restricted member of it. … [H]e is not, as he was in the Heroic Age proper the embodiment of the right, the moral and the legal as such … The individual is no longer the vehicle and sole actualisation of these powers as was the case in the Heroic Age.[20]

Therefore when art, with its individuating means of representation, attempts to address itself to the ultimate question of the age, to that of the relation between the striving of the free personality for a self-fulfilling life and the objective, anonymous rationality of modern institutions, it inevitably will falsify the complex reality of modernity. It must either (as Hegel's critique of the modern idyll demonstrates) mendaciously conceal, or at least ignore, the never eliminable possibility of conflict and contradiction between the striving of the free personality and the power of unforeseeable accidentality which follows from the enmeshment of individual fate in the complicated web of depersonalised interactions. Art then becomes an apologetic ideology characterised by "mawkishness and sentimental flabbiness."[21] Or, it will abstractly fix this opposition, the contradiction between "the poetry of the heart and the opposing power of circumstances,"[22] as something untranscendable. Thereby it will express only the equally distortive ideology of a rebellious, anarchic subjectivity. This may have had a subjective justification in the pre-Revolutionary world of the struggle against the *ancien regime* but now is simply anachronistic. By becoming autonomous, art ceases to be a form of Absolute Spirit; by finding what always was its ultimate subject matter, *Humanus*, human life in all its freedom and variety, it also loses the ability to make manifest its highest, universally binding ends in their historical, cultural relevance to the present. Under contemporary conditions art must content itself with the partial, with the finite: it "makes itself at home in the finite things of the

[20] *ibid*., p. 194.
[21] *ibid*., p. 191.
[22] *ibid*., p. 1092.

world, is satisfied with them, and grants them complete validity."[23] Certainly it can, and ought to, disclose this finite reality as suffused and enlivened by Spirit, as man's "own human and spiritual work."[24] But it no more discloses Spirit in its infinity as working itself through all finite circumstances, actions and interests towards unconditional, universally valid, and therefore community-creating ends.

I think that the indubitable effectiveness of the Hegelian thesis of the "end of art," its being a constantly renewed topos in discussions of the art of modernity, is due principally to the radicalness with which it identified the problematic situation of modern art, the lack of clarity and the insecurity surrounding its social relevance and cultural accomplishment. It is a problematic situation due not to some external limitations, but to the autonomisation of art as the telos of its development, to art becoming fully and solely art and nothing else. However, the idea of the "end of art" in itself articulates this situation only negatively, as the loss of its "highest vocation," of its power to disclose for immediate apprehension the ultimate, binding ends of a community, and in this way to be an effective form of practical action orientation and socio-cultural identity. But Hegel also clearly maintains that art in the empirical sense can flourish and "rise ever higher" even after its "philosophical" end. One may then expect that his work-aesthetics, so decidedly concentrating on the question of the socio-cultural "work" art can perform, also will tell us something of its possible function and significance after its end.

Before looking at the *Aesthetics* with this question in mind, I will consider two interpretations of the "end of art" which from our vantage point of acquaintance with the post-Hegelian development of art may seem plausible, even attractive, but which are, perhaps regrettably, irreconcilable with Hegel's own conceptualisation. One of these has been proposed by Danto:[25] that art ends because, beginning with Duchamps' Fountain and culminating in Warhol's Brillo Box, it becomes its own philosophy, an "infinite play with its

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[23] *ibid.*, p. 594.

[24] *ibid.*, p. 574.

[25] See especially the paper "The End of Art" in Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disfranchisement of Art*, Columbia, 1986.

own concept."[26] Danto, as a "born-again Hegelian," makes this proposal not as a strict interpretation of Hegel but as the free application of some of his ideas to the understanding the evolution of contemporary art. It would hardly constitute an objection to him, therefore, if one simply suggested that no doubt Hegel would have furiously rejected such a view – as is attested by his deep hostility towards works of Romantic irony. A work which playfully deconstructs the conditions of its own possibility satisfies the requirements neither of beauty nor of truth, and thus it is for Hegel not a work of art at all but a piece of harmful ideology. But one can formulate more general objections, in Hegel's spirit, against seeing in this type of ironic, deconstructive self-reflexivity the main function "post-historical" art is capable of fulfilling. It usually demands a relatively high level of philosophical sophistication to appreciate the point of such works of art; and once they are "decoded," once the provocative surprise of making these abstract ideas present as a sensuous object or happening is gone, they seem to be exhausted. They lack not only the immediacy of impact but they do not sustain an impulse to linger upon them with an ear or an eye "that never can be sated." Furthermore, to have this power of provocation presupposes that art and its concept still has some genuine interest and importance for us, that it still possesses some other forms of relevance that can engage us directly.

A different approach was suggested in an interesting paper by Karsten Harries.[27] He identified the end of art with the victory of the tendency of *l'art pour l'art*, with the emergence of the pure aesthetic attitude directed solely to the aesthetic form of the work. The problem with this interpretation is that Hegel's *Aesthetics* does not really offer conceptual means for the articulation of what would in this sense constitute the purely aesthetic qualities of some sensuous or imaged object. The great strength of his theory, his insistence upon the historicity and the mutual conditioning of content and form, can be seen at the same time, in retrospect, as also its weakness. Since Hegel insists on the primacy and the determining role of content in this relationship of mutuality, he cannot admit the possibility of a form, which could create its own content, independent of any pre-given meaning. This is especially clear

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[26] *ibid.*, p. 209.

[27] "Hegel on the Future of Art", *Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1974).

in his unambiguous rejection of absolute music (music without text) as a "misfortune" which is "not strictly to be called art."[28] Hegel does accept as legitimate (as we shall see immediately) the tendency towards the emancipation of the sensuous material of art, but only under the condition that this material still serves as the vehicle of expression of some meaning, even if this meaning (as with his beloved Italian operas) is of no consequence or interest.

We will not find in the *Aesthetics* any explicit and coherent discussion of the question: what function and significance can art works possess after the end of art? Hegel is not engaged in speculations about the future of art; historical prophecy is not within the competence of philosophy. However, at different places and rather disjointedly, he does offer a number of observations concerning tendencies which he regards as significant and valuable in the development of contemporary art. These may allow us to formulate a more general answer to the question.

When Hegel states that art is a thing of the past, he means above all that for the contemporary recipient art first and foremost is the art of the past. This historicisation and musealisation of art which, as Hegel clearly indicates, goes together with the broadening of the temporal and geographical compass of the aesthetically relevant traditions, plays an important functional role in modernity. The great art works of the past open the way to the understanding of those cultures that constitute our spiritual prehistory; they are the most important constituents of our "historical memory." They are the background against which we can comprehend the present itself as historical, as our own – therefore changeable – work. Interest in and acquaintance with the masterpieces of the past is thus a basic element of that formal cultivation (*formelle Bildung*) without which the modern individuals cannot establish an adequate, self-reflexive, critically affirmative relationship with the general conditions of their life.

If the art works of the past retain their relevance because the aesthetic power of their beauty (or sublimity) makes us involved in the quest for their truth, in the disclosure of their meaning content, even though this quest now requires historico-hermeneutical reflection, then the problematic character of

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[28] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 902

living, contemporary art aesthetically manifests itself in a disjunction between beauty and truth that allows only a narrowly circumscribed and insecure space for their, always partial, unification. In Hegel's understanding the evolution of contemporary art proceeds in two opposed directions. One pole is constituted by works of beauty, whose content is without any particular relevance or interest. Examples are Dutch landscape and still-life painting, and, most of all, the modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the contemporary opera. What makes painterly representations of commonplace objects and musical performances of obsolete, often stupid, texts aesthetically significant, is perfection of technical skill and execution, which infuses them with the subjectivity of vision and emotive expression, making "poetical" exceptions to the overall prose of everyday existence. These works, with their magic of colour and expressive singing voices, make perceivable the most fleeting impressions of the senses and the minutest changes in feelings, which normally escape our attention. In general, they bring to presence the relatedness of the phenomenal world to man, the fittedness of the humanised world of appearances to our subjectivity.. They function as works of a spiritualised enjoyment, of a humanised, reflective sensibility and free fantasy, of the joy, or at least *Gemütlichkeit*, of cultivated civic, *bürgerlich*, existence. This constitutes the limit of art at this pole. When this warmth of subjective vivacity and the spell of appearance is lacking, when the work becomes merely a faithful imitation of prosaic reality, the realistic-naturalistic portrayal of the everyday, it ceases to be a work of art.

At the other pole of contemporary art stand works of genuine socio-cultural relevance, of "great ethical interest" and "genuine ethical pathos," which is how Hegel characterises the historical dramas of Schiller. But they achieve this end only by sacrificing the harmonious objectivity and immediacy of beautiful completion to the intellectualisatlon of the work of art, the intrusion of an abstract, didactic, authorial intent. Even at this price, they still cannot serve the end of direct, practical, action orientation. Since under the conditions of modernity "universal ends cannot be accomplished by a single individual,"[29] the tragic denouement, the fated failure of heroic individuality, lacks the concluding accord of reconciliation that would allow immediate,

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[29] *ibid*., p. 1224.

affirmative identification with the hero. We do not leave the modern theatre with "a relieved heart," but with the confused feeling of an "unhappy bliss in misfortune."[30] This does not fortify the viewer to a definite ethical orientation but rather spurs them on to independent reflection upon the hard ethico-moral choices in life. This can lead to confusion; the subjective play with, and dissolution of, all ethical standards can become the end of the work, as in Romantic irony and "subjective humour." Such works annihilate the objectivity of both content and form, representing "only a sporting with the topics, a derangement and perversion of the material" to "emphasise the subjective wit of the author."[31] This again transgresses the limits of art, the work ceases to be a work of art even in an empirical sense. Contingent externality and contingent interiority, subjectivity, represent the opposed but interrelated limits of "post-historical" art.

In between the two limits there is, however, an ill-defined territory, upon which it is still possible, if only in a partial and fragile way, to reunify beauty and truth, aesthetic immediacy and socio-cultural relevance. Hegel calls it "objective humour." His discussion, at least in the published text, is laconic and fragmentary, making interpretation a risky affair. In general, he seems to mean the aesthetic realisation of a subjective attitude, which willingly immerses itself in, abandons itself to, the object. Thereby the representation becomes the expression, or at least the symbol, of some inward relation with the world which, through this objectification, loses its merely private character and becomes re-experienceable, an aesthetic summons to a shareable form of, or attitude towards, life. The concrete instances of such "objective humour" which Hegel cites are, however, bafflingly heterogeneous. On the one hand it seems to be exemplified by Dutch genre paintings as aesthetic articulations of a national self consciousness. These works, masterfully evoking, even in representations of the most vulgar, even ugly, scenes of everyday life, a spiritual cheerfulness, an all-pervading attitude of life affirmation, of the ease of being at home in a world created by the prosaic labour and the heroic historical struggle of a small nation, serve the function of communal identification. They are certainly particularistic and limited, even perhaps narrow-minded,

[30] *ibid*., p. 1232.

[31] *ibid*., p. 601.

in their bourgeois cosiness, but genuinely co-constitutive of the formation of a national unity.[32] But then, he refers to this concept of "objective humour" what seems to be precisely the opposite case: Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, a late cycle of poems attempting to transpose the spirit of Persian lyric poetry into contemporary emotive and expressive idiom, which Hegel admired. For him, this is the outstanding example of modern art making the life attitude of an alien culture directly re-experienceable by aesthetic means. This serves the function of a cosmopolitan education, elevating the private citizen, the bourgeois, into a citizen of the world, spiritually open to other forms of conduct and experience.

Lastly, it seems that he also subsumes under this category the accomplishment of the *Bildungsroman*, novels of education, with their objective irony of practical reconciliation. They portray growing up as apprenticeship to the rational realities of the present, against which, as a senseless and alien order of things, the youthful heart had revolted in the name of higher ideals and the infinite right of feelings. Ultimately, youth becomes "as good a Philister as any."[33]

These dispersed observations about the various possibilities of "post-historical" art clearly demonstrate that Hegel did not identify the "end of art" with its simply becoming functionless, losing all vestiges of social relevance. But the concrete cultural functions he indicates as aesthetic potentialities in his analyses seem to be *ad hoc*, accidental and heterogeneous: cultivation of sensibility and intellectualised representation of the conflicts of modernity for conscious reflection, formation of a national cultural identity and cosmopolitan education, and so on. But this is, I think, exactly what Hegel meant to say. Art after its own end is problematical, because what function it can possess becomes an unsettled problem, to which all answers and solutions will remain *ad hoc*, accidental, transient and heterogeneous. Art which became solely and

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[32] This accomplishment of Dutch art is, of course, already a matter of the past for Hegel. But his repeated characterisations of Goethe and Schiller as *Nationalpoeten* seem to indicate that such a function of forming (or perhaps transforming) the self-consciousness and cultural identity of a particular nation is for him still possible and relevant in contemporary conditions.

[33] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 593.

fully art, that is autonomous, won for itself not only freedom from any prescribed content, independence from all hierarchies of themes and styles, but emancipation from a pre-given, settled function as its vocation as well. This is undoubtedly a great loss; art no more expresses the "substantial spirit of a people," that unifying communal ethos which has an unconditional socio-political relevance. Under modern conditions, what genuinely unifies the individualised and privatised members of the state is the working of its impersonal, bureaucratic institutions, the rationality of which can be grasped by conceptual thinking alone. But this loss is simultaneously also a gain in freedom, an expansion of potential. The artist now has the freedom not to find, but to create, through the power of aesthetic representation and in response to particular situations, new types and models of socio-cultural relevance. The artists can endow their art with new modalities of meaning. Even at the end of art, the art work can and ought to "work." Hegel's philosophy does not allow for the complete self-enclosure of the aesthetic sphere. This would not be the "end" but the disappearance of art, its transformation into a mere hobby or game.

The deeply problematical and paradoxical character of "post-historical" art consists in the fact that while it endows the artist with this freedom, the power to make it effective does not reside with the artist's art and artistry. For the emancipation of the artist from the "bondage of particular" subject-matters and a mode of portrayal,[34] also makes the recipient free. The ontological status of the work of art, as *Schein* implies, that it is what it is only for another. As a sensuous object it is incomplete; it has the status of a work of art only for, in relation to, the recipient. "The art-work for itself is something lifeless, not self-consciousness; to it pertains a community [*es gehort eine Gemeinde dazu*] which knows and imagines what is represented as the substantial truth."[35] Its sensuous imagery character makes direct ("naive") apprehension the adequate subject-attitude towards art. Immediacy, however, is always mediated immediacy in Hegel; it always presupposes some unreflectively accepted form of conceptualisation, some unconscious prejudgements. Thus the naive,

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[34] *ibid.*, p. 605.

[35] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. G. Lasson, Meiner, 1966, vol. I, p. 282.

immediate reception of art is again typically restricted to those historical epochs when individuals share a common culture as the natural and evident precondition of understandability, when they are the "representatives" of an ethical substantiality. For modem individuals, works of art are objects of personal taste, critical judgement and reflexive interpretation. As Hegel at one point remarks, even the painting of the penitent Maria Magdalena can now be equally an object of religious piety or a mild erotic stimulation. Whether or not a work of art achieves its intended impact, fulfils its projected function, transmits its envisaged meaning, depends not only, not even first of all, on its immanent qualities. It depends upon whether or not it finds an audience disposed towards these ends; and this is largely a matter of concrete historical conjuncture and social constellation. Whether an art work "works" in any sense – and for Hegel this means whether or not it is a work of art at all – depends upon something external to it. This explains Hegel's maddening habit, even after the most positive characterisation of some contemporary tendency in art, or art work, of raising the question: is this, however, still a work of art? and then leaving it unanswered. For artistic modernity does not simply replace the traditional question "Is this beautiful?" with some much broader concept of aesthetic evaluation, for example the Schlegelian "interesting." What it asks, again and again, is the question "Is this at all art?" To this question, no answer can be given on the basis of formally definable aesthetic criteria or merely historical considerations alone. Ultimately the answer will depend on the facts of reception (including, of course, intra-art reception and influences). This is co-determined by what is external to art, by the accidentalities of the present. This is the ultimate meaning of the "end of art," the fundamental paradox of modem art. Art, becoming fully autonomous, made the determination of what is art a matter of heteronomy. For, Hegel would say, nothing is truly autonomous but Spirit is the totality of all its manifestations.

Chapter Fifteen

Marxism and Theories of Culture

I

The concept of culture – due to its origin in the project of the Enlightenment – is a systematically ambiguous one. That is, it has two clearly distinguishable meanings which, however, in its actual use prove to be not completely dissociable. "Culture" designates, on the one hand, some all-pervasive aspect of social practices and their results: in its contemporary understanding the meaning-bearing and -transmitting dimension, the signifying system/s of any society (the wide anthropological meaning of culture). On the other hand it refers to a circumscribed and specific set of practices, to those which – like the arts, sciences and so on – under conditions of Western modernity became autonomous, that is, socially posited as valuable in themselves and possessing their autochthon-immanent norms and criteria of evaluation (the narrow-sectorial, "value-marked" conception of culture).

II

As regards the anthropological notion of culture, it *cannot* be articulated by the conceptual means of a "historical materialism." This certainly does not mean that Marxism has nothing to say about the various aspects and elements of the so-designated domain of phenomena, only that from the viewpoint of its own internal logic they do not constitute a unity which could be approached and made intelligible in a uniform way.

The problem lies in the opposed logic of conceptualisation. The anthropological conception of culture is based upon an integrative image of society: culture is that what all members of a society share, the participation in which enables them to act in a commonly interpreted world in mutually understandable ways. And it is these shared meanings on the basis of which individuals form a common identity whose persistence in time ensures the continuing unity of society.

Marxism, on the other hand, proposes to investigate society in the dynamic interrelation between its variously structured institutional spheres as it is realised through the ongoing conflict of social agents occupying different positions in these structures. It sharply distinguishes the unity and continuity of society from any shared consciousness of common belonging – it conceives the former as the uninterrupted reproduction of those relations and institutions supporting them which determine the character of basic social antagonisms. It is not linguistic communication, but division of labour in production which provides Marx with the paradigm of social intercourse: interaction based upon the complementarity and interlocking of institutionally differentiated activities that primarily presuppose not shared, but different competences and may well involve an opposition of actual interests.

Since the "anthropological" notion of culture indubitably plays an important and fruitful role in our (both everyday and scientific) thinking, to declare it unarticulable by the theoretical means of Marxism seems to involve a very harsh judgement upon this latter, implying minimally its need in being supplemented by principles alien to its logic. This conclusion, however, is compelling only as long as one regards the idea of a "complete" theory realisable, that is, considers it possible that a single coherent theoretical framework can in principle satisfactorily explain all the (at least essential) characteristics of the phenomena that fall under its conceptual domain. I do not share this

expectation and do not know a single example even approximating to its satisfaction in any field of inquiry. Furthermore the idea of supplementation seems to be specifically problematic in the field of social theory and humanities where different theoretical paradigms frequently offer *practically* irreconcilable perspectives upon, and orientations for, social action without the possibility to demarcate once and for all the scope of their legitimate applicability (which is precisely the matter of their dispute). In this situation one has to *choose* among them, in spite of their recognised theoretical "insufficiency" – a choice which is certainly not independent of practical commitments, and so implies also practical responsibilities.

III

The narrow, value-marked concept of culture, on the other hand, constituted for Marxism, from its very inception, an important domain of theoretical interests. Decidedly opposing the view of Enlightenment which regarded culture and cultivation as the main vehicle of progress towards a rational and free society, and at the same time claiming a radical practical significance for its own theory belonging to the same realm of culture, the problematic of this latter represented for Marxism both a theoretical difficulty and a practically relevant field of theoretisation. Three ways of conceptualisation of culture (in this sense) have played a prominent role in theories of Marxist providence and all three can be traced back to Marx. Though they usually appear in various combinations with each other, they represent sufficiently differing approaches to be schematically characterised separately. They are expressed respectively by the metaphor of *basis and superstructure*, the notion of *ideology*, and the concept of *cultural production*.

IV

The conception of an *economic base and dependent superstructure* – in all the variations of its formulation and understanding – articulates the idea of a necessary dependence of all political, legal, religious and cultural institutions and practices (as to their character and change) upon the economic structure and processes of society. It is reasonable to interpret this dependence in terms of both constraining and motivating role of economic change in respect of transformations in the sphere of the superstructure. With Marx this idea had

a strongly polemic, disillusioning character: it was directed against the understanding prevalent in his time of the political and the cultural as expressions and embodiments of general interests, viz, universal values sharply divorced from, and counterposed to, the economy as the alleged sphere of merely private interests. One should also acknowledge that the dichotomy of basis/superstructure constituted the framework of those early Marxist writings on culture which – in whatever way we evaluate them today – have substantially contributed to the formation of the sectorial disciplines of sociology of culture (sociology of literature, arts, science and so on).

V

Nevertheless, even if one discards as simple distortions a number of ideas that for a long time have accrued to the understanding of this dichotomy (the identification of basis with the "material" and superstructure with the "conscious-ideal"; the monocausal relationship between the two and so on), it seems to me that its theoretical usefulness has been exhausted. Leaving a number of certainly not unimportant theoretical difficulties aside, the main point can be made in the following way: what seems to be rationally retainable from the idea of the "conditioning" of the superstructure by the basis no longer represents a critical insight. That political and cultural activities are in some sense and degree dependent upon, and reacting to, processes of economic change, that practices in the former spheres are often influenced or motivated by variously articulated group interests – in this generality it takes on the appearance of an empirical fact today. What represents genuine theoretical and practical interests is how these facts are understood and interpreted. For the articulation of this, however, the extremely abstract notion of a superstructure, encompassing completely different institutions and practices, does not provide an adequate theoretical vehicle – because one thing is clear: in respect of its different constituents this question has to be answered in basically different ways. The conception is reductionist not because it does not allow the acknowledgement of a "retroaction" of the superstructure upon the basis – it patently does, but because it can conceive this active role only in terms of a single dichotomy between expressing *versus* suppressing definite interests, promoting or hindering definite tendencies of economic development. Or to put it otherwise: the talk about the "relative autonomy" of

superstructure remains invariably a defensive generality. For to give meaning to a notion of autonomy (however relative it be), one must be able to indicate not only *from what*, but also *to do what* is a given form of practice "autonomous." The dichotomy of basis/superstructure, however, lacks precisely this ability: to specify what are the *sui generis* characteristics that constitute the various superstructural practices and institutions. It seems to me therefore quite symptomatic that the relatively recent and sophisticated attempts to spell out what remains valid from this conceptualisation today (Godelier, R. Williams, G. Cohen), in all their differences not only share the same character of intellectual contortions, but also all end up with standpoints that are evidently and fundamentally at cross-purposes with the ideas and intentions that motivated the Marxian introduction of this metaphor.

VI

The concept of *ideology* was used by Marx partly (especially in his early writings) for directly polemical purposes: to reduce systems of thought and representations ascribing a transcendent power to ideas in history to well-defined, particular (conscious or unconscious) social interests. In this sense the concept of ideology only transformed the idea of a dependent superstructure into an effective method of a demasking cultural critique. But already Man employed this concept also in another way pointing beyond the basis/superstructure dichotomy. This meaning of ideology is primarily exemplified by his great and repeated criticisms of Hegel, Adam Smith, Ricardo and so on. It is conspicuous that in these critical analyses the explanation of theories by a specific configuration of particular interests plays only a marginal role, though Marx consistently describes them as "ideologies of bourgeois society." The centre of his analysis lies elsewhere: in the disclosure of those unthematised, taken-for-granted assumptions of these theories which effectively transform some constitutive features of this society into the ultimate methodological premises of thought, more generally into the way rational discourse or representation is constituted and structured by them. It then proceeds to reveal the consequences which follow when a real attempt is made – as it is done in significant works of culture – to genuinely universalise these unreflexive prejudgements, consequences which are primarily present in the contradictions and fractures of the works analysed. Culturally significant ideologies are in

this sense paradigmatic closures of thought which transform historically conditioned practical constraints into the untranscendable limits of thinking and imagination. Their critique is part of the critique of a society whose dominant culture systematically precludes the understanding of those social possibilities and alternatives which itself creates. At the same time this critique is a reconstruction of the meaning of cultural objectivations never residing in the works alone, but dependent upon those objective conditions which render the very sense-constituting cultural practices possible and which for their creators appear as self-evident necessities. In this sense ideology-critique – as lately many have underlined – represents a dialectical mediation between hermeneutic *understanding* and objectivising *explanation* of meaning in its dependence on its *non-textual*, social-practical context.

VII

It was this latter understanding of "ideology" which constituted the basic framework of those Marxist writings (of Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse and Goldmann and so on) that without any doubt seriously shaped our whole view of contemporary culture and its traditions. Nevertheless, already Marx, though in a rather accidental way, has indicated two principal difficulties encountered by ideology-critique. The first concerns the problem of the genesis and specific function of the *basic cultural farms (or genres)*. The second relates to the question of *cultural traditions* which endure as meaningful and significant long after the social conditions of their original creation and reception have disappeared (becoming perhaps even unreconstruable). These two problems are evidently interconnected – long-term effective tradition in the above sense exists only in some cultural genres and is unknown in others.

Later Marxist writings certainly addressed themselves to these problems – one needs to refer only to those which explicitly focused upon the historical transformations (and social significance) of definite genretic forms (Lukács and Goldmann on the novel, Williams on drama, Adorno on classical musical forms and so on). Nevertheless the questions in their generality remain unanswered. Or more correctly, they have been usually answered either in terms of an ahistorical anthropology (the division between the basic cultural genres as the emerging separation of the possible human relations to the world or of the diverse aspects of communicative relations in general) or that of a

romanticising historicism (cultural tradition as the living memory of mankind, the accumulated self-consciousness of its history). And one finds such solutions even with authors (such as F. Jameson) who otherwise show no sympathy whatsoever to theoretical positions of this kind. Answers of these type, however, seem to be rather odd within the framework of Marx's strong historicism (even if he himself occasionally may have entertained them) and are hardly reconcilable with the facts of history demonstrating fundamental changes both in the stock of effective tradition and in the very structure of the culturally codified genric classifications. Nevertheless I see these unconvincing answers first of all as symptoms of a healthy self-defence – self-defence against making ideology critique "total," transforming it from a method of cultural *intervention* into a general theory of culture as such.

"Ideology" is a *critical* concept in Marxism. It served and serves as an effective vehicle of intervention into the dominant processes of tradition-transmission and -maintenance, to open up new horizons of thinking, to stimulate new ways of social sensitivity and imagination, to emancipate from some cultural constraints – for the sake of social emancipation. As a form of critique it necessarily claims a privileged position in respect of its object, it recognises as particularistic and socially induced some of those pre-judgements which remained opaque and were therefore actually treated as self-evident in the works analysed. To transform such a method into a general-total theory of culture can mean only one of two things. Either the critic now claims a privileged position *in general*, declaring their own standpoint in principle free from any form of historically constraining perspectivity, and thereby positing it also outside the continuity of cultural traditions. Or it can be acknowledged that the standpoint of the critique itself is in principle embedded in the same distorting conditions in which its object is enmeshed – because these can, *post festum* and reflexively, be recognised, but never transcended. There is no doubt that Marx himself was inclined toward the first alternative: he conceived (especially in his late writings) the status of his own theory along the model of the natural sciences which, though historically conditioned and not "without presuppositions," operated only with empirically verifiable premises constantly tested in material practice. In this respect the strict Althusserian dichotomy between science and ideology has legitimate roots in the classical legacy itself. Most of the representatives of ideology-critique, however, could not accept either the positivist understanding of science

(involved both in Marx and Althusser) or the equation of the method of the critical theory with those of the natural sciences. The second alternative, however, was for them, and for good reasons, equally unacceptable. Because the self-reflexive "totalisation" of the concept of ideology – as illustrated recently by several trends in French post-structuralism – is totally impotent as an instrument of social criticism. For the critique is here targeted at something rationally untranscendable; at language as such, or at the constraining power of any articulated discourse, or the inescapable historical determination and perspectivity of all thinking and so on – all of which to be presented as a desperate protest against, or a happy reconciliation with, these aspects of human finitude, make ideology-critique lose its practical-social relevance. Hence the flight of some of its most outstanding Marxist representatives to abstract anthropological generalities in respect of some of the fundamental questions of a theory of culture.

VIII

The term *cultural production (geistige Produktion)* appears again and again in Marx's writings, from 1844 to his last economic manuscripts, but its meaning and implications were never clarified by him in any detail. If this expression became somewhat modish in the last two decades it partly had to do with the fact that it fits nicely with a disillusioned attitude towards culture no more seen as the result of incomprehensible creative acts of individual geniuses producing eternal values, but as that of a mundane process of social manufacturing of objects of definite kinds for variegated consumer taste and choice. Essentially this is all that is meant by the term by authors like Janet Wolff or Sanchez Vazquez.

With Marx, however, "cultural production" meant, or at least signalled, something more significant; a paradigmatic extension of the notion of production proper to the realm of sui generis cultural activities. This involves at least two presuppositions. Firstly the idea that the social function of these practices is determined primarily by their (historically changing) place in the overall division of labour, and therefore the demand to investigate those institutional mechanisms through which they are interconnected with, and integrated into, the latter. Secondly, and much more contentiously, the proposal to

comprehend the very specificity of these cultural activities with the help of some conceptual distinctions and insights gained from the analysis of material production proper. What these are, that is, in what sense is production paradigmatic in respect to all forms of institutionalised practices, is a major point of debate today. Here I can merely state my disagreement with those views often encountered which equate the paradigm of production with an instrumentalistic understanding of all human activities, with their reduction to labour as goal-rational activity. In my view this paradigm involves three components:

(a) the interpretation of social activities in terms of *objectivation and appropriation* of human abilities and needs;
(b) the drawing of an analytic distinction between "*material content*" and "*social form*" in respect of both of these activities and their products; and
(c) the comprehension of any such act of "production" as a singularised moment in the ongoing process of *reproduction*.

IX

There have been attempts, especially in the literature of the last few decades, to make use of the concept of "cultural production" in this more strict sense. Two of them deserve at least specific mention. The first directly applied Marx's critical analysis of the commodity form to modern culture, especially to the sphere of art. There is, first of all in Germany, a significant literature on "commodity aesthetics" investigating the historical effects of commodification upon aesthetic practices and their products. It is, however, conspicuous that such analyses are most successful when applied to the "aesthetisation" of utilitarian products of everyday consumption (Haug). They offer useful, though often one-sided, insights concerning the developmental tendencies of "mass culture," but run into considerable difficulties when they attempt to deal with works of "high culture." This is hardly accidental. The autonomy of high culture, as a constitutive institutional characteristic of modernity, represents a formidable countervailing factor against the thoroughgoing, genuine commercialisation of these practices. And one ought also to add that Marx's theory of the commodity form (more particularly his labour theory of value) is singularly unhelpful when it comes to the analysis of the economic aspects

of contemporary (either "mass" or "high") cultural production – so theories of "commodity aesthetics" in this respect are often forced to operate with rather superficial, rhetorical generalities.

Secondly, there has been more general attempts – initiated by Benjamin, and continued, for example, in the late works of Adorno and R. Williams – to use the Marxian distinction between productive forces and relations of production (one of the concretisations of the content/social form – dichotomy) again in the analysis of modern art. These theoretical constructions could only be discussed separately and in detail – something I cannot do here. I am certainly indebted in some respects to them. At the same time one is struck by the apparent diversity of meanings in which all these authors use the respective concepts, a diversity which, for example, with Adorno, seems to be connected with quite disparate, nay irreconcilable theoretical projects. In general, in respect to *both* approaches to a theory of cultural production their emphasis, in my view, falls predominantly and one-sidedly upon those social institutions and relations which *pertain to* the sphere of culture, ensuring its integration into the total process of social reproduction, and not on the social relations *constituting* the realm of culture as such.

X

To make sense of this last, I fear, enigmatic remark, and also to be able to conclude this paper with some positive proposals, let me point out what seems to constitute the principal difficulty involved in any notion of "cultural production." If it is accepted that the paradigm of production implies, as one of its aspects, the notion of reproduction, then talk about "cultural production" does not seem to make sense at all, at least in respect of the culture of modernity. For this culture posits the principle of innovation, that is, the requirement of *novelty* as a constitutive condition which must be satisfied by any objectivation if it is to be conceived as belonging to the realm of culture at all. Cultural activities proper therefore appear as acts of *creation* (that is, are socially posited as unique – which of course has nothing to do with their psychologically understood creativity), and not as those of production.

The inapplicability of the concept of reproduction to such cultural activities seems to be acknowledged – but in a self-contradictory way – in the very

terminology Marx applies to them: *geistige*, that is *ideal* objectivations. According to Marx the necessity of reproduction in general follows from the fact that the appropriate consumption of socially produced use-values, their use, is at the same time their being used up, the destruction of their purposeful form – so a human-created social world of material objects can subsist only by being constantly remade, reproduced. Works of culture, however, are products of "mental" labour, "ideal" objectivations, where the Hegelian terminology ("*geistige*") brings forth the fact that they fulfil their intended, specifically cultural function primarily as *meaning-complexes* merely "embodied" in some material form. Therefore the acts of their appropriate use, of cultural reception and understanding, in principle do not use them up, in fact it is only these acts which *conserve* them at all in the function of cultural objectivations. The notion of an "ideal-cultural production" seems to be therefore self-contradictory – the characterisation of these "products" as ideal makes the notion of their reproduction objectless, and so the talk about their "production" also lacks strict meaning.

XI

It is, however, just these considerations which illuminate the sense in which cultural practices and objectivations can, and even ought to be regarded as constituting a specific sphere of social reproduction in the genuine sense of this word. The above indicated specificity of cultural reception can also be formulated by saying that in respect of these objectivations their act of "consumption" constitutes not only – as Marx has stated in respect of the products of "material" activities – the "finish of production," but also the very act of their reproduction. Works of culture, first of all texts of various kinds, retain an effective *cultural* significance only as long as they are directly endowed in the continuously repeated acts of their proper reception with a meaning posited as immanent to them and relevant to the ongoing, present cultural practices – otherwise they become mere historical or sociological *documents* whose sense is lost and can only be reconstructed by providing an appropriate context for them. But the fact that this apparently inherent meaning of cultural objectivations changes in history (and must change if they are to retain a relevance for the ongoing cultural practices) indicates that they "possess" this meaning only because they are posited into, and understood within,

a silently assumed context always already at place – a system of relations constantly reproduced which constitute the realm of culture as such in its specific articulation and subdivisions.

XII

This point can be clarified by returning to the problem of innovation as a constitutive characteristic of modern cultural practices. A general requirement of "novelty" is strictly speaking meaningless, since one always equally well can argue that everything is novel (necessarily so according to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles), and that nothing is new under the sun. The constitutive norm of novelty makes sense only because at any moment in each field of cultural practices, and both for authors and recipients, it is broadly pregiven in comparison *with what* (the effective tradition) and *in what respects*, according to which criteria a work of culture ought be "novel." And the relevant criteria are basically different in the different cultural genres: "replication" of an earlier experiment in natural sciences means something entirely other than, let's say, "imitation" in painting, or "eclectic epigonism" in philosophy. Again, only because an appropriate context is provided can a work of culture meaningfully claim, and be appreciated, to be "novel", thereby both reaffirming and (possibly) modifying this very framework itself.

XIII

This context in question which establishes the conditions both of direct meaningfulness and novelty for any cultural objectivation (of a definite genre) can be conceptualised as a complex system which posits any work claiming to be culturally relevant into *normative relations* to its *imputed author* (fixed in some communicative position), to a *"proper" public* (characterised by some specified and demanded attitude toward the cultural object) and to an appropriately selected and organised body of other works constituting an *effective tradition* into which it has to be inserted again in a definite way. The given work must satisfy these relations to be accepted as a "cultural creation" of a definite kind. These are specific, sui generis *cultural relations*, relations constituting the sphere of autonomous culture in its basic subdivisions and

articulation. They "exist," if this is a proper word to use, primarily in the form of various institutionalised norms and requirements, expectations and evaluative criteria of definite type, and secondly in that of both authorial and receptorial competences which are oriented – more or less successfully – by these norms that are at the same time reproduced and modified in the exercise of these competences. So, in respect of the recipient, their ability to "reproduce" the *content* (that is, the meaning) of a work, that is, to understand it in some appropriate way, presupposes the ability to comprehend it as satisfying and embodying some set of such normative relations, that is, as having a definite form. *Cultural forms* (in the broad sense coinciding with that of a genre) are coagulated cultural relations seen as directly present in the structure and organisation of the work in question – while in fact the form habitually ascribed to some work accepted into the body of the long-term tradition usually undergoes basic metamorphoses in history, with the change in the actually dominant system of cultural relations.

XIV

Cultural forms define the range of the *admissible modalities of meaning* that cultural objectivations in a definite epoch can have – the ways they may be interpreted, referred to and put to use, the viewpoints according to which they can be praised or criticised, the manner whereby they can be brought into relation with other works of culture (of similar or dissimilar form). They constitute an institutionalised pragmatics which circumscribes the plurality of positions and perspectives from which we ascribe meaning to, or at least render intelligible, the world and our life in it.

XV

The cultural relations of modernity are both enabling and restraining. They do not fix ascriptively who can perform the relevant authorial and recipient roles, nor what may be said or represented in this or that cultural form – being in principle open in all these respects is a basic aspect of their claim to autonomy and universality. But they normatively define an authorial "voice," demand "proper" receptive attitudes able to reproduce the meaning of a text

or representation in some codified sense-modality. These demanded abilities and competences are in fact socially restricted and restrictive. And this is not merely an empirical fact; modern culture posits itself both as being inherently valuable and therefore significant for everyone *and* as being "uncommon": as *high culture*. This opposition between "high" and "mass" culture is fundamentally different from that we can draw between the "elite" and the "folk," or "low," culture in pre-modern societies. In the latter case, for the societies concerned, the involved practices were not conceived as practices of the same kind; they ascriptively belonged to different social agents and possessed quite distinct, incomparable functions and significance. Only under conditions of modernity – with works of culture being in principle addressed to a sociologically unspecified public, with their distribution being, as a rule, homogenised through market-mechanisms and so on – does what has been a case of *difference* become transformed into the *internal contradiction* of the so constituted cultural realm.

XVI

The character of diverse cultural forms, the differentiated system of normative Author–Work–Recipient relations, ultimately depends upon, and is determined by, the social function the so demarcated practices and their products have at a time. For example, a science of nature (like the "natural philosophy" of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) which is primarily to serve "edifying" purposes differs from a natural science whose principal role is that of opening up new technical possibilities, and differs not only in its social organisation and actual audience, but also in its cognitive structure, forms of literary objectivation, criteria of admissible criticism and so on.

On the other hand, changes – or attempted changes – in the social function of some cultural practices (usually involving also at least a partial reorganisation of those institutional structures through which the activities concerned are integrated into the overall division of labour – a question which I cannot discuss here) are as a rule possible only through the transformation of the dominant cultural relations and forms. Social pressures and demands are always refracted through the prism of the codified effective traditions and the pre-existent cultural forms while they provide important impulses for their

change. The "internal" disputes and struggles concerning questions of form in the various fields of autonomous culture devolve around matters which are far from being merely "formal;" they relate to issues of demarcation between the different cultural practices, to the character of the appropriate recipient-attitudes posited by them (and thereby indirectly: to the character of the intended audience), to the force and modality of meaning expressed and to be understood (and thereby indirectly: to the claimed social significance). These are social struggles within the realm of autonomous culture as such. One can repeat the dictum of the young Lukács: form is the social factor par excellence – not only in literature, but in culture in general.

As a bare, unelaborated illustration I can refer here to the problem of *system* in philosophy. The notion of this concept is not to be confused either with some atemporal requirement of coherence and comprehensiveness, nor with a particular literary form of exposition – "system" is the dominant (though certainly not uncontested) *cultural form* of philosophy (and as long as the positive sciences were incompletely demarcated from it, also of them) for almost three centuries. It implies a set of specific normative postulates that works of this genre are in principle supposed to satisfy and in accordance with which they also ought to be understood. Its idea which emerged in the early seventeenth century was one of the fundamental vehicles through which philosophy-science culturally emancipated itself from the tutelage of institutionalised religion and theology and made its claim to autonomy. The later disputes about the legitimacy of this form – first of all the two great waves of the "critique of systems," French Enlightenment and German Romanticism – were essentially (whatever the arguments used) struggles about the appropriate relation of an autonomous philosophy to everyday consciousness and life, about its possible tasks and relations to other great cultural genres (such as literature). The slow disintegration and disappearance of this genre from the late nineteenth century on was partly the result of the underlying cultural processes of professionalisation and specialisation of all socially codified forms of learning, and even today the various proposals as to the adequate form of the practice of philosophy – from its "scientisation" to deconstruction – represent alternative, opposed projects of its desirable socio-cultural function, targeting different audiences and re-drawing the genretic boundaries of high culture in disparate ways.

XVII

While broad historical changes in cultural practices are dependent upon transformations in the global system of division of labour and their place in it, cultural relations have their own, sui generis *material basis*. One could say that there are specifically "cultural forces of production" co-determining the development of cultural relations and forms. They are connected, very roughly speaking, with the techniques and means of communication and reproduction of meaning-bearing messages of various kinds. It is, however, not communicative and reproductive techniques as such, but the social distribution of competences and powers to use them and their products that has a generally culture forming significance. In other words, and for example, it is not forms of writing as intellectual techniques, but the socially determined forms of literacy, not printing as such, but the effective social scope and organisation of a reading public and so on which are determinig factors in cultural change. Cultural relations do have therefore, in a definite sense, a "superstructural" character: they are connected with their own technical "basis" only through the mediation of a given system of social power and stratification.

XVIII

Under conditions of modernity when cultural practices are socially endowed with a value in themselves and novelty is simultaneously posited as a constitutive requirement that their products must satisfy, their various forms understandably acquire strong impulses towards an autogenous, self-propelled development. Indeed, shorter periods of cultural change often can quite successfully be comprehended according to the explanatory scheme of problem-generating problem-solutions – this is conspicuously so, of course, in the case of natural sciences, but true not only of them. In general, however, both types of "external" determination indicated above remain in force. Autonomy of culture does not mean that its various subfields have a logic of development of their own. Transformations in the character of cultural practices and their objectivations continue to be decisively influenced both by demands and pressures emanating from other, "external" domains of social life and by the new possibilities that the development of their own material basis creates. Autonomy in this respect means only that each type of cultural practice, having its own regulative norms and independent evaluative criteria and

possessing an institutional structure enforcing them, reacts to all external impulses and possibilities in a highly selective, active and specific way.

XIX

Two points can, in closing, be made concerning the question about the origin of cultural modernity and the role of cultural factors in the emergence of Western capitalism (the imagined "dispute" between Marx and Weber). On the one hand, it seems to be clear that only the general development of commodity relations created a stable socio-economic framework for the sustained reproduction of the cultural practices, objectivations of which are addressed to a personally and socially unspecified, anonymous public. On the other hand, it is an historical fact that fundamental cultural changes constituting basic aspects of, or preconditions for, the autonomisation of these practices often took place earlier (sometimes by centuries) than the incipient commodification of the involved activities or their products. For example, the modern concept and system of arts, together with a changed understanding (and even ascription) of authorship evolved under conditions when the practices concerned were still performed within a system of relations of personal dependence (patronage), on the one hand, and corporatist (guild) organisation, on the other. Furthermore it is also noticeable that some cultural fields played a pioneering role in the evolution of developed forms of market organisation and corresponding economic practices. For example, books and cultural spectacles like theatre-performances were actually the first commodities to be regularly advertised (from the late fifteenth century on), the book-trade represents one of the first instances of a product-market achieving (already in the eighteenth century) a genuinely national organisation and so on. In general, it seems to be not unreasonable to suppose – in accord with Weber, but independently of his motivationalist argumentation ultimately determined by the individualistic framework of his theory – that some institutional mechanisms, social competences and attitudes necessary for the universalisation of commodity relations in economy proper were first formed and exercised in the realm of narrowly understood cultural activities. If history has any lessons at all, it seems to signal that significant cultural transformations are as much preconditions for as consequences of structural social change.

Chapter Sixteen

On Ideology-Critique – Critically

There are doubts as to the centrality, or even integrity, of the basis-superstructure metaphor to the general conceptual scheme of Marx's social theory. No such queries can, however, arise in respect of the concept of ideology. True, the term itself is used by Marx in his late writings rather sparingly. But it never disappears, and more importantly the conception it designates – a conception, the formation of which predates the first explicit employment of this (borrowed) term in 1845 – remains without question present and effective throughout his whole oeuvre. In fact it is actually in his late economic manuscripts that his method of the critique of ideologies receives its most extensive and profound application. I am thinking here primarily of that great portion of his 1861–1863 manuscript which is commonly known under the title *Theories of Surplus Value*.

It was also through the Marxian conception of ideology that this term entered the vocabulary of the social sciences and humanities. Its widespread acceptance and popularity today are accompanied by an equally wide range of variations in its implied meaning, and this is true also of its employment in

writings explicitly situating themselves in the Marxist tradition of thought. Therefore it is perhaps useful to begin this discussion with the indication of some elementary "demarcating" features that characterise the Marxian understanding of ideology as distinct from many contemporary uses of this term.

First of all, it needs to be emphasised that Marx applied the term "ideology" exclusively to works of culture in the narrow, value-marked sense of this word. That is to say – as was shrewdly observed already by Korsch[1] – he never designated the phenomena of everyday consciousness as ideological, although their social constitution (an important aspect of his theory of fetishism) was a major area of interest. "Ideology" in Marx pertains to the analysis and critique of "high" culture, primarily the autonomous culture of modernity.[2] At the same time, and secondly, the concept of ideology is not applicable, even in principle, to the entire range of those phenomena which we usually consider as "cultural" in the above, restricted sense. Though Marx, as opposed to many of his present-day interpreters, did *not* regard the adjectives "ideological" and "scientific" as mutually exclusive,[3] he did exclude the *natural sciences*, regarding the very character of their enterprise, from the sphere of ideology. He consistently characterised their social meaning and function, in universalistic, as it were, anthropological terms.[4]

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[1] See K. Korsch, *Marxismus und Philosophie*, Frankfurt, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963, p. 123.

[2] On several occasions Marx also lists morality, law and politics as belonging to the sphere of ideology. His subsequent discussions, however, usually make it clear that he means by this primarily moral, political, and juridical theories, or at least the quasi-theoretical cultural representations pertaining to these fields. See for example K. Marx–F. Engels, *Werke*, Berlin, Dietz, 1957–1972, vol. 3, pp. 26–27, 362–363, 569.

[3] Marx clearly regarded Ricardo's economics as ideology, and explicitly called it so; see Marx, *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*, Frankfurt, Neue Kritik, 1969, p. 133. This, however, in no way meant that he denied its scientific character (and its theoretical achievements and significance). In general "science" in Marx designates a cultural formation of a specific type. It is not an epistemologically evaluative term synonymous with (or implying) truth.

[4] Natural science is characterised by Marx as "the general cultural (*geistige*) product of social development," "the product of the general historical development in its abstract quintessence," "the general productive force of social mind." See Marx,

This is of course connected with the fact, and this is the third point to be made, that "ideology" is a *critical* concept in Marx, and in a strong sense. While the characterisation of works of culture as ideological certainly does not imply their "dismissal," and in general does not necessarily involve an overall negative evaluation of their cultural value and significance (after all, Marx regarded Hegel's philosophy, the economics of Ricardo, the novels of Balzac and so on as ideological), it does indicate their being "false," "distorted" or "inadequate" in some non-accidental but radical sense. It refers to the "lie of their principle," that is, to the distortion of the very way their meaning is constituted, which in turn determines their function and impact in particular historical circumstances. Ideology is not synonymous in Marx with the historical situatedness, determination or perspectivity (and therefore also inevitable historical limitedness) of ideas in general, which is also true, as he well knows, of the theories of the natural sciences. It is addressed specifically to the problem how, and with what effect, the recognition of this determination and limitedness is systematically barred, and therefore the ongoing overcoming of "limits of thought" rendered impossible in certain fields of culture under certain social conditions.

Lastly, and as largely follows from the above, the theory of ideology in Marx does not deal, or at least not primarily, with the genesis of ideas, but with the *function* and meaning of specific cultural formations. It is a constituent element of his theory of the reproduction of social relations of domination, above all, under the conditions of a capitalist society. It provides at least part of the answer to his question: how, in what ways and with what effects, do the ideas of the ruling class become the ruling ideas in society – that is, the problem of legitimation (or hegemony) in its Marxian formulation. It means also that the critique of ideologies in Marx is not, in its fundamental and ultimate intention, a critique of this or that particular work of culture, but the critique of a society through the demonstration that its cultural horizon, its culturally codified ways of self-understanding, systematically preclude the possibility of adequately grasping its own antagonisms and those historical alternatives which in principle it creates, making it impossible for its members to gain rational

Resultate, pp. 79, 81, and Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Dietz, Berlin, 1953, p. 586.

control over their life and over the course of their common historical development. This is clearest from Marx's systematic treatment of the whole history of bourgeois political economy as the basic ideology of capitalist society: the critique of the historical sequence of individual theories seeks to show how a society becomes progressively less and less capable of meeting the very cultural-cognitive standards and criteria of scientificity which it created.

The Marxian conception of ideology, only partially explicited by Marx, represented in its fundamental premisses a new approach to the realm of culture. Works of culture are no longer regarded as *sui generis* entities of some specific kind, nor as mere "representations" whose sense and validity depends solely on their relation of correspondence to something else. They were dealt with as objectivations of social practices, whose primary function is the creation, transmission and imposition of meanings through which individuals can collectively comprehend their own life situation, its limits and possibilities. Critique of ideologies was a way to the disclosure of the "real" meaning of cultural creations – in this sense it was a kind of hermeneutics – but this meaning was conceived neither as simply inhering in the works concerned, nor as identifiable with the intention of their creating subjects as ultimate sources of meaning. Meaning was seen as being dependent upon those objective conditions which render these practices possible and necessary, conditions which are "made," enacted by human beings, without their being aware of them: which are "done," but not "known," and cannot be known as long as history is not made solidaristically by associated individuals, but is the blind outcome of the struggle of antagonistic interests. This idea of the dependence of the very meaning of cultural objectivations upon their *non-textual*, that is "material"-practical context is the most abstract-general presupposition articulated in the Marxian concept of ideology.

This idea involved first of all the recognition of the *historical* character of these meanings themselves. So, as Marx himself underlined,[5] "one and the same" theory can possess (in changing historical circumstances) not only different,

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[5] See his discussion of the history of theories of rent: "The *same* doctrine has been used by its originator, and by Malthus *for*, and by Ricardo *against*, landed property. At most one can say that some, who represented it, defended the interests of landed property, while others, who represented it, *fought* against the *same* interest:" Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 26/2,pp. 115–116.

but directly opposed meanings and significances. But the relationship between these objective conditions and the cultural was not conceived in this conceptualisation – as opposed to the usual understanding of the basis / superstructure metaphor – simply as that of causal, or even functional dependence. The social circumstances of their life and the constellation of conflicting interests determined by them certainly *condition* the way people perceive and understand their own situation. Ideologies, however, do not simply "reflect" or register this fact; they actively and – in varying degrees – creatively *give answers* (philosophical, artistic, political and so on) to problems raised by, and conflicts emerging from, the so perceived and understood life situations, answers which are both socially motivated and culturally relevant, that is, related to the inherited cultural traditions in definite ways. They are the forms, as Marx stresses, in which people become aware of their social conflicts and fight them out. So the relation between an ideology and the relevant social conditions however conceived, is both that of an unreflexively imposed "determination" and a (variously constituted) meaning connection – it is the opaque intermingling of the two which necessitates and constitutes the object of the critique. This latter, speaking again in the most abstract and general way, usually consists (in respect of its direct cultural object) in the radical revision and redrawing of the boundaries between the meaning-constituting dimensions and distinctions of the given type of discourse: between facts and values, ideas and interests, the imaginary-fictional and the real. Critique of ideology demonstrates how the constitution of the culturally intended and socially effective meaning is co-determined by meaningless, or at least (in their meaning) uncomprehended conditions of its constitution – with the aim of disentangling this mixture of power and validity,[6] and of also raising these merely factual and "external" determinations to consciousness and thereby making them reflexively, and ultimately practically transcendable. From the methodological viewpoint, therefore, it represents "a dialectical mediation between the social-scientific 'explanation' and the historico-hermeneutical 'understanding' of traditions of meaning under the regulative principle of 'overcoming' the unreflexive moments of our historical existence."[7]

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[6] *ibid.*; J. Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1985, pp. 140–141.

[7] K. O. Apel in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 43.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that all such general explications of the Marxian conception of ideology, even if they relate only to its fundamental theoretical premisses, remain somewhat inadequate in respect of his texts, since they do not take into account the fact that Marx used this term in recognisably different senses and, accordingly, his method of critique also took different forms. If attention is not one-sidedly fixed upon the few fragmentary and rather provisional statements Marx made about ideology in general (most of them to be found in *The German Ideology*), but account is taken of the ways he actually *dealt* with the various cultural formations he regarded as ideological, at least two different meanings of this term emerge from his writings.

On the one hand, and usually in directly polemical contexts, by ideology Marx means theories or other forms of cultural representation which fulfil – consciously or, more usually, unconsciously – directly "apologetic," justificatory functions in respect of some well-defined, historically and socially specific set of interests. Ideologies in this sense are systematisations and pseudo-rationalisations – through the use of inherited cultural means – of the given, spontaneous illusions shared by members of a social group or class due to their particular social position, common way of activity and life – illusions about themselves and the social world in general. In this way they make particular interests *appear* as general – usually, though not exclusively, the interests of the ruling strata, since it is the dominating class which has access to the cultural resources of codified traditions that are mobilised in the articulation of such ideological discourses. Critique of ideology in this sense operates with the method of *sociological reduction*, that is, the uncovering behind a system of ideas or representations their genuine practico-social life-basis: a constellation of interests as the "true motives" of the particular historical agents, determined by the "dominant material relations" which find their "ideal expression" in the given cultural forms.[8] Such a concept of ideology remains essentially within the framework of the basis/superstructure dichotomy[9] – it concretises and specifies how the cultural superstructure functions, even if in

[8] Compare Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 39, 46–47.

[9] This is born out also by Marx's terminology – in the relevant contexts he speaks about "ideological echoes and reflexes," "sublimates of the material life-process," "ideal expressions of dominant material relations" and so on: *ibid*., pp. 26, 46.

some respects it also qualifies the concept of this latter by introducing the idea of its (at least potential) *heterogeneity*, encompassing differing, partially opposed or conflicting ideologies. Such a critique (for example, Marx's treatment of the Young Hegelians or the vulgar economists) serves the task of *unmasking*, of polemical refutation through the disclosure of a "hidden" social meaning contradicting the explicitly formulated and thematised one. And it acquires a heavily ironical character when its targets are idealist conceptions of history (as in *The German Ideology*), for then it demonstrates behind the phrases about the transcendent power or eternal rule of ideas in history the hidden sway of unreflexively accepted, particular and narrow interests. It is in these contexts – in which "ideology" is often used as a synonym for the idealist conceptions of history – that Marx characterises it as the inverted reflection of reality, so that its critique becomes a materialist "reversal."[10] This view, clearly derived from Feuerbach's critique of religion, is, however, only of limited significance and application in Marx, even in respect of the "unmasking" conception of ideology.

There is perhaps one more observation worth making concerning this practice of unmasking critique. No one acquainted with the relevant texts of Marx can fail to be impressed (and not necessarily positively) by the space and effort he devotes to the demonstration that the objects of his critique do not meet the elementary criteria of traditionally conceived cultural validity – lack of originality (or outright plagiarism), ignorance in respect of the relevant facts or theories, direct contradictions are elaborated in almost *painful* detail and extent. This feature cannot be ascribed to Marx's far from attractive polemic style alone. It belongs in a sense to the very enterprise of an unmasking critique to show that the works in question do not satisfy the very cultural norms which they uphold, that they are genuinely consistent only at the level of their hidden, completely unthematised "sociological" meaning and, accordingly, that their influence and impact can be explained only by the force of popular illusions and vested interests.

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[10] The most famous formulation of the view is, of course, the *camera obscura* metaphor in *The German Ideology*, in *ibid*., p. 26. The inadequacies of such a conception were quite legitimately pointed out by Althusser, *For Marx*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969, pp. 72–73.

However, even if one disregards this last point, it is evident that there is a basic difference – and not only of tone – in the way Marx treats, let us say, Hegel as opposed to the Young Hegelians, or Ricardo as opposed to the vulgar economists, even though he also regards the theories of the first mentioned as "ideologies" and states it explicitly.[11] Nevertheless, the method of critical interpretation through the "reduction" of ideas to well-defined configurations of social interests plays only a subordinate, indeed marginal role in his voluminous and repeated criticisms of these theories; he usually makes such references to explain some of their accommodative inconsistencies (for example, of the Hegelian theory of the state) rather than their essential meaning and significance. These "epochal" ideologies are treated by him as theoretical expressions of a perspective connected with a definite *type of society*, and not primarily as those of concrete, momentary interests of a definite class or stratum in this society. Accordingly, the critique of ideology acquires in these cases a form sharply different from the enterprise of "unmasking" critique.

In spite of the considerable temporal distance there is a pronounced parallel between Marx's early criticisms of Hegel and his later texts dealing with the classics of English political economy. In both cases his analysis centres upon the disclosure of the *unthematised*, *taken-for-granted* premisses and assumptions of these theories which are inscribed and fixed by their very *method*, by the way rational discourse is constituted and structured, and which thereby acquire the character of "logical" constraints of thought. The "epochal" character of these ideological formations is ensured, on the one hand, by the fact that their "unconscious," unreflexive pre-judgements (for instance, the Hegelian identification of alienation and objectivation, or the Ricardian equation of a definite, historical form of social labour with its "natural" form, with labour as such) express, fix in thought not some passing configuration of particular interests, but fundamental constitutive features, essential conditions of a given type of society.[12] It is these latter that they elevate – through their

[11] In regard of Hegel, compare Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 167, 331, 442. As to Ricardo see Marx, *Resultate*, p. 133, and Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 26/1, p. 343.

[12] "If the conception of Ricardo on the whole is in the interests of *industrial bourgeoisie*, this is so only because, and insofar as, the interests of this latter coincide with that of production or the productive development of human labour. When the former

methodically unfolded logic – into universally valid norms or, alternatively, untranscendable natural necessities. On the other hand, they have this significance not only because they consistently ("cynically") follow through the consequences of these assumptions, but also because from their intellectual perspective they genuinely attempt to solve the contradictions manifest in the life of these societies. The "creativity" of these works of culture does not simply mean their originality, but refers primarily to the strenuous effort to overcome in thought those conflicts of real life which challenge and potentially undermine the universal validity of their implicitly assumed principles (conflicts which, from Marx's own viewpoint, can be eliminated only in and by radical social practice). In this sense they not only parade particular interests as universal ones, but attempt to *universalise and rationalise* these interests, whose domination is de facto ensured by the basic mechanisms of the society concerned. By transforming historically conditioned structural constraints of social activities into untranscendable limits of thought and imagination, these ideologies represent *paradigmatic closures* of discourse and representation which must be critically overcome to free the way for the idea of a *different* form of organisation of social practices, of an *other* future as alternative historical possibility. In view of its basic end such a conception and practice of ideology-critique can perhaps be called – in contradistinction to unmasking – "emancipatory."

The negative characterisation of these epochal ideologies as closures of thought to be overcome does not, however, exhaust their significance for critical theory. First of all this denial of their productivity[13] cannot be thought to

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contradicts the latter, he is just as ruthless towards the bourgeoisie, as he is otherwise towards the proletariat or the aristocracy." Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 26/2, p. 111.

[13] The Althusserian opposition between science and ideology, which counterposes the ability of the first to produce "new problematics" to the imaginary solution of problems by ideology as an impediment to theoretical practice, effects just such an absolutisation. Leaving aside the question that the exclusive dichotomy of science *versus* ideology is alien to Marx, this view represents a fetishisation of the principle of novelty or productivity (in fact constitutive of the whole culture of modernity) and its simultaneously narrow positivist interpretation. The exclusive attribution of productivity to science is certainly untenable: the Cartesian philosophy of self-consciousness, to take an arbitrary example, can legitimately be conceived – from a definite critical

be their determining characteristic; they act as discursive barriers only *in respect* of those radical, alternative social possibilities that their critique articulates. And even in this regard they are – or at least can be – more than mere constraints. Precisely because they genuinely attempt to universalise and rationalise those particular interests, the domination of which is in fact ensured by the functioning of the society, because they attempt to solve or sublimate by intellectual means its real contradictions, they create an intellectual distance to its direct, effective reality. They legitimate a normatively ideal type of the society in question, the realisation of which is blocked by its own mechanisms, a fact which from the standpoint of its ideological representations appears as a mere empirical accident. In this way they contain (as Marx energetically emphasised in respect of Hegel and Ricardo)[14] critical and/or anticipatory-utopian elements which can serve as a positive tradition and mobilisable cultural resource for their own critique. What we have called "emancipatory" critique of ideology therefore uncovers in the work the unconscious, unintended intrusion and inherence of a "social reality," of a historically limited and restrictive form of a social practice, which – unreflexively assumed and methodically fixed – becomes eternalised and legitimated, *and* at the same time and in the same respect – the non-correspondence of ideology and reality, the critical or utopian distance between the two, representing that element of "ideological overstretching" which, "indirectly confers upon the work its unideological truth-content."[15] And the critique aims

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perspective – as ideological. Such a characterisation of it, however, cannot obstruct the recognition of its intellectual productivity in the Althusserian sense: it opened up a genuinely new "problematics," that of epistemology in its strict, modern meaning. Althusser's view represents the positivist counterpoint and supplementation to the Romantic fetishisation of the principle of productivity in the idea of the "open work of art" in early post-structuralism.

[14] In fact such a conception of ideology has been prefigured by Marx's early critique of religion as *both* the illusory transposition of the satisfaction of earthly needs into the realm of other-worldly transcendence (and thereby the legitimation of suffering) *and* the simultaneous expression of a protest against this suffering and of "the dream of another world."

[15] T. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 346. Or, to quote another, equally suggestive formulation of Adorno: "critique of ideology, as the confrontation of ideology with its own truth, is only possible insofar as the ideology

to unveil the contradiction between these two aspects in the very fractures, gaps and strains, of the work analysed: the inevitable failure of attempts to intellectually solve contradictions which are not logical but expressed in the inability of these discourses to meet those standards of cultural legitimacy and validity (rationality, scientificity, artistic truth and so on) which they have posited. In this sense ideology-critique is the transposition of the traditional method of immanent criticism from the realm of the textual into that of the social. By situating texts in their non-textual contexts (social-historical contexts) ideology-critique attempts to discover the unreflexive presuppositions which both structure and set limits to the possibility of rational discourse or coherent representation, to reveal behind the constraint of concepts or images, as they are manifested in textual breaks or silences, the "external" constraint of social circumstances.

While indicating the presence of two different concepts of ideology in Marx, and correspondingly that of two different practices of its critique, it needs to be underlined that there is no strict dividing line between the two. Of course, the difference between them in a sense reflects the differing cultural significance of the objects of the critique. But this is not some fixed property of the works in question, even though its estimation is not arbitrary. It changes with the changing historico-cultural circumstances; it is relative to the character of contemporary cultural practices, including – a point to be stressed – the character, viewpoint and ends of the actual critique. "Unmasking" and "emancipatory" critiques of ideologies are partly just enterprises motivated by different ends. Furthermore, the latter in no way excludes the uncovering of the direct impact of narrowly conceived interests in "epochal" ideologies, partly as factors distorting their own logic. And in general, one could argue that the distinction between these two types and concepts of ideology expresses no more than the difference between the cultural representation of "momentary" historically concrete and local versus the generalised, historically long-term and fundamental social interests.

Paradoxically, however, it is this latter observation which elucidates that the practice of an "emancipatory" critique of ideologies actually (whether it is realised or not) transcends the framework of the basis/superstructure

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contains a rational element with which the critique can deal." *Aspects of Sociology*, Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, London, Heinemann, 1973, p. 190.

dichotomy and is not genuinely compatible with it. Generally speaking, the notion of ideology was usually conceived in the Marxist tradition as enriching and concretising this latter conceptualisation: it confers a *positive content* upon the idea of the relative independence of the cultural superstructure by articulating what is the *sui generis* accomplishment of its cultural objectivations as ideologies (and thereby also in what ways they can retroact upon the basis). It generally allows the institutional autonomy of cultural practices to interconnect with the idea of the socio-historical conditioning of their products. At the same time it makes it impossible to interpret the "correspondence" between the basis and the superstructure in a reductionist sense: since, as a rule, the cultural superstructure comprises a *plurality* of partly opposed ideologies competing with each other, the view of superstructure as a simple "reflection" of its basis loses sense. On the other hand, however, it ought to be clear that the theory of ideology does not directly depend upon the basis/superstructure dichotomy and the connected stronger or weaker variants of "economic determinism." Ideology-critique uncovers the meaning and significance of works of culture by relating them to the conditions of social existence, to the way of life and activity of various classes and groups in their conflictual relations with each other. Of course, it is one of the fundamental presuppositions of the whole Marxist tradition that the character and the scope of these conflicts are ultimately circumscribed by the economic structure of the given society and by the position of different classes and strata within it. It does not make sense to speak of a theory of ideology of *Marxist* orientation if it does not incorporate this idea. But the relationship which the "emancipatory" notion of ideology posits and establishes between the "material life conditions" and their cultural-ideological "expressions" is *not* (as in the conceptualisation of the basis/superstructure dichotomy) that of causal or functional *dependence*, but of *transposition*, more exactly of a universalising, totalising, rationalising *transformation* of the constraints of circumstances and material practices into constraints of discourse and representation, a transposition which always depends on the characteristics and requirements of the cultural genre in question, on the mobilisable cultural traditions, and on the concrete use made of them. And it is here that the *outcomes* of ideology-critique seem to pry apart the conceptual scaffolding of basis and superstructure. Already with Marx its practice demonstrates that one and the same social group or class can (and usually does) develop at a given historical

moment effective ideologies, whose social meaning, cultural significance and actual impact are significantly different, depending precisely on the above-mentioned cultural factors. These differences can be reformulated in terms of the divergence between momentary and particular *versus* long-term and fundamental interests. This, however, only brings home the fact that the interests, which allow a social group to form a conscious social identity, cannot be conceived as objectively pre-given determinants fixed by its economic position alone. Rather they are always *culturally articulated and interpreted* interests, and only as such can they be factors in the formation of social self-definitions and effective motives of collective social activities. This is certainly *not* the way Marx himself (especially in his late writings) operated with the concept of "interest" but it seems to be a conclusion legitimated and dictated by his own practice of ideology-critique, and more particularly by the necessity to employ in this practice divergent conceptions of ideology.

Before examining what consequences follow from this critical observation for the theory of ideology as a whole, it is apposite first to discuss some difficulties and problems concerning its Marxian conceptualisation. In general, the two notions of ideology in Marx had roughly fixed the boundaries within which this problematic has been developed in the later Marxist tradition.[16]

[16] This is emphatically *not* true of the Althusserian theory of ideology, which is situated outside these boundaries. It is motivated by, and primarily addresses itself to, a problem certainly unknown to Marx: the necessity to find an explanation for the failure of radical-revolutionary expectations in the countries of developed Western capitalism. This problem moved Gramsci to relocate the focus of the analysis of ideologies to the *institutional structure*, ensuring the linkage between high culture and everyday consciousness ("common sense") as an important element in the hegemony of the dominant class. For Althusser the theory of ideology essentially becomes the conception of an elementary acculturation of all members of society through a vast network of institutions (rather misleadingly called the "ideological state apparatuses") to those functional places that are required by its reproduction. By "interpellating" the individuals as "subjects" (the eternal effect of ideology) and thereby effacing the social process constituting and determining them, the "invisible" ideology ensures their apparently free contribution to the flawless working of capitalist domination. Althusser's attempt to save a Marxist orthodoxy despite contradicting practical-historical experiences seems to me to operate both with philosophical presuppositions alien to Marx and to

It was however, the "emancipatory" conception of ideology-critique which first of all found its continuation in the works of those representatives of Western Marxism (Lukács, Bloch, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Goldmann, Williams and so on), whose writing had the greatest influence upon contemporary theories of culture (in its narrow, value-marked sense) and upon our perception of the cultural situation of comtemporaneity. During this development a number of important conceptual questions have arisen within the Marxist tradition (in fact some of them were already signalled, as we shall see, by Marx himself) that still to a large extent remain open today.

The first of them concerns the historical scope and limits of applicability of the concept of "ideology." The few remarks Marx made concerning this subject strongly suggest that he regarded ideology as a phenomenon pertaining to all forms of class society, or even broader, as emerging with the hierarchical division between mental and material labour. Though his formulations to this effect[17] are perhaps not completely unambiguous, such a view corresponds

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lead to untenable consequences (among them an oversimplified and unjustifiably homogenised conception of the cultural order which irons out all its contradictions). In any case it deals with a different problem-complex – the constitution of everyday experiences as elementary evidences – than the one addressed by Marx.

[17] Compare: "The division of labour only becomes a genuine division from the moment when there occurs a division between material and mental labour. From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really fancy itself to be something else than the consciousness of existing practice, to represent *really* something without representing something real. From this moment onwards consciousness is capable of emancipating itself from the world and of proceeding to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, morality etc." Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol, 3, p. 31. And: "The division of labour, which we already found to constitute one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of labour between mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part takes upon itself the role of the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists who make the formation of the illusions of this class about itself the chief source of their livelihood), while the other has a more passive and receptive relation to these ideas and illusions, because they actually are the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves." *ibid*., pp. 46–47.

also to his explicit reference[18] to priestly religion as the first historical form of ideology, and more generally to the fact that – at least in the writings of the 1840s – he regarded religion as both the most elementary and the paradigmatic form of ideology. On the other hand, however, the objects of ideology-critique have been (for Marx exclusively, in the relevant Marxist tradition predominantly) works (or trends and tendencies) belonging to the emerging or fully formed autonomous culture of capitalist modernity (that is, works of "pure" theory, philosophy, art, and so on). This cannot be explained merely by pragmatic reasons, by the requirements of "ideological struggle" alone. As we have seen, Marx's own critical practice everywhere presupposes the validity of those criteria (such as originality) which specifically pertain to, and make sense only within the framework of, modern autonomous culture. Furthermore, and more importantly, if the fundamental "effect of ideology" is located in the universalisation of particular interests or conditions of life, then the idea of "pre-capitalist ideologies" seems to be at odds with Marx's emphasis upon the historical character of the tendency towards universalisation which reaches its completion only under capitalist conditions.[19] Since, according to Marx, in pre-modern societies social domination appears in the transparent form of personal dependence (a dependence directly sanctioned by transcendent powers, which for members of these societies are practical realities or, at least, objects of consensually shared beliefs), this does not seem to leave a place for ideology as the mask or veil of domination. Or, to put it otherwise, if the social function of ideology consists primarily in the legitimation of the existing relations of power, then its applicability to "traditional" societies ought to be questionable.[20] This point was made most succinctly by Adorno:

> ideology belongs, if not to modern economy, then, in any case, to a developed urban market economy. For *ideology is justification*. It presupposes the experience of a societal condition which has already become problematic and therefore requires a defense just as much as does the idea of justice itself,

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[18] Compare *ibid*., p. 31.

[19] *ibid*., p. 47.

[20] Of course this does not exclude the ideological analysis of works of the pre-capitalist past as *effective traditions* for autonomous cultural practices.

> which would not exist without such necessity for apologetics and which has as its model the exchange of things which are comparable. Where purely immediate relations of power predominate, there are really no ideologies.[21]

It would seem that Marx, at least in *The German Ideology*, confused the *specialisation* of some cultural (cultural from our viewpoint) functions and activities, a historical phenomenon encountered in various degrees in all civilisations, with the *autonomisation* of these practices (emergence of "pure" theory and so on) but which pertains fully only to modem societies. This confusion bequeathed a legacy: works in the Marxist tradition of ideology critique – and not only simplistic vulgarisations, but writings of genuine theoretical interest, such as A. Hauser's comprehensive sociology of art and literature – are not infrequently guilty of an anachronistic treatment of the cultural objectivations of the pre-capitalist past, an ahistorical neglect of the institutional relations and conditions under which these activities took place and which alone conferred meaning upon their products.

The question of the applicability of the concept of ideology has been raised, however, not only in respect of the remote past, but also concerning contemporaneity. Doubts to this effect were already voiced – strange as it may seem – by Marx. In *The German Ideology* he argued that large-scale industry and universal competition "destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality etc. and, where it could not do this, made them into a palpable lie."[22]

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[21] *Aspects of Sociology*, pp. 189–190. Similarly Habermas: "Only when meaning- and reality-complexes, internal and external relations have been dissociated … only then can the suspicion arise that the autonomy of validity claimed by a theory (be it empirical or normative) is illusory, since concealed interests and power claims have crept into its pores … Critique becomes ideology-critique when it aims to demonstrate that the validity of the theory has not been sufficiently divorced from the context of its origin, that behind the back of the theory there lies hidden an inadmissible *mixture of power and validity*, and that it owes its reputation precisely to this fact." *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, pp. 140–141.

[22] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 60. In spite of surface similarity, this view has little in common with later radical conceptions of "loss of ideology." Its premisses are rather opposed to this latter: an ever-growing simplification of all class relations and an increasing perspicuity of class conflicts in the course of the development of capitalist society; see also *ibid*., vol. 4, pp. 464–465.

But the idea that the concept of ideology is no longer relevant to the critique of contemporary society has received a genuinely argumentative elaboration only relatively recently, with specific reference to the conditions of late capitalist societies. Though the thesis of the "end of ideology" is better known in its technocratic-conservative variants, it had been formulated originally from the standpoint of a radical critique in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and especially in the later writings of Adorno. In the totally administered society of late capitalism, "The world as it is becomes only ideology, and mankind, its component."[23] In this world, "in which not only the machineries of production, distribution and domination, but economic and social relations and ideologies are inextricably interwoven, and in which living people have become bits of ideology," one "no longer needs to derive, from its causal conditions, an ideology which no longer has an independent existence and can no longer claim a truth of its own."[24] Ideologies, as elaborate systems of meaning, which create an illusion of universality and thereby legitimate the particular, are replaced – primarily due to the ever-present and inescapable impact of the mass media and culture industry – by the spell of manipulatively constructed, elementary significations which appeal to the unconscious, and which regress behind the universal/particular distinction itself and evade reflexive control.[25] They no longer influence consciousness through the convincing power of their claim to truth, but directly shape it, and thereby also shape the immediate perception of reality, which in this way becomes undistinguishable from them.

These views of Adorno clearly prefigure some of the basic ideas of presently influential theories of post-modernity (Baudrillard's *simulacrum*, the "end of great narratives" with Lyotard and so on). The difference between them (leaving aside the character and – I would also say – the depth of argumentation) consists primarily in the fact that what had been an aspect of a desperate, almost apocalyptic social criticism is now presented in the tone of

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[23] T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1975, p. 271.

[24] *ibid*., pp. 264–265. See also Adorno, *Prismen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1963, pp. 20–25.

[25] T. W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1980, pp. 62–65, 70–71.

a "happy positivism." It would be a rather cheap observation to indicate that between these two diagnoses of the ultimate decline and loss of ideology there intervened a period, the late 1960s and early 1970s, of an indisputable "return of ideology." This fact proves nothing, for not only ideologies, but also culturally influential proclamations of their "end" have returned. Evaluative discussion of these theories is impossible within the framework of this essay which is addressed to some theoretical and methodological problems of cultural analysis in general. Thus I can only indicate that, while the thesis about the "loss of ideology" seems to me highly problematic both as to its basic premisses and as a fitting empirical description of the present state of affairs, it represents at the same time a telling *symptom* of the cultural contradictions of contemporaneity, the continuing flourishing of an autonomous high culture in conditions where the traditional legitimations of its autonomy (which clearly drew, and simultaneously justified, its boundaries) have largely lost their power of conviction even among its creators and addressees. No doubt, in these circumstances of a "mistrust of culture," the practice of ideology-critique *can* (though need not) become a ritualistic reinforcement of the prevalent sentiment of a disoriented – either desperate or cynical – impotence among intellectuals and their "clients." If it does, it genuinely is at its "end" as method of *critique*.[26]

Questions concerning the limits of applicability of the concept of ideology can be raised, however, not only in historical, but in analytico-systematic respects as well. Two of the most important problems of this kind – points often made today by the critics of the theory – were in fact mentioned, though in a rather accidental way, by Marx himself.

In a footnote to the first volume of *Capital*, Marx makes the following remark: "In fact it is much easier to discover through analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than, in the opposite way, to develop from the

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[26] "Where instead of ideology nothing more is offered but its critique, instead of an unconsciously bad reality – only its consciousness … critique of ideology obtains an ideological function: men find salvation from the misery of the present not in history, but in the art of the diagnosis of the malaise of its refusal, they strive for exoneration through the attempt to absolve the lack through its diagnosis." O. Marquard, *Skeptische Methode im Blick auf Kant*, Alber, Freiburg, 1958, pp. 21–22.

actual relations of life in question the *form* in which they have been apotheosised. This latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore scientific one."[27] This statement has a principal significance. On the one hand, at the general methodological level of its aim of reconstructing *the social genesis of cultural forms*, it enables us to relate the critique of ideologies to the Marxian critique of political economy, and thus to comprehend the intended *unity* of Marx's theoretical project. In opposition to classical bourgeois economy's discovery of labour as the "earthly content," expressed in the fetishised forms and magnitudes of value, this theoretical unity was specifically aimed to answer the question: "why has this content assumed that particular form?,"[28] that is, set as its task the reconstruction of the social genesis of the *economic* determinations of form. On the other hand, this remark indicates a basic problem that theories of ideology have to face. Ideology-critique often uncovers (at least *prima facie*) the *same* "earthly kernel", the same non-textual conditions and constituents of meaning in a multiplicity of diverse cultural objectivations, among them ones which may belong to completely different cultural forms or genres. This is what Marx himself suggests in respect of the philosophical theory of natural law in Locke and the economic system of Ricardo.[29] Does this then mean that the ultimate, culturally significant and socially effective meaning of these works is to be conceived as essentially identical? If so, the theory of ideology hardly can be defended against the often encountered objection that it misses precisely what is culturally specific in the works critically analysed, for example, what confers aesthetic value and significance upon a work of art. Or, if the cultural genric form is to be comprehended as constitutive to the effective meaning and significance, then – it would seem – recourse must be taken to autochtonous principles, immanent to the given cultural sphere itself, which cannot be articulated and explained through the concept of ideology. This aporia[30] can only be solved if the concept of ideology can be applied to the analysis of cultural forms (genres, types of discourse

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[27] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, p. 393.

[28] *ibid*., p. 95.

[29] Compare Marx, *Resultate*, p. 133.

[30] In respect of the theory of art, R. Bubner characterised the above alternative as the "aporia of any kind of Marxist aesthetics." See his paper "Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik," *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, vol. 5, 1973, p. 38.

and representation) and their historical change, that is, if these *forms themselves* can be "developed from the actual relations of life" and in this way conceived as bearers of socially determined and significant meanings. And this is, as Marx states, "the only materialist, therefore scientific" method.

This, however, remains with Marx only a statement of intentions. For his oeuvre does not contain any general indication how to solve this task, nor does it elaborate examples of an analysis of the "ideological content" of specific cultural forms. True, there are some dispersed observations in his writings which are undoubtedly related to this problem: he discusses the origin and general character of speculative philosophy in *The German Ideology* and makes a short remark in the *Grundrisse* about the animosity of bourgeois society towards specific artistic genres like epic poetry; in his late economic manuscripts (especially those of 1863–1865) he repeatedly deals, though in an unsystematic way, with the social conditions of the emergence of political economy as science. In their concrete content, however, these observations as a rule do not go far beyond ideas that had already been formulated in the Hegelian theory of Absolute Spirit, and they do not allow us – it seems to me – even to reconstruct some coherent socio-ideological conceptualisations of cultural forms. Thus, in spite of Marx's very sharp and empathic formulation of this task, there is no solution of it in his work.

A second difficulty for theories of ideology, again often critically raised, has similarly been indicated by Marx. In his 1857 Introduction to the method of critical economy he states: "The difficulty lies not in the understanding that Greek art and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and in certain respect count as a norm and as an unattainable model."[31] The problem involved is once more much broader and more profound than the given example: it concerns the question whether the theory of ideology can account for the fact of *cultural traditions* in general. As we have seen, the concept of ideology implied in the Marxian practice of "emancipatory" critique explains the paradigmatic *epochal* significance of some cultural objectivations. But it reaches, at least directly, no further: it does not seem to be able to explain the fact that at least in some cultural genres, like art or philosophy, works of a remote past,

[31] Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 31.

belonging to historical epochs and social formations whose conditions of existence have long disappeared and are today hardly even reconstruable, retain their relevance and significance (or actually regain it, after being forgotten for long periods of time) for contemporary practices of cultural "creation" (as "norm and model") as well as reception (as object affording, for instance, "artistic pleasure"). Insofar as the theory of ideology, understood as a form of critical hermeneutics, explains the genuine and "hidden" meaning and potential impact of works of culture in reference to the social conditions of their *genesis*, works of a remote past, so it seems, can retain only a purely historical- documentary interest for it, while their present-day "naive" reception must appear as a case of illusory misunderstanding (which still leaves the *motive* of interest in these works completely enigmatic). It seems then to result, as Jauss has formulated, in an "antiquarianism under materialist auspices"[32], a pedestrian variant of empirical historicism. Or, alternatively, the contemporary meaning and significance of such "classical" works ought to be explicated in reference to the *present-day* social conditions and context of cultural activities. However, if this meaning is not to be regarded as a completely arbitrary imposition that can be conferred upon any work of the past, some non-accidental and socially relevant connection has to be found between present conditions and the work in question. But how can such a linkage be established between our own circumstances and, say, a work of oral poetry composed nearly three millennia ago? A mere reference to the historical continuity of domination and social antagonism (as T. Eagleton seems to argue) certainly will not suffice – it posits "ideological content" at such a level of abstract generality that it makes its idea completely empty and useless for any concrete analysis.

In this case, however, Marx himself did provide an answer to the "difficulty," at least in the concrete form in which he has formulated it.

> A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not enjoy the naivete of the child, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the character of each epoch come alive in the nature of children as if in the form of natural truth? Why should not the

[32] H. R. Jauss, "The Idealist Embarrassment: Observations on Marxist Aesthetics," *New Literary History*, vol. 7, 1975–1976, p. 193.

> historical childhood of humanity, where it found its most beautiful unfolding, as a never returning stage, exercise an eternal charm? There are unruly children and precocious children. Many of the ancient people belong to this category. The normal children were the Greeks. The charm of their art for us does not contradict the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. It is rather its result and inextricably bound up with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could only arise, can never return.[33]

This is a rather disconcerting quotation and "solution." Leaving aside its extreme Eurocentrism and rather naively classicist view of art, it represents a straightforward application of the biological-organicist metaphor of "maturation and growth" to history, conferring an openly teleological character upon the idea of historical development. It is possible perhaps to argue that this is merely an unfortunate and unthinking reproduction of a *locus communis* of post-Schillerian aesthetics.[34] This may actually be so, but the passage in fact became one of the most widely commented upon citations from Marx in the subsequent Marxist tradition, and its various (positive) interpretations have exercised – as we shall see, not without reason – a considerable influence upon theories of culture within the tradition.

Beside the general problems just mentioned, there remains a further one. "Eternal charms," as Max Raphael has remarked,[35] presuppose an equally eternal source of these charms: the idea of cultural (or at least artistic) development conceived as a process of historical maturation makes sense only if one simultaneously postulates the existence of anthropological-transhistorical characteristics and capacities, which then "evolve" in history. There are some indications that such a thought was not alien to Marx, at least in respect of aesthetic production and experience. In the *Economic and Philosophical*

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[33] Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 31.

[34] The metaphor is derived from Schiller's *Über naive and sentimentale Dichtung*. It becomes one of the basic constituents of Hegel's conception of modern education. Its continuous impact during the nineteenth century can be illustrated by Burckhardt's characterisation of Greek antiquity as the "adolescence of humanity" and his emphasis upon the "outright normality" of Greek works of art in the *Cicerone*.

[35] M. Raphael, *The Demand of Art*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 186.

Manuscripts of 1844 the ability to produce "free from physical need" and "in accordance with the laws of beauty"[36] is treated as a universal human propensity that distinguishes man in general from animals and is then progressively realised in history through labour, understood as the activity of self-creation and development. Thus, if one searches for a consistent answer to the problem of a "cultural (or at least artistic) tradition" in Marx, the answer, which perhaps can be alluded to, consists in the postulation of such historically and socially universal human abilities and needs, the evolution of which confers upon history the character of a goal-directed human progress. The main stages of this are then expressed and eternalised, made re-experienceable in "classical" works of art which thereby acquire and forever retain a permanent and general human significance. This may be a coherent answer and in itself does not contradict (at least not necessarily) the program of an ideologico-critical analysis of the works of *modern* culture. But it is, at best, a *supplement* to the latter: its articulation involves anthropological universals which transcend the historically and socially concrete categories with which a theory of ideology operates. There is certainly no elaboration or justification of a theory of such universals in Marx's writings.

Though the two problems discussed above – that of the form, on the one hand, and tradition, on the other – seem to be unrelated, there is in fact a strong connection between them. Historically long-term, effective traditions exist only in some cultural genres, and are conspicuously absent in others (such as modern natural sciences).[37] And it is also quite usual in aesthetics to explain the "atemporal" validity of classical works of art by the transcending power of artistic form. This interconnection is confirmed by the fact that in the subsequent development of the theory of ideology within the Marxist tradition these two questions received (as a rule) answers, the ultimate theoretical premisses of which turn out to be identical.

The task of an ideological analysis of *cultural forms*, posed but unresolved by Marx, became (though almost exclusively in the realm of aesthetic theory), one could say, the central endeavour and achievement of the dominant

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[36] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, suppl. vol. 1, p. 517.

[37] On this see my paper, "Why is there No Hermeneutics of Natural Sciences?," *Science in Context*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1987, republished in this volume.

tradition of Western Marxism in the field of a critical theory of culture.[38] Already in his earliest writings, from the period of his "first Marx-reception" (1908–1911), Lukács clearly counterposed this tradition to the practice of ideology-critique as it was conceived by the theorists of the Second International (Plekhanov, but also Mehring, Hausenstein and so on): that is, the reduction of the *content* of the works of art to class-determined interests and aspirations as their "sociological equivalent."

> Form [wrote Lukács] is the genuinely social element in literature; In the field of literature it is solely with the help of the concept of form that we can grasp the interconnection of its internal and external life … form [is] the link, the only genuine connection between the creator and the public, the sole category of literature which is simultaneously social and aesthetical.[39]

And this did not remain a mere program. The works of Lukács and Goldmann on the theory of the novel, of the early Lukács and Raymond Williams on the development of drama, Adorno's writings on the rise and dissolution of classical musical forms (to refer only to oeuvres which are widely known and which exercised a lasting influence upon social theories of art) have concretely demonstrated the possibility of connecting the emergence, metamorphosis and disappearance of specific artistic forms and genres with changing social conditions, demands and experiences. In this way they succeeded in showing how immanent aesthetic structures can be the bearers of social-ideological significations. This was, of course, possible only under the condition that

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[38] It has also been explicitly raised in the dispute between the Russian Formalists and Marxists, at least in its early stages when it still had a theoretical content. However, even Trotsky, undoubtedly the most thoughtful and sensitive towards problems of literature among its Marxist participants, essentially remained satisfied with answering the question about the historical longevity and "migration" of literary forms and "devices" by vague references, on the one hand, to the persisting-common features of the societies concerned, and, on the other hand, to some psychological constants ("the limits of human imagination") upon which the "peculiar laws of art" as such are apparently based. See Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, International Publications, 1925, pp. 175–178.

[39] G. Lukács, "Megjegyzések az irodalomtörténet elméletéhez" (Remarks on the theory of the history of literature), in *Ifjukori Müvek*, Budapest, Magvetö, 1977, p. 393.

these forms were not regarded as fixed sets of technical devices or as abstract-invariant structures, but as culturally-socially codified and historically changing ways of selecting and organising the "stuff" of social and personal experiences which is only thereby transformed into aesthetically relevant and meaningful content. The multifarious contradictions between the requirements and tasks imposed by an inherited form and the actual experiences to be "expressed," between these two and the explicitly perceived and intended social demands ("authorial ideology") and so on – all these together condition the ultimate, socio-culturally relevant meaning of the work, and the resolution of these contradictions (or their laying bare in the work itself) constitutes that process of "aesthetic universalisation" which confers upon the work its ideological significance. There are certainly significant differences even among the few authors we have mentioned in the way they conceptualise and explicate this transposition of the social into the immanently aesthetical, but they do not concern us here. In general one can maintain that in the later history of critical theory, the Marxian program – "the only materialistic" approach to ideologies that develops from the actual relations of life the cultural forms of their "apotheosis" – has to a significant extent been realised, even if only in the realm of arts.

This program has been realised – but within readily perceivable limits and with restrictions of principal significance. The writings to which we referred (and many concrete analyses following in their steps) were in general confined to the investigation of the socio-historical transformation process of *particular* literary/artistic genres and forms, or, at most, to the elucidation of the conditions under which a dominant genre (say, epic poetry) was replaced by another (the novel). They stopped short before a socio-historical approach to the main divisions in the (contemporary) system of arts and to the "fundamental" (for us) genre classes,[40] not to mention the ultimate subdivisions of

[40] There are, of course, counter examples and countertendencies, and not only in the more recent literature like F. Jameson's somewhat vague program of an "ideology of forms" (see *The Political Unconscious*, London, Methuen, 1981, ch. 1, especially pp. 76, 96–100) or P. Bürger's "Theory of the Institution of Art" (see *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1982, especially pp. 15–26). One could refer to Walter Benjamin or to Mikhail Bakhtin (whose theory of genres, in its first, rudimentary form, has

the whole field of "high culture" into practices and objectivations of basically different kinds (art, science, philosophy and so on). The method of ideology-critique did not result in a *general theory of cultural forms*. This negative formulation, however, is insufficient. The historisation of particular artistic genres and forms in the predominant tradition of Western Marxism was positively anchored in an ahistoric/transhistoric treatment of the ultimate aesthetic categories. Social theory of art remained dependent upon a general and normatively conceived aesthetics, irrespective of whether this latter is explicated or not.

First of all, there is a conspicuous linkage between the critical historisation of particular aesthetic forms, on the one hand, and a conception of *art itself* (of the work of art in general, or of the "aesthetical") which articulates them with the help of universal anthropological or ontological categories (and which then renders unproblematic the selection of "major" genres and "major" oeuvres as appropriate objects for an ideologico-critical analysis). Even with those who, like Adorno, critically focus the attention of art-theory upon the historical specificity (and the contradictory consequences) of the process of autonomisation of art in modernity, and who are therefore in general completely aware of the dangers of projecting the (alleged or real) characteristics of autonomous aesthetical objectivations beyond the social conditions of their possibility, the "work of art" (as a "windowless monad") and its "truth" receive a consistently universalistic and atemporal (with Adorno in fact ontological) characterisation which is ultimately justified with the help of foundational anthropological categories (the contradictory impulses of mimesis and objectivation). The fact that this characterisation is kept by Adorno at a very abstract level allows him to encompass – in contradistinction to Lukács – changing and significantly different types and principles of aesthetic construction and organisation; in this comparison his conception of art is undoubtedly more genuinely historical. But the ontological-anthropological characterisation of the artwork in general is, of course, no verbal embellishment with him,

been formulated within the framework of a positive confrontation with the Marxist tradition). In both of these cases, however, the effort at a more radical historisation of aesthetic categories resulted in prying apart the conceptual scaffolding of ideology-critique.

either: it establishes the universal conditions of "artistic truth" through which he can then *normatively* demarcate aesthetic value and authenticity.

As to its basic conceptual structure it is, therefore, the same theoretical construction which finds expression (no doubt, more straightforward and rigid) in the aesthetics of Lukács. The invariant characteristics of all true works of art (form/content unity, the work as intensive totality, mimetic representation of the universal in particular as the "typical" and so on) confer upon art its transhistorical function and mission: to defetishise and humanise the social reality of life.[41] The aesthetic means of representation, through which these general principles can be realised and art's vocation fulfilled, necessarily change in history, depending upon the concrete social conditions and the character of reality to be represented. (In spite of the often encountered misunderstanding, "realism," for Lukács, does not mean a definite "style" – E.T.A. Hoffmann is, for him, a great realist.) It is these principles which confer an atemporal validity upon the paradigmatic works of authentic art and ensure the objectivity of aesthetic evaluations independent of the socially induced variability and relativity of the dominant taste.

This retreat from the socio-historical and contextual to some ahistorically conceived "immanently aesthetical" characterises, in general, not only these two great protagonists of a Marxist aesthetics. It is equally present in Bloch's conception of art as the manifestation of a utopian consciousness rooted in the fundamental determination of man as a "being of lack," and ultimately grounded in an ontology of nature as "not-yet-being." It is formulated with an extreme sharpness in the late writings of Marcuse, with their emphasis on the "transhistorical substance of art," a metasocial dimension "constituted by the aesthetic form" which both defines authentic art and enables it to "emancipate itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while

[41] Lukács certainly does not shrink from the directly ahistorical consequences of these premises: the work of art as an *immanent* meaning-totality is in principle opposed to the demands of religious transcendence; aesthetic and religious representations of reality are always and by necessity in conflict with each other. In this way the whole complex and contradictory socio-historical process of secularisation under conditions of modernity is transformed into the "emancipatory struggle of art" as such. *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1964, vol. 2, ch. 16.

preserving its overwhelming presence."[42] It is implicitly presupposed by Goldmann, when he – in a polemic with Adorno and with a direct reference to Kant – explicates aesthetic value in the abstract-general terms of "a surmounted tension between an extreme richness and an extreme unity, between a very rich universe and a rigorous structuration" – a unity that must always be embodied and concretised in some historical world-view which at the same time represents the consistent realisation of "one of the basic possibilities of humankind."[43] One can find its traces even in the Althusserian theory of literature, in its ascription (not only with Althusser, but also P. Macherey) to literary form as such of a power of distantiation able to render the gaps and contradictions of dominant ideology specifically "visible."

I hope it is not facetious to indicate that this resignation from the strong historicism and social contextualism of ideology-critique often itself serves directly *ideological* functions. It provides for the representation of particular cultural-political claims and standpoints as the "demands of art," it endows practically oriented interventions into cultural life with the apparent universality of the defence of human values in general (and nowhere more clearly – and equally on both sides – than in the dispute between Lukács and Adorno). It is therefore not by accident that this type of argumentation became more and more prevalent with the growing "anonymity" of the social referent and addressee of critical theory, with the loss of faith in the proletariat as the sole agent of radical transformation (and the potential bearer of a "progressive" new culture). At the same time, at the level of explicit argumentation, the retreat from the standpoint of ideology-critique, insofar as the understanding of art in general was concerned, served the function of *justification* for its application to the more concrete problems and issues of aesthetic practice. It insulates and protects the views of the critic from the suspicion of themselves being subject to ideological distortions; it undercuts the possibility of drawing paralysing relativist conclusions from a socio-historical approach to art.

The tendency towards a dehistoricised conceptualisation of cultural practices, however, usually reaches further than the understanding of "the aesthetical,"

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[42] H. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, London, Macmillan, 1978, pp. ix-xi, 6, 25.

[43] L. Goldmann, *Cultural Creation in Modern Society*, Saint Louis, Telos Press, 1976, p. 142.

of art as such. In the history of Marxist aesthetics one can observe repeated attempts at (what essentially amounts to) a systematic "deduction" of the main kinds of artistic creativity – of the basic subdivisions in the (modern) system of arts, together with their fundamental formal characteristics – from this general concept of the aesthetical.[44] Similarly, there is a strong tendency in this legacy to relate the most general and fundamental "genre" categories within one kind of art (for example, the traditional distinction between the lyrical, dramatic and epic within literature) to some anthropological dimension. Instead of multiplying the number of illustrations, I refer here to a case which seems to me especially striking: Raymond Williams.

No one in the Marxist tradition represented more energetically and consistently the necessity of a historical approach to the arts than Williams, especially in his late writings. From this standpoint he emphatically – and to my mind, convincingly – criticised precisely those tendencies which were discussed above:

> The distinctions between art and non-art, or between aesthetic and other intentions and responses can be seen as they historically are: as variable social forms within which the relevant practices are perceived and organized. Thus the distinctions are not eternal verities, or supra-historical categories, but actual elements of social organization … Indeed, the first deep form of the social organization of art is, in this sense, the social perception of art itself.[45]

He specifically objected to Lukács and Goldmann – for staying "too often within a received academic and ultimately idealist tradition in which 'epic' and 'drama', 'novel' and 'tragedy', have inherent and permanent properties, from which the analysis begins and to which selective examples are related."[46] This "strong historicism" leads Williams, in his theoretically most encompassing and ambitious project, to outline a conceptual scaffolding for the historical sociology of culture in general, to replace the method and framework

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[44] M. Raphael, *Zur Erkenntnistheorie der konkreten Dialektik*, Paris, Excelsior, 1934, pp. 188–196; C. Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality*, London, Macmillan, 1937, ch. IX; partly (and in a rather contradictory way) also Lukács, *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, vol. 1, ch. VIII/1 and vol. 2, ch. XIV.

[45] R. Williams, *Culture*, London, Fontana, 1981, p. 130.

[46] R. Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London,Verso, 1980, p. 27.

of ideology-critique with the paradigm of "cultural production." Nevertheless, and precisely in the course of this systematising attempt, he seems to resort to the type of solution and assumptions he so energetically rejected elsewhere. For the "deepest and most general level and constituent of literary forms," the "modes" (dramatic, lyrical, narrative) and the major genres (tragedy, comedy and so on) of literature are also related by him "more to the sociology of our species, at a certain level of cultural development, than to the specific sociology of a given society at a certain place and time;" they are "more accurately referred to an anthropological or societal dimension than to the sociological in the ordinary sense."[47] For, although some of these forms had been invented under specific historical conditions and, of course, underwent significant alterations with their change, they persist as recognisably separate classes of literary works with some fundamental shared characteristics "capable of virtually indefinite reproduction in many different social orders."[48] This way of posing and solving the problem seems, however, to be determined by the retention of some of the unexamined presuppositions of ideology critique. To indicate what is meant, I shall use an example, the detailed illumination of which is largely due to the work of Williams.

Some Greek tragedies, like *Oedipus Rex* or *Antigone*, serve for us as the paradigmatic embodiments of the "dramatic mode." This means that we read them – a practice of reception not available to their original audience, since, leaving the disputed question about the spread of literacy in Athens aside, their texts certainly were not in common circulation – *as* dramas, that is, with expectations, interests, evaluative criteria, and so on, largely formed by our acquaintance with, and experience of, *modern* dramatic literature. They are also performed, by and large (in spite of all antiquating tendencies), according to the social and cultural conventions of modern theatre. Now, modern drama was born in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries partly as the result of direct efforts to resurrect, under radically different conditions, the tradition of ancient (though first of all Roman) dramatic art and in a conscious opposition to the still living tradition of the mystery and morality plays (for us, just other dramatic "genres"). It was, however, not the *sole* cultural form attempting

[47] Williams, *Culture*, pp. 150, 194.

[48] *ibid*., p. 194.

such a revival: Italian opera, this new *musical* genre, was largely indebted in its origin to the same impulse. In principle, this was not less legitimate – Greek tragedies were musico-dramatic spectacles, even if their "score" is lost. For us, the ability to perceive the similarities *and* differences between *Oedipus Rex*, *Othello* and, say, *The Cherry Orchard* belongs to (is culturally "required" for) their appropriate, aesthetically informed understanding as works of art. To do so in respect of Sophocles' *Antigone* and Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, not to speak of Bizet's *Carmen*, seems to us rather misplaced, in any case of secondary aesthetic import: to try to judge the latter two on the basis of criteria which we can formulate (given our usual understanding of Greek tragedies) in terms of such similarities and dissimilarities would mean to miss their character as sui generis works of art, that is, works *of music* (and in the case of some operatic forms – the *opera seria* – such criteria would seem utterly irrelevant and misleading). The question is not whether there really are common formal traits and characteristics – of course, there are, and in *both* cases. But then one can find *some* such similarities between *Carmen* and Galileo's dialogues, too – the latter also satisfies that strictly and consistently formal definition of the dramatic mode which is proposed in some structuralist poetics. The genuine question consists in asking which of these "shared" formal constituents are *culturally aesthetically relevant* both for artistic production and reception. And this depends on the *internal social (institutional) organisation* of the contemporary sphere of aesthetic practices, among others constituting separate lines of tradition for each of its "kinds", providing a cultural context against the background of which the appropriate meaning and significance of individual works of art can emerge.

And it is here that the limitation of the theory of ideology, referred to above, comes to the fore. Ideology-critique establishes a connection between separate elements of the cultural realm (be they individual works or particular cultural forms abstracted from them), on the one hand, and specific extra-cultural social conditions and processes, on the other. No doubt, such connections are real – cultural change, to various degrees in various cases, is related to, partly conditioned by, "external" social factors. But such an approach bypasses those *sui generis institutionalised relations* which constitute the sphere of culture in its articulation and subdivisions, and through which the influence of these factors is always "mediated," that is, both selectively filtered and channelled. It is these relations which also determine the very way a

specific history is constructed for each of these "subdivisions," for each type of cultural practices. Therefore precisely where a *systematic-general* effort is made to clarify the manner in which the social is *transposed and transformed* into the cultural (that is, aesthetical, philosophical, scientific and so on) – which is, as we emphasised, the characteristic framing of this problematic in the theory of ideology – the theory runs against inherent limits: since the institutionally constituted *specific historicity* of each of these spheres is neglected, some aspects of this transformation (some constituents of the "form") inevitably appear in this conceptualisation as an ultimate nucleus which resists any historical treatment at all and can only be comprehended as an anthropological residue. In this way theories of ideology ultimately fail to transcend the standpoint of that "naturalisation of genres" (and cultural forms in general), which, as has been convincingly shown by Genette,[49] represents one of the constant and highly problematic features of the autonomous aesthetic theories of modernity. In fact, the solution which ideology-critique offers to the problem of form in its generality is in a rather strange correspondence with that articulated by the tendency usually conceived as its main rival and opponent: that found in the (historically more conscious) late writings of Russian formalists and Prague structuralists.

Among the many consequences which follow for the *practice* of ideology-critique from this combination of a historical approach to the metamorphosis of particular cultural (usually aesthetical) forms with an ahistoric treatment of the "deepest" and most "general" form-constituents, I shall mention only one. In the writings of its most significant representatives a genuine sensitivity in elucidating the historical conditions and social significance of even relatively minor formal and stylistic changes (sometimes within a single *oeuvre*) often coexists with a pronounced penchant towards the broadest possible analogies between works belonging to completely different fields of cultural activity. The parallelisation of Pascal and Racine (Goldmann), Hegel and Goethe (Lukács), Beethoven and Hegel (Adorno) are the best know examples

[49] Compare G. Genette, "Genres, 'types', modes," *Poetique*, no. 32, 1977, pp. 405ff. See also the remarks of T. Todorov, "The Origin of Genres," *New Literary History*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1976, about the traditional division of genres into "natural" and "conventional" ones.

of this tendency. I certainly would not deny that these parallels, in certain respects, have a genuinely enlightening power; what is alienating in them is the inclination towards the "substantialisation" of the interpretively highlighted correspondences, their transformation into some ultimate identity of meaning (such as Goldmann's positing of an identical tragic world view which is then ordered to the same class position arrived at as the result of an almost aprioristic construction; or Adorno's explicit thesis about the "convergence of philosophy and art in the truth-content.")[50] Foucault has legitimately criticised this tendency towards totalisation that reduces the multiplicity of discourse-types to some single essence and principle. And this tendency is not accidental. For when the diversity of cultural practices and the corresponding cultural forms, determined by the multilayered institutional organisation of the field of culture, is explained in terms of ahistorical-anthropological determinations, then these differences always turn out to be in the last end merely "formal,"[51] only diverse ways of "expressing" some ultimately identical content.

The problem of *cultural tradition* can now be dealt with much more briefly, since the solutions offered to it largely depended upon the conception of cultural forms outlined above, and in the most representative cases they generally did not go beyond the reformulation of the already discussed Marxian answer to this question – reformulations which tried to avoid its most embarrassing associations. Precisely the anthropological grounding of aesthetic forms allowed the latter to be conceived as conferring upon the "authentic" works of art a power to transcend the particular conditions of their genesis and to acquire a universal significance. In no way was this understood to imply that the meaning of such "classical" works of art is to be reduced to

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[50] Adorno, *Asthetische Theorie*, p. 422.

[51] See Lukács' elucidation of the difference between the scientific and the artistic representations of reality in terms of the abstract universal and the typically particular, or Adorno's formulation of the relation between art and philosophy: in the first, truth becomes wholly and completely expression, while in the second, expression becomes wholly truth. In this spirit then H.-H. Holz (*Vom Kunstwerk zur Ware*, Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1972, p. 18) can simply characterise fine arts as non-conceptual but "visual" philosophy.

some abstraction of the "eternally human," devoid of all socio-historical specification. On the contrary, it is precisely the *historically specific* situations and experiences which, through aesthetic forming, acquire a paradigmatic expression, making them understandable and directly re-experienceable, even when the circumstances that brought them to life have disappeared. The preservation of tradition thereby confers upon art the significance of the collective historical memory of humankind, and makes art simultaneously the bearer of the project and promise of humankind's genuine, free unity which in the present exists only as a cultural ideal.

This conception of the aesthetic tradition and art in general, as the "self-consciousness of the human species," has been elaborated in the grandest manner by Lukács.[52] It is, however, equally present in Adorno, in spite of the fact that he fundamentally opposes the silent premise of the Lukácsian conception: the identification of art with the (ever expanding) collection of *chef-d'oeuvres*, and takes *contemporary artistic production* as the focal point of reference in his conceptualisation of art. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all his polemics against the concept of classical perfection,[53] he also repeats: authentic works of art are "the unconscious historiographies of their epoch, and it is not least this feature that underlies their claim to knowledge."[54] The persistence of this trend of thought is perhaps best demonstrated in its unexpected re-emergence in theorists whose whole effort is directed at the expurgation of all transhistorical preconceptions from the theory of art. Thus Frederic Jameson, who begins his book with the slogan: "always historicise!" as the sole absolute imperative of dialectical thought, a few pages later also solves the "essential *mystery* of the cultural past," its return to life in surroundings utterly alien to it, by reference to history as "the unity of a single great collective story," in which the past works of art immortalise "vital episodes in a

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[52] Compare Lukács, *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, vol. I, ch. 7, para. III. For a generalisation of this viewpoint to the whole of the sphere of "high" culture: a conceptualisation of the sciences, arts and philosophy as ideal objectivations of the consciousness, respectively self-consciousness of human species-being, see A. Heller, *A mindennapi élet* (Everyday Life), Budapest, Akadémia, 1970, pp. 153–169.

[53] Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 239–244.

[54] *ibid*., p. 272.

single vast, unfinished plot," even if these surviving cultural masterpieces tend to perpetuate only a single voice in the confrontational dialogue of classes, the voice of the hegemonic class.[55]

This general answer to the problem of cultural, or at least aesthetic, tradition goes back, as we have seen, to Marx but there is nothing particularly "Marxist" about it. It was clearly already outlined by Hegel and Goethe, and the conception of art as the historical self-consciousness of mankind – "the historical manifestation of the principle of historicity itself"[56] – was one of the favourite ideas of German Historicism. This is not an attempt to discredit a view through its "tainted associations." The point is merely to indicate that the conceptual theory of culture with the help of the notion of "ideology" seems to run against inherent limits; it has to be "supplemented" by ideas which – though not contradicting it formally – are certainly independent of, and rather alien to, the whole approach it embodies.

But the problems do not end here, for the solution offered hardly seems to be satisfactory on its own account, either. The idea that the cultural effectivity, the present-day meaningfulness and significance of some works of the remote past is to be explained by their being the speaking witnesses of our common history – which made us what we are and therefore vitally concerns us all – silently presupposes the essential *permanence* of this tradition which is conceived under the aegis of the "classical." This interpretation does not account either for the actual, often significant and sudden changes in the composition of the effective tradition, for the many transvaluations of values in history, nor for the often radically altered understanding of the meaning of even its most constant constituents, so well documented in the reception-history of the most widely recognised "classics" of literature, fine art or philosophy. This defect is all the more significant, since cultural modernity is specifically characterised in contradistinction to pre-modern cultures and epochs by the pronounced instability of its respective traditions on the one hand, and simultaneously, by the uninterrupted *widening* of the scope of potentially relevant

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[55] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 189–20, 85.

[56] The formulation is by J. Rüsen, *Ästhetik und Geschichte*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1976, pp. 88–89.

traditions on the other, a process which is still going on.[57] Any theory which attempts to explain the "longevity" of cultural traditions in terms of the inherent characteristics of the works in question *alone* without systematically accounting for their dependence upon the character of *present-day* cultural practices (and more generally, social-cultural concerns) seems to fail inevitably.

Within the broadly conceived Marxist traditions there were attempts, of course, which took a different standpoint and direction. The most significant among them was the view which – at least in the form of fragmentary suggestion – emerges from the late writings of Walter Benjamin. In his effort to find, or, more accurately, to actively make a counter-tradition opposed to the canonised one of the dominant culture, those "cultural treasures" that in their origin, content and manner of transmission are "tainted by barbarism," by the "anonymous toil" of those whose voice they fall to evoke, Benjamin articulated a hermeneutic conception of the resurrected past, the genesis of which is always in the present. According to this view, instead of the conformist (and ideological) image of tradition as the steady accumulation of cultural "values" in history, effective tradition selectively connects changing and vanishing fragments of the past, wrenched away from the "wrong," disastrous continuity of historical time, on the basis of a secret affinity connecting them with the "time of the now" (*Jetztzeit*): with that arrested moment of the present which hovers between the compulsive repetition of the "ever same" of oppression and suffering, and the always in principle open possibility of "redemption," a discontinuous and radically different future.

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. "The truth will not run away from us": in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism … Historical materialism wishes to

[57] To give a single example, in the field of fine arts the "rediscoveries" of the Gothic, Romanesque, Oriental and then primitive art are now, so it seems, continuing in the re-evaluation of what earlier has been considered as female domestic craft-products and their re-appreciation as "genuine" works of art.

> retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes.[58]

This view allowed Benjamin to offer a genuinely historical interpretation of the distinction between the "material" and the "truth content" of works of art: the first being what they as cultural messages *say*, which becomes unintelligible once the way of life and experiencing disappeared that made their manner *of saying* it directly comprehensible, and the second being what is unintentionally and "physiognomically" *revealed*, "shown" by them as media of intersubjective communication in their very form. For Benjamin even this latter, the *Wahrheitsgehalt*, remained essentially historical, dependent upon what could be thrown into relief from the perspective of the present, both as to the possibility of its actualisation and in its actualised content. Nothing illustrates better the fragility of such a hermeneutically oriented approach within the dominant trends of the Marxist tradition than the fact that Adorno, who directly took over this distinction from Benjamin, again gave to the notion of "truth-content" as we have seen, an ontological, dehistoricised sense.

The concept of ideology and the method of ideology-critique do not prove to be sufficient for the development of a comprehensive, general theory of culture (even in its narrow, value-marked sense); in respect of some basic issues and problems, necessarily raised by such a theory, they seem to strike against some, apparently inherent limits.

This formulation, however, is one-sided, since the limits in question equally can be seen not as results of an objectively inscribed *incapacity*, but as those of a deliberate theoretical choice, the outcomes of a strategy of "healthy self-defence," of a conscious *self-limitation* to stop the theory of ideology becoming "total" and in this way avoiding some consequences irreconcilable with its critical intentions. And here we touch upon some of the most fundamental difficulties encountered by the conceptualisation of cultural practices and objectivations with the help of the concept of ideology – difficulties which have been alluded to earlier but which require greater discussion.

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[58] W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, vol. I/2, p. 695.

The theory of ideology aims at discovering the "genuine" meaning, and at explaining the actual impact and significance, of works of culture by relating them to that non-textual, social context within which the meaning-creating cultural practices take place and which conditions their possibility. It operates with a contrast between the "illusory" sphere of the ideological – illusory not in respect of its existence, but in its assumedly self-enclosed and self-sustaining character as an autonomous domain of pure meanings – and the "real," the practices of material life and social intercourse, which unreflexively intrude into the former both as that which requires meaningful interpretation and/or legitimation, and as that which provides the elementary resources (cognitive, organisational and so on) for this.[59] It is only through this contrast that the critique of ideology accomplishes its practical task: to make us aware of the socially imposed restraints upon our thinking and imagination, and thereby enable us to overcome these limits in thought and ultimately in conscious collective practice as well.

This very opposition between the "ideological illusion" and the "reality" of material life-practices seems, however, itself illusory, produced by the illusions of a "naive realism." For the "reality" to which the critic of ideological illusions refers – a historically specific set of practices and practical-social circumstances – is, of course, itself a cultural construction (or reconstruction), that of the critic, and depends upon the critic's particular perspective, consciously and unconsciously accepted interpretative principles and so on. Or, to put it differently: the non-textual conditions, to which the theory of ideology relates the object of its critique, are – and can be – nothing else but *another text*, which now – in its turn – raises a claim to the transparency and

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[59] Compare "For the young Marx the conceptual alternative to ideology is not science but reality, reality as praxis … This reality is then represented in the heaven of ideas, but it is falsely represented as having a meaning autonomous to this realm, as making sense on the basis of things that can be thought, and not only done and lived. The claim against ideology therefore comes from a kind of realism of life, a realism of practical life for which praxis is the alternate concept of ideology. Marx's system is materialist precisely in its insistence that the materiality of praxis precedes the ideality of ideas." P. Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology* and *Utopia*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 5.

self-sufficiency of its meaning. And since this text, with its claim to directly present the real *sans phrase* – as it simply is – veils its own textuality – the fact and the way it is culturally *made* – it cannot be other than distortively ideological. As an assertion of naked truth, it is only a disguised assertion of authority.[60]

This critique of ideology-critique, often encountered today – in spite of its admirable sharpness – misses, however, its specific target. For the antinomy it formulates is ultimately that of human cognition in general: the antinomy between the linguistic preconstitution of any reality to which we have cognitive access, on the one hand, and the necessity of a referential relation to some extra-linguistic reality for the constitution and functioning of language itself, on the other. The fact that difficulties of this type also re-emerge within the practice of ideology-critique is hardly surprising, since it is a form of cognitive activity. This fact in itself still tells us nothing conclusive about the legitimacy, fruitfulness, or relevance of this specific cultural practice. For the contrast which Marx draws between "the language of real life" and the mere "phrases of the actual world," that is, between what the individuals actually do and what they say, think and imagine they are doing,[61] may well be naive and untenable in abstract generality – as if what one does were independent of what one thinks one is doing, and as if the first could be stated in a language evoking directly, without interpretation, reality as such, a language no longer concerned with "man as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived."[62] Nevertheless, in practical life and from case to case we are well able to make precisely the kind of distinction Marx indicates, and resigning from drawing it would make us only more gullible and uncritical. Therefore one

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[60] "[T]he discourse of history … believes it knows only a two-term semantic scheme, referent and signifier, the (illusory) merging of referent and signified defines, as we know, *sui-referential* discourses (such as performative discourse): we can say that historical discourse is a fake performative discourse in which the apparent constative (descriptive) is in fact only the signifier of the speech act as an act of authority." R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1986, p. 139.

[61] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 20, 26–27.

[62] *ibid*., p. 26.

should attempt to state the difficulty involved here in less sweeping and general terms.

The theory of ideology serves the aims of a socio-cultural *critique*. As such it presupposes the possibility of taking a distanced attitude towards its object and claims in a sense a privileged position in respect of it. For criticism implies judgement – not, of course, in the sense of distributing good or bad marks, but of exploring and positing meaning in, and for, situations and contexts independent of possible authorial intentions. Therefore it always claims the possibility (in principle) "of understanding a work better than its author did." It is precisely the explicitness of this claim which distinguishes its own practice from that of "mere" exegesis. And there is nothing particularly suspicious or troublesome about such a claim in its specific application to be free from definite illusions, to emancipate oneself from specific prejudices of others and to comprehend them as prejudices is certainly not beyond our power. This is unproblematic, even from the viewpoint of a decisive insistence upon the universal and untranscendable linguisticality of all our conscious world-attitudes.

> The reflection of a given pre-understanding brings something before me that would otherwise happen behind my back. Something – not everything. For effective-historical consciousness is in an uneliminable way more being than consciousness. This does not mean, however, that it could escape ideological sclerosis without a constant creation of awareness.[63]

Linguisticality includes the possibility of (finite) reflection upon what is said – here the possibility of regarding it not as the disclosure of a participatively shared or shareable meaning, but as the deliberate use of "signs" which either "express" some hidden (and perhaps unconscious) intention, or embody, "show" presumptions and preconditions making such a signifying practice possible, but not "sayable" by its means. Whether such a reflexive-critical attitude (which, of course, always presupposes the background and horizon of *some* shared understanding) is legitimate, can be decided only

[63] H. G. Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik," in H. G. Gadamer, *Kleine Schriften: Philosophie-Hermeneutik*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1967, p. 127.

concretely and from case to case, and ultimately by how far it is able to enlighten in a non-arbitrary way what was said in a manner relevant to our own concerns.

But Gadamer's qualification – "something – not everything" – this reference to the *limits* of reflection simultaneously indicates the limits of a theory of ideology. The more encompassing and totalising this critique becomes, the more the claim to a privileged position acquires a sweeping character (and the distinction between text and context also becomes increasingly problematical). When – and if – theory of ideology is transformed into a *general* theory of culture (at least of the present and the past), it implicitly assumes for itself the power to transcend once and for all our whole "tainted" and "distorted" cultural legacy, to emancipate us not only from definite closures of thought (the debilitating effect of which may hinder us, here and now, from exploring our collective possibilities), but from all "prejudices" in general. Of course, such a presumption is in essential contradiction to one of the fundamental characteristics of an "emancipatory" critique of ideology – not simply to unmask tradition, but to unify its critique with the disclosure of its "truth," with the active mobilisation of its utopian and/or subversive potentialities (whereby the critique situates itself culturally not through some ahistorical break, but through a consciously articulated, discontinuous continuity in history). Such a view not only veils – in a self-mystifying fashion – its own dependence upon (and the degree of participation in) the cultural practices which it exposes. More importantly, such a claim can be legitimated only if one regards one's own critical standpoint and perspective as insulated against the openness of history, that can create undreamed of dangers and possibilities, may turn the "unthinkable" into reality, and thus can *make* our present thought and imagination limited and "prejudiced," blind in its very insights. Since theories of a Marxist provenience can hardly insist upon an extra-territorial position in respect of history in general, they can vindicate such a stance only by claiming a secure ("scientific") knowledge of the future, that is, transforming a practical-critical *project* into the *prediction* of historical inevitability. Such a global and total conception of ideology escapes the consequences of self-reflexivity by turning its own practical-polemical engagement and enmeshment with its historical situation into an objectifying and objectivist attitude. And then, but only then, can the critique in each concrete case

conceive its own practice as offering not one interpretation of its object – one which is enlightening and relevant for us in view of our social and cultural problems and objectives – but as disclosing its sole "genuine" meaning and significance.[64]

There is little doubt that Marx's interpretation of his critical practice to a considerable degree fits into, or at least suggests, just such a pattern. When he consistently excludes the (modern) natural sciences from the domain of ideology, he does not thereby deny their historicity – neither their dependence upon particular historical conditions,[65] nor the changing and fallible character of their theoretical constructs. There is for Marx no thinking without historically specific (and therefore also limited) "preconditions." However, in the case of the practice of natural sciences – these preconditions are always made *transparent* through their explicit linkage with, and control by, the data of observations and experiment. This fact confers upon the process of their historical change – conditioned by the continuous widening of their experimental basis, spurred on ultimately by the requirements of a dynamic system of industrial production – the character of cognitive *progress*, that of a *growth of knowledge*, in opposition to the mere "metamorphoses" of ideologies lacking genuine cumulation.[66] And it is this type of historicity that Marx repeatedly claims for his own critical theory. Even though this tendency is much more pronounced in his late writings, it is already present in his early attempts to formulate the standpoint of historical materialism. This latter, as the "real, positive science" of history,

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[64] How little such a claim accords with the actual *results* of ideological-critical practices I tried to illustrate in a paper dealing with some of the outstanding critical interpretations of Kant in the history of Western Marxism. G. Markus, "'Ideology' and its Ideologies: Lukács and Goldmann on Kant," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 1981, vol. 8, no. 2.

[65] See his considerations concerning the connection between the emergence of modern natural sciences and the capitalist mode of production in *Grundrisse*, p. 313.

[66] In this sense, the distinction between natural science and ideology corresponds in the realm of cultural-theoretical practice to that between the forces and the relations of production in the realm of material-economic practices. It is this structural affinity that makes possible the transformation of the natural sciences into "direct forces of production" which is regarded by Marx as one of the basic trends of technical evolution under conditions of a developed capitalist economy.

> is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic fixity and isolation, but in their real, empirically perceivable process of development under definite conditions. … These premises can thus be established in a purely empirical way. … Incidentally, when things are conceived in this way, as they really are and as they happened … every profound philosophical problem is resolved into an empirical fact. With the presentation of reality autonomous philosophy loses its medium of existence. At most its place may be taken by a summing-up of the most general results that can be abstractly derived from the comprehension of the historical evolution of men.[67]

Though this tendency towards a positivistic scientism never completely dominated the Marxian characterisation of his own theory, it certainly provided strong impulses and "textual legitimation" for the strict Althusserian dichotomisation of science and ideology, even if Marx (as I tried to show earlier) never drew such a generalised conclusion from it.

Most of the representatives of Western Marxism did not, however, follow Marx in this essentially positivistic self-interpretation of critical theory. They had to find therefore another way of arresting the use of the concept of ideology at a level which would not allow it to become total, perennial and thereby also self- referential. For the "total" conception of ideology – as it is illustrated first of all by some theories of French post-structuralism, for example, the late writings of Barthes – inevitably localises the roots of "ideological illusion" at such a deep and universal level (the nature of predicative language, the historical situatedness of all our conceptualisations, the constraining force of any articulated discourse, and so on), the transformation of which is no longer imaginable as a *practical* project. Critique of ideology then can be a distressed lament about human finitude or a smug reconciliation with its effect, satisfied with its own acumen of seeing through the vanity of all efforts to reach the "truth" – in both cases it is condemned to practical-social *impotence*.

The flight of the leading representatives of Western Marxism to abstract anthropological generalities in respect of some fundamental issues of a theory of culture was therefore a strategy of rational self-limitation in the interest of retaining the basic practical orientation of critical theory. Marxism, however,

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[67] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 27, 21, 43,

with its tradition of strong historicism, is ill-equipped to provide an enduring foundation for such anthropological universals.[68] Thus their introduction usually remained to avoid certain questions and paths of questioning. The theory of ideology as an effective method of critical intervention points therefore to a lack: the lack of a general theory of culture in the Marxist tradition that could provide both appropriate justification and delimitation of its validity.

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[68] Such a more systematic "anthropological" foundation for a theory of culture could be provided only by those theorists who consciously retreated from Marx's historicism: by Marcuse (in *Eros and Civilization*), who turned back – through a radically reinterpreted Freud – to an essentially Feuerbachian point of view, and by Habermas, renewing – via the linguistic turn – some paradigmatic ideas of a Kantian transcendentalism.

Chapter Seventeen

A Philosophy Lost: German Philosophies of Culture at the End of the Nineteenth Century

In 1904 an influential book on contemporary philosophy[1] declared it to be essentially nothing else but the philosophy of culture, *Kulturphilosophie*. The name of its author, Rudolf Eucken, will hardly be widely recognised today though actually he was the first philosopher ever to receive the Nobel Prize. And his extravagant-sounding statement did not express merely a personal idiosyncrasy. A similar view is implied – to refer now to some more familiar names – when for example H. Rickert and W. Dilthey define philosophy as *Weltanschauungslehre*. For it is world-view, *Weltanschauung*, which constitutes in a sense the epitome of a historical culture. Philosophy conceived as *Weltanschauungslehre* is essentially a philosophy of culture.

Around the turn of the century *Kulturphilosophie* emerges in Germany with the claim, if not to exhaust the whole domain of philosophical inquiry, then at least to be its

[1] R. Eucken, *Geistige Strömungen der Gegenwart*. Compare W. Perpeet, "Kulturphilosophie um Jahrhundertwende," in *Naturplan und Verfallskritik*, ed. H. Brackert and F. Wefelmeyer, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp1984, pp. 378–379.

foundational discipline. It is certainly not alone with such a claim. It stands in this respect in a complex relationship – partly competition, partly fusion – with epistemology, on the one hand, and philosophical anthropology, on the other. But while these latter two have undoubtedly succeeded (philosophical anthropology leastways in Germany) to establish themselves at least as well defined and broadly accepted philosophical "disciplines," philosophy of culture failed to become even a recognisable topic in contemporary philosophy. Characteristically Ernst Cassirer, the last great representative of this tradition, already in the late 1930s complained of its lack of clear demarcation and therefore of its questionable legitimacy.[2] Though *Kulturphilosophie* still has a marginal existence in Germany, for the broader community of philosophers the very meaning of such an enterprise has been lost.

It is the story of the rise and fall of philosophy of culture – the schematic outline of the conditions and putative reasons of its emergence, the internal difficulties of some of its representative realisations and the possible causes of its decline – that constitutes the topic of this paper. In this sense it aims at a reconstruction rather in terms of history of ideas, though hopefully not without some philosophical relevance.

The modern concept and conception of "culture" – though the term itself can be traced back to Cicero – is the product and invention of Enlightenment. From the very time of its origin this notion was burdened by fundamental ambiguities: the term seems to possess quite unrelated meanings that cannot be brought to any systematic unity and nevertheless are inseparable from each other. "Culture" served to replace the idea of a binding tradition – it designated and designates all those human achievements and accomplishments which, as historically accumulated and inheritable material and ideal objectivations, constitute the storehouse of human possibilities that can be put selectively and creatively to use for meeting the ever new exigencies of a dynamically changing life. But to this broad (anthropological) notion of culture stands opposed its narrow ("value-marked") sense: culture as high

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[2] Compare E. Cassirer, *Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie*, quoted in E. W. Orth, "Der Begriff der Kulturphilosophie bei Ernst Cassirer," in *Kultur. Bestimmungen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. H. Brackert and F. Wefelmeyer, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp1990, p. 156.

culture designating a very specific set of practices and their products, those which under the conditions of modernity are regarded as autonomous, having a value in themselves, that is, primarily the sciences and the arts. The conflation of these two unrelated senses through a single term belongs, however, to the very project of Enlightenment. For in its understanding the broadly conceived culture as the great resource for a no more tradition-bound, but innovative social-historical life can serve genuine human progress, "perfectioning," only if it is guided by those universally valid ends that solely culture in its narrow sense can provide.

Such a systematic ambiguity pertains, however, not only to the notion of culture in general, but also separately to both of its indicated constituents. "Culture" in its broad sense designates, on the one hand, a genetic realm in which all humans, in their distinction from animals, necessarily participate. On the other hand, it conceptualises precisely what unifies a particular, distinct social unit in its contingent difference from the other ones. And "high" culture also exists only in a necessary opposition to a "low" or "popular" culture – the normative universality of the first presupposes the empirical-factual generality of the second.

What is specifically important to underline, however, is the fact that we are not dealing here simply with the polysemy of a term based on some vague, family-type connection between its meaning-constituents. For these mere differences are transformed into sharp oppositions and antagonisms owing to the fact that the two great trends/tendencies whose strife and ever-renewed struggle underlies the whole history of cultural modernity conferred diametrically opposed values upon the respective terms of these distinctions. In this way, due to the opposition and dispute of what one may call – in a purely ideal-typical sense – "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism," "culture" became not only a systematically ambiguous, but also systematically contested concept, and the cultural life of modernity an arena of contestations whose structure and basic dimensions are reflected in, and articulated by, the concept of culture itself.[3]

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[3] On this see my paper "Antinomien der Kultur," *Lettre International*, 1997, Heft 37, pp. 13–20. To the following compare also my essays: "Culture: The Making and the Make-Up of a Concept," *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 18, 1993, pp. 3–29; "A Society of

It was the great systems of German classical idealism, first of all those of Kant and Hegel, that first disclosed some of the basic characteristics and internal strains of the so-constituted cultural sphere of modernity. Their ultimate verdict upon the worth of this culture has been, however, a curiously undecided one. With Kant this followed from the logic of his system. Culture for him is the necessarily inconclusive mediation between nature and freedom. In both of its antithetical, external-instrumental (culture of skill) and internal-motivational (culture of discipline), components it constitutes only a negative, merely facilitating condition of moralising, the only source and domain of unconditional values. Because even science and art, these two, again opposed constituents of the culture of discipline, can only curb the tyranny of Ego-centred inclinations by creating an empirically general, "cosmopolitan" and civilised way of thinking and feeling – they never can result in that unconditional universality which is demanded by practical reason.[4]

With Hegel, on the other hand, such an "undecidability" emerges in spite of the system. For this latter unambiguously resolves the diremption of modernity, this society of *Bildung*, through the reconciliation of its contradictions in the absolute knowing of philosophy. But the very content of his philosophy of Absolute Spirit – in a sense his theory of high culture – endows this optimistic answer with a highly ambiguous meaning. For the insight of reconciliation is available solely for philosophical thought requiring the hard labour of concept that only a few – as Hegel once stated, a "sect of elects" – are able or ready to undertake. The end of art and the (certainly less explicitly formulated, but clearly implied) end of religion mean that the genuinely popular cultural forms are no more adequate just in respect of the valid and persuasive articulation of this insight. Thus modernity is characterised by a paradoxical "cultural deficit:" it demands legitimation which is available in a universally valid form, but it lacks an empirically general access to such self-legitimation. And as Hegel states at the harrowing conclusion of his 1824 lectures on philosophy

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Culture: The Constitution of Modernity," in *Rethinking Imagination*, ed. G. Robinson and J. Rundell, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 15–29; and "The Hegelian Conception of Culture," *Praxis International*, vol. 6, 1986, pp. 113–123).

[4] Compare Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* § 83.

of religion, philosophy has no competence as to the resolvability of this contradiction: it must be left to the "temporal empirical present alone" to find its way out of it.[5]

The dissolution of the great metaphysical systems of idealism after Hegel's death and the following general decline of the prestige and cultural role of philosophy (after the failed revolution of 1848–49 in an accentuated form) not only dissolved the framework within which the problems of cultural modernity have been integrated with its more traditional problems and topics – it simultaneously endowed these problems with such an importance and poignancy in view of which the majestically open-ended, as it were suspended response to them, exemplified by Kant and Hegel, no more seemed to be tenable. There are a number of considerations which may bear upon the emergence of a *Kulturphilosophie* with foundationalist claims – I shall proceed from the more narrow-specific to the more general and perhaps also more essential ones.

1. During the nineteenth century there takes place a slowly accelerating process of "disciplinalisation" and even specialisation within philosophy. Its old division into logic, metaphysics and ethics (or practical philosophy) becomes growingly irrelevant – there emerge the special disciplines of epistemology, aesthetics, philosophy of law, religion, of some special sciences (such as mathematics) and so on. This process, however, endangers the idea with which philosophy's claim to scientificity has been most intimately connected for at least two and half centuries: the idea of the system. Philosophy of culture seems eminently well suited to bring again to systematic unity these separated fields of philosophical discourse. And when this last effort to save the system-character of philosophy as its inherited cultural form fails, as it does even with Rickert, there still remains the option to legitimate the claim of philosophy to objectively valid knowledge through philosophy of culture understood as *Weltanschauungslehre*, that is, through tracing back the strife and anarchy of metaphysical systems to a single and binding, ultimate ground and in this way to "neutralise" their dispute, or,

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[5] Compare Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion. Werke*, Theorie Werkausgabe, Frankfurt, vol. 17, p. 344.

as Dilthey explicitly formulated, to transform their contradictions into mere differences.[6]

2. Philosophy of culture, however, was not only an attempt to rescue the scientific status of philosophy. In a sense it played a similar role in the interpretation of the meaning of scientificity and the general function of science as well. As well known, it emerged in connection with the famous demarcation dispute between the natural and the "cultural" sciences. In this dispute, however, more was at stake than merely the epistemological and methodological autonomy of *Kultur-* or *Geisteswissenschaften*. It concerned the possibility and legitimacy of the broadly conceived "edifying" role of science. Acknowledging that the modern natural sciences, emancipated from the burden of metaphysical speculation, can fulfil only an instrumental role, philosophy of culture, at least with Dilthey, Windelband and Rickert, asserted the existence of another large group of sciences, in the case of which the requirements of scientific objectivity, including the need for empirical confirmation, are still reconcilable with their ability to provide a firm orientation for (individual and social) life.

3. The fact, however, that this problem acquired such a weight as to give rise to philosophies of culture with foundationalist claims – a typically German phenomenon which has no contemporary parallels except perhaps (and not accidentally) in Italy – this fact cannot be understood outside the broader context of German political and cultural development. Meinecke's famous distinction between *Staats-* and *Kulturnationen* may well represent a simplified historical overgeneralisation, but it points to a genuine difference. There is a difference at least in the social evaluation of the significance of "high culture" (and by implication of its bearers, the intellectuals) depending upon whether the establishment of a unified/centralised state essentially precedes the formation of "national" culture, or the reverse is the case. In this latter situation, especially under conditions of a political autocracy when cultural life – willingly or unwillingly – substitutes for the lack of an open politics, national culture (and not simply Enlightenment) tends to appear as the great history-forming spiritual power. One needs only to read the German

[6] W. Dilthey: *Weltanschauungslehre. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VIII, Leipzig-Berlin, Teubner 1931, p. 8.

social-philosophical publicism of the early nineteenth century to appreciate the spread and the force of these exaggerated expectations. And this was not simply an ideological illusion – consciousness of cultural unity has indeed played an important mobilising role for projects of political unification. But the very success of the latter, fully releasing the autonomous powers of economy and politics, brought with itself widespread perceptions of a cultural crisis – a case of aborted expectations which, however, often still remained coupled with faith in the inherent superiority of German culture in comparison with the mere "civilisations" of the West. Not by chance both Burckhardt and Nietzsche regarded the founding of the *Reich* a dire danger for the continuous existence of "German spirit." Is culture merely a means in service of other ends, or at best a private refuge allowing a temporary escape from their prevailing power, or does it have not only an autonomous and unconditional value, but also genuine effectivity to steer life towards the realisation of binding ends? The pressing character of this question made irrelevant not only the naive optimism of the earlier epoch, but also the open-ended indecision of a Kant or Hegel. It is this question to which philosophies of culture provided an answer, or more precisely: answers. For to the positive, "reconciliatory" response of Rickert and Dilthey stand opposed the views of those like G. Simmel or the early, pre-Marxist Lukács (and to some degree Max Weber) who speak here of a tragedy: culture in its evolution necessarily creates such strivings the satisfaction of which is made systematically impossible by this very development.

4. Philosophies of culture are, however, not simply ideologies of a particular historical moment and space. They succeed to interconnect these, more local, motives with problems which are vital for the whole tradition of modern philosophy. Is the ideal of harmonious/integral and autonomous personality reconcilable with the insight that subjectivity itself is grounded in, or at least dependent upon, something subject-transcendent, be it a system of objective values which are, however, accessible only through historically changing, relative value commitments (Rickert), or the dynamic system (*Wirkungszusammenhang*) of a historical world as the temporal manifestation of the all-encompassing nexus of life (Dilthey), or social forces objectified in actual institutions and "external" culture (Simmel)? The ideal of integral personality, the validity of which is assumed by all these thinkers, whether they consider it realisable or not, is understood along the lines of the humanist

tradition, primarily of a Kantian provenance, and is formulated in the language of a philosophy of consciousness. Autonomy means the free spontaneity of the subject, its ability to overcome any pre-given determinations. Is, if not the full realisability, then at least the meaningfulness and binding validity of this ideal reconcilable at all with the idea of human finitude in the sense of historicity? This is the ultimate problem which philosophies of culture not so much deal, as struggle with.

All these considerations apply perhaps in the most direct manner to the philosophy of *Heinrich Rickert*, in the sense that they appear with him in the form of rather open and unresolved contradictions. Rickert has transformed an essentially methodological distinction which Windelband, on the basis of an amplified Kantian theory of knowledge, has drawn between nomothetic and idiographic sciences, into an essentially revised theory of the constitution of objectivity. The dualism of subject and object, valid in the realm of epistemology, is only a derivative abstraction, dependent upon the ultimate dichotomy of "reality" and values. "Reality," in its most basic sense, is an extensively and intensively infinite, heterogeneous continuum, incomprehensible and ineffable. It can be brought to comprehension always only from some finalising standpoint, based on definite principles of selection. Such selections, however, can only constitute knowledge claiming objective truth – a claim the meaningfulness of which can only be denied at the price of naked self-contradiction — if they are related to, and oriented towards, what is unconditional: objective values. Such a system of values, being the condition of possibility of the claims to unrestricted intersubjectivity pertaining to all higher cultural formations, explains and legitimates with Rickert not only the distinction between generalising natural and individualising cultural sciences. More importantly it also justifies the humanist postulate of the inherent valuableness of personality which is not founded either on the import of empirical uniqueness or upon some vitalist drive to life, but on the human ability through active value commitments to give meaning to life. The objective values themselves, however, ought be strictly distinguished from such acts of historically changing, always conditioned valuations. These latter are existing realities, while the unconditional values themselves do not exist at all: they only validly hold (*gelten*). The realms of "reality" and of objective, though non-existent, values in their duality together constitute the "world," in the most encompassing sense of this term implied in the idea of *Welt-anschauung*. On the other hand, objective

values, being radically transcendent, are not accessible otherwise but through (individual or collective) acts of valuation, the historically conditioned and relative value-commitments, in which they are not disclosed, given, but merely intended and "pre-set" (*vorgegeben*) as conditions of possibility. It is these acts of evaluation through which concrete – positive or negative – cultural values of changing content are ascribed to definite existents, endowing them with meaning. And these ideal meanings constitute the "third realm" mediating between "reality" and transcendent values. Concrete systems of such meanings embody the ideal essence of particular, historical cultures. It is the task of philosophy through an interpretation of these evolving meaning-formations to raise itself towards the never terminable understanding of suprahistorical, objective values and thereby also to orient us towards the future, not in the sense of what must but what ought to come.[7]

This task of philosophy is, however, given Rickert's premisses, in principle unsolvable. In fact the fundamental concepts of his construction turn out to be in rather elementary way self-contradictory. "Reality" as the infinitely heterogeneous continuum is radically ungraspable – actually in some of his early writings he explicitly designates it a mere limiting concept.[8] On the other hand, it is precisely that what, in counterdistinction to all the selective abstractions of our thinking, is the solely and fully "real," and within a philosophy of consciousness this means that it must be conceived as the directly given, pre-conceptual experience, what is immediately lived through. Such an *Erlebnis*, however, no more can be identified with the unfathomable, inaccessible stream of mere intuitive presencings; in the latter writings of Rickert it is explicitly characterised as the fusion of value and reality.[9] But since values can acquire psychic reality only as valuations, that is, as selective viewpoints, the originally introduced idea of reality is not extended or modified, but simply revoked.

Intractable problems arise also in connection with the idea of values which do not "exist" even ideally, but nevertheless pertain to the basic ontological

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[7] Compare H. Rickert, "Vom Begriff der Philosophie," *Logos*, vol. I, 1910/11, p. 29.

[8] For example *ibid*., p. 21.

[9] Compare H. Rickert, *System der Philosophie. I. Teil: Allgemeine Grundlegung der Philosophie*, Tübingen, Mohr 1921, pp. 258, 296 etc.

furniture of the world, and thus their validity must still be regarded as some enigmatic mode of Being. These values are, as Rickert underlines, subject-transcendent. In fact the subjectivity of the living individual is constituted by, and through, its value commitments, and thus is ultimately dependent upon objective values as conditions of its possibility. On the other hand, objective values can be understood only in the light of actual, conditional/relative valuations. And if the untranscendable ground of all knowing is their immediately lived through fusion with reality, then the "ontological difference" between this latter and the values themselves hardly can be comprehended otherwise but as the result of the activity of transcendental subjectivity. In any case philosophy can provide merely a formal taxonomy of possible values, whose concrete content must be borrowed from cultural history, and, more importantly, it is – at least in respect of non-theoretical cultural values – incapable either to justify or to disprove their validity-claims.[10] With this, however, even Rickert's original program of legitimating the scientificity of the sciences of culture seems to collapse. For if there is no objective principle allowing to adjudicate between conflicting value commitments, then neither can a rational choice be made between the irreconcilable reconstructions of historical life that issue from them, and thus the claim of *Kulturwissenschaften* to the status of science, as he understands it, cannot be saved.

In a rough, but perhaps not quite unjust, way one can say that some of the problems which surface with Rickert in the form of internal contradictions of his philosophy are explicitly accepted by *Dilthey* as immanent contradictions necessarily arising from the ungroundable multidimensionality of "life." They cannot be solved theoretically, but their radical comprehension by a "historical consciousness" allows us to raise ourselves above their strife, or at least to transform it into a source of creative intellectual and practical energies.

Dilthey undertakes a much more radical "revision" of Kant than the Neo-Kantians did. He criticises the "bloodless" intellectualism of Kant not only in the name of the living, that is, feeling/willing/thinking "whole man," but also in that of the "historical" man, from the viewpoint of the untranscendable historicity of human existence. Already around 1880, in the *Breslauer Outline*,

[10] Compare *ibid*., p. 150.

he counter-poses to the Kantian "dead and fixed" *a priori* the idea that the very "conditions of consciousness," by which the sovereign intellect frames and articulates experience, change in the course, and under the impact, of historical life experiences: they have to be conceived as "living historical process."[11] Just as the consciousness of a unitary self emerges only in the course of individual life experience, to be modified in its concrete content throughout its whole duration, also "human being" as a type is moulded and reformed in history. Therefore Rickert's program: through history to the suprahistorical, is in principle unrealisable. The idea of unconditional values is an unfulfillable metaphysical postulate – all human values, ends and ideas are historically conditioned and therefore relative. The historicism of human existence implies radical human finitude.

This radical historicism is in one sense the direct consequence of the Diltheyan philosophy of life. Life is the unceasing process of active contact with the world and the other selves and simultaneously that of the withdrawal from these relations as *Innewerden*. It is the ever expanding circle of externalisation and interiorisation, of expression in, and through, the media of communality and, at the same time, an equally permanent re-subjectivisation, retranslation of the outer into the inner. And Dilthey reactivates the Hegelian conception of an "objective spirit" in the broadest sense of "culture" as the repository of those embodied communal meanings which are present in that evidently understood world in which we always already find ourselves. And while he rejects, because of its metaphysical implications, the Hegelian notion of Absolute Spirit, the forms of *sui generis* high culture are prioritised also by him: they are pure and full, transparent expressions of meaning and nothing else.

However, this very process of objectivation, and its concommitants – a growing cultural differentiation and rationalisation – by necessity transform the immanent multidimensionality of life, the irreducible heterogeneity of basic life-attitudes, which in the elementary lived experience are present in a diffuse unity, into irreconcilable intellectual standpoints. The strife of metaphysical systems and world-views, together with the ensuing plurality of the irreducibly diverse approaches in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, are uneliminable by intellectual, rational means. But historical consciousness, which discloses

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[11] W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (hereafter *GS*), vol. XIX, p. 44.

their relativity and thereby seemingly dissolves all grounds of a fixed orientation towards life, is capable of healing this self-inflicted wound. Because precisely through this historisation it makes possible to understand all these manifestations of historical life – to understand in the sense of tracing back their meaning to its ultimate foundations in life. And in this way historical consciousness liberates us from the narrow confines of our own time, makes us aware the whole richness of already created human possibilities, and thereby opens a creative orientation towards life beyond sceptical doubts.

This, of course, leaves completely open two questions: in what way and on what grounds can historical consciousness, itself historically conditioned, provide an objectively valid understanding of the formations of alien cultures, overcoming its own finite historicity? And even if it is capable of doing so, in what sense can it offer a newly secured orientation towards life, beyond the strife of the world-views?

The answer to the first question discloses the sense in which Dilthey's philosophy of life contradicts his radical historicism, his idea of the "whole man" revokes the view of man as a historical being. *Lebensphilosophie* remains within the confines of philosophy of consciousness: the principle of phenomenality (*Satz der Phänomenalität*) is for Dilthey the highest principle of philosophical reflection.[12] Life is always *erlebtes Leben*, a life experientally lived through, psychic life (*Seelenleben*). It is the unchanging identity of the basic psychic structure as teleological whole – what Dilthey at points simply calls "the sameness of human nature"[13], this invariable matrix of all historical changes owing to which life always discloses itself in the same fundamental aspects of significance; it is this which renders possible both the universal scope and the objective validity of understanding. Dilthey's hermeneutics never has to face up to the radical problem of perspectivicity, because it presupposes a fixed point of reference insulated from history and securely accessible once historical consciousness traces back the objectified meaning-formations to their ground in life-experience. This explains the rather evident inadequacies of his hermeneutics: his untenable theory of elementary understanding, the power uncritically ascribed to the comparative method and so on.

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[12] Compare Dilthey: *Die geistige Welt*, Part One, *GS*, vol. V, 1924, p. 90.

[13] Compare *GS*, vol. I, p. 91; vol. VIII, p. 95 etc.

All this, however, still does not explain in what sense can he ascribe the power of a firm practical orientation to such a historical consciousness. To this question he seems to offer several, quite differing answers, none of which is satisfactory. At points this power seems to imply nothing more than the capacity of aesthetic distantiation, of a joyful contemplative re-experiencing of all the manifold variety of past and present life-expressions.[14] Sometimes it has the stronger sense of self-immunisation: precisely by disclosing the relativity of all the great, consistent forms of world-view in the meaning of their being one-sided expressions of different aspects of the total life-nexus, historical consciousness makes us now also free to fully commit ourselves to the standpoint of any of them, since they all represent some side of that truth which in its totality cannot be grasped intellectually at all.[15] Lastly, some formulations suggest a voluntaristic solution:[16] historical consciousness emancipates us from the shackles of the past and the present, and thus encourages to take a firm stand on our most personal values, be they uncommon and new, to enter in this way into the stream of the infinite creativity of life.

Both Rickert and Dilthey attempt to reconcile the contradictions of modernity by disclosing that unitary/unifying ground upon which ultimately rest all its competing cultural formations whose objective intensions seem to oppose and exclude each other – be this ground a coherent system of objective values or the unfathomable multidimensionality of life. Is, however, such an understanding of the necessary interconnection between the split-off realms of modern life a genuine "reconciliation," does it actually offer a theoretically and practically effective solution of its anomies and antagonisms? This seems to be the orienting problem of *Simmel*'s late writings.

Man the knower is the maker of nature and history, but man as known by himself is made by nature and history.[17] This is the eternal problem of subjectivity and objectivity, pushed to its extreme form of a paradox. In this way it

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[14] For example, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in der Geisteswissenschaften*, *GS*, vol. VII, 2nd edn, pp. 290–291.

[15] For example, *Weltanschauungslehre*, *GS*, vol. VIII, p. 225.

[16] For example, *ibid.*, p. 204.

[17] G. Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 4th edn, München-Leipzig, Duncker-Humblot 1922, p. vii.

expresses in the language of philosophy the coexistence of sharply opposed tendencies equally constitutive of modernity: an ever growing individuation, on the one side, and the steadily increasing power of autonomous, objective social forces over the individuals, on the other side, both appearing not only as facts, but also as values. Can their antagonism be reconciled?

It is culture in respect of which this question takes on its sharpest form. For culture, in the sense of the whole complex of variously constituted and embodied meaning-formations, is precisely what is fully created by man alone and exists solely for him. In it and only in it "spirit speaks to spirit:" in its very sense and intention culture is always the culture of a subject, subjective culture. On the other hand, however, it belongs to the very meaning of these cultural formations to be endowed with general or universal validity which holds independently of the attitudes and valuations of particular individuals. They exist as the autonomous realms of "objective culture" and as such are the preconditions of individual cultivation.

Subjective culture designates the result of personal cultivation through which the original endowments of the individual attain their potentially highest harmonious unfolding through the interiorisation of the elements of objective culture. It is the forming of a concrete life owing to which it becomes – in spite of all its accidentality – the expression and realisation of a unique personality, acquires a recognised meaning and value. Objective culture, on the other hand, refers to those manifold complexes of material and ideal "artifacts" which come into being only owing to the (personal or collective) energies and intentional, objectifying activities of the individuals, but once created – in the very process of their re-interiorisation – obtain a meaning independent from these original intentions, develop their own value-criteria and thereby acquire a specific to them, immanent logic of development. It is constituted by the autonomous realms of objective spirit, the participation in which alone renders the individual capable of giving a unitary sense to its life. And culture as such, without qualifications, in its full sense, is the synthesis of subjective and objective culture, the unity of "the subjective soul and the objective spiritual occurrence (*Ereignis*),"[18] "the path from closed unity through unfolded multiplicity to unfolded unity".[19]

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[18] Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur*, 2nd edn, Leipzig, Duncker-Humblot 1919, p. 227.

[19] *ibid.*, p. 225.

Understood in this, its proper sense culture – itself a historical formation – is the historical answer to the question of metaphysics.[20] As the mediating middle between subjectivity and objectivity, it is the resolution of the dualism of the subject and the object, and even of the ultimate existential ground of this latter: a resolution of the dualism of life and form. Culture reconciles the unlimited, ever changing, creative flux of life as it is immediately presenced only in lived experience with those forms that are created by the self-transcending power of life and are alone capable to confer upon it the ordered stability of common reality (or more precisely: realities), but simultaneously in the fixity and the inertia of their objectivations tend to arrest and deaden life.

The question is only whether this idea of culture can be fully realised. And from the vantage-point of modernity the answer to this question is tragically negative. Modernity first brings to true awareness the value of inwardness which is life in its immediacy; it first allows the demand of a subjective culture to emerge with full force. But it also creates an objective culture which in its autonomy and complexity can no more be genuinely reappropriated by the individuals. Division of labour, specialisation, technicisation, the unlimited accumulation of cultural products and so on – all this endows the diversified fields of culture with independent life and uncontrollable autonomy. They transform objective culture into alienated culture. The meaning of its formations no more can be rendered transparent to the subjects who at the same time are unable to deny or escape their significance. This is the tragedy of culture: the very conditions necessary for its full realisation make any realisation of it impossible.

Simmel provides an exceptionally rich and sensitive interpretative description of the various manifestations of this cultural crisis and the diverse subjective reactions to it. But he never succeeds – does not even try – to establish a conceptual connection, be it logical or historical, between them and the fundamental theses and categories of his philosophy of life, in terms of which their ultimate significance is disclosed. He – one of the great essayists of the philosophical literature – simply moves directly from the first to the second by largely rhetorical means, through metaphors and analogies. At points he simply eternalises characteristics of contemporary culture (such as the autonomy

[20] Compare *ibid*., p. 251.

of its separated realms) which elsewhere he clearly recognises to be historically specific and particular. Or he just declares such phenomena to be mere *Sonderfäle*, particular instances of the eternal dialectics of life and form.

This, however, leaves the very idea of the tragedy of culture in completely ambiguous light. On the one hand he calls it "the all-embracing human-spiritual fate:"[21] it is the inevitable and irreversible outcome of cultural development. On the other hand, its manifestations are often explicitly treated as constituting only a transitory stage, not at all unique (except its intensity) in history – a stage which must be followed by a radically new, unforeseeable form of cultural unity.[22] In the first case the only rational attitude towards this tragic crisis is that of a resigned recognition which still leaves some room open for the choice and the art of a personally satisfactory, illusion-free life conduct. In the second case an awaiting openness is demanded towards the unknown of the coming new, whose arrival Simmel seems to expect not from a god, but – at least this is suggested by his late ethics of the "individual law" as purely personal imperative – from the creative will of some exceptional, leading individualities.

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This has been, of course, not only a very sketchy and simplificatory but also one-sidedly critical overview of these philosophies, concentrating mainly upon the immanent reasons of their failure or at least inadequacies. These theories, however, had also significant achievements in the sense of posing new questions or offering problem-solution that proved to be fruitful and relevant for further philosophical developments. Beyond that for which they are primarily remembered today – being the first forms of a well-targeted and sustained criticism of positivism and initiating a coherent explication and legitimation of the epistemological and methodological autonomy of the human sciences – there are also other problem-complexes which, without any claim to exhaustiveness, should be mentioned in this context.

1. Philosophies of culture not only elaborated the concept of culture inherited from the tradition but also problematised it. They did so primarily by

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[21] *ibid*., p. 244.

[22] See for example his late essay, *Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur*, München-Leipzig. Duncker-Humblot 1918.

"deconstructing" the naive, ontological understanding of that dichotomy through which this concept has usually been articulated: the opposition between "nature" and "culture," identified between that of the material and the mental, or the real and the ideal. "Nature" itself, they emphasised, is a cultural construct which, however, does not imply the denial of its reality – it is no less real than the empirical self. This involved also a more radical historisation of natural sciences than the traditional conception of their unlimited accumulative growth: the legitimacy of the claim of these sciences to objective validity goes together with the fallibility and historical change of their concrete explanatory schemata. In this respect one ought at least to mention the early writings of Ernst Cassirer, first of all his path-breaking *Substanzbegriff*.[23]

2. All these philosophies, though with varying degrees of clarity and emphasis, raised the problem of the naive-immediate, everyday world-understanding as a *sui generis* formation, the structure of which cannot be identified with the confused, rudimentary prefiguration of the categorial structure of the scientific picture of the world. It is this everyday reality (figuring under various names: "empirical reality" with Rickert, "pre-theoretical life-nexus" in Dilthey, "immediately lived through reality" with Simmel, *Erlebniswirklichkeit* with the early Lukács) that they regard as the genetic prius, in the *Umarbeitung* of which all higher cultural formations originate. And with Dilthey and Simmel – partly predating, partly following Bergson, and in an explicit criticism of the Kantian conception of time – the analysis of the lived experience of temporality acquired in this regard a particular significance. In Simmel's last book even the dualism of life and form seems to be ultimately arising out of the contradictoriness of lived temporality: the specific continuity of lived experience in which the present appears only in the context of the remembered past and anticipated future, on the one hand, and the finitude of life, death not as an external event, but as "a formal moment of life itself which paints over all its contents,"[24] on the other hand.

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[23] Compare E. Cassirer, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*, Berlin Br Cassirer Verlag 1910.

[24] Simmel, *Lebensanschauung*, 2nd edn, München-Leipzig, Duncker-Humblot 1922, p. 99.

3. Lastly, these philosophies succeeded to establish some fundamental principle of systemic interconnection between the separated realms of high culture disclosing their ultimate unity without denying the oppositional character of their constitution. As a typical and perhaps the simplest example, one can refer to Rickert's characterisation of the relationship between natural sciences, cultural sciences and arts according to the scheme: universal concept/individual concept/universal intuition.[25] This also illustrates the basic idea of this unification: the demarcated fields were in general regarded as complementary to each other with the claim – successful or (with Simmel or Lukács) illusory – to mutually compensate for the "limitation" of each taken separately.

This last point is important for the clarification of the sense in which one can legitimately talk about the gradual "disappearance" of philosophy of culture in the period between the two world wars. For it is certainly not true that questions and topics which clearly can be subsumed under, or related to, the idea of "contemporary culture," have simply vanished from philosophical discourses. But their discussion now generally takes place not within the framework of a philosophy of culture but that of *culture critique*. There are perhaps two fundamental points of distinction between these two enterprises. In culture critique the problems of culture in general, and of contemporary cultural crisis in particular, lose not only their assumed foundational role, but also their autonomous significance. Whatever importance is ascribed to them, they are still regarded as symptoms of underlying, deeper metaphysical, social or historical malaises. At the same time the various forms of *culture critique*, be they conservative or radical, are in their very intention theoretical interventions into cultural life. Accordingly they also usually conceive this latter as a field of contestation between the (prevalent) negative and the (perhaps only dormant) positive forces or tendencies. They are to defend and advocate these latter. Therefore also their interest is usually restricted to those fields or segments of culture (such as the arts) within which such a conflict can be meaningfully located. The idea of some structuring principle which would join the contending parties into some encompassing unity as the common ground upon which their conflict takes place, such an idea is basically alien to their invested commitments, or at least they do not have a particular

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[25] Compare Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*. 4.-5th edn, Tübingen, Mohr 1921, pp. 83ff.

interest in it. (This is, of course, not a value-judgement upon the fertility or relevance of their potential insights, only a schematic characterisation of the direction of their interests.)

There are sufficiently weighty "internal" reasons to explain why philosophy of culture slowly faded away during the inter-war decades. My overview of some of its representative forms aimed at nothing more but to illustrate the fact that they were rent by an internal contradiction which was uneliminable, for it arose out of the essential intentions of their project. Not only due to their roots in the traditions of German historicism, but first of all owing to their central subject-matter itself, they could not but recognise the historicity of human existence in general. However, the conceptual framework of philosophy of consciousness, which they all shared, made it impossible to think through its consequences consistently. And what was at play here is again not simply the weight of the Kantian tradition which they all, with various degree of radicalism, "revised," but were unwilling to abandon. This unwillingness itself was well motivated. For it is this tradition which provided the most adequate framework for the articulation and legitimation of that ideal of autonomous personality upon the validity of which they all insisted. But once radical theories of human finitude came to dominate the scene of philosophy, it was no more the realisability, but the very meaningfulness of this ideal, with its associated concept of unitary-integral subject, that became questionable. And then the ultimate, orienting question of philosophies of culture – can culture ensure, or at least contribute to, the realisation of this ideal – appeared as a typical pseudo-problem.

It was, however, not only inner-philosophical development that made this latter idea appear meaningless. Already the carnage of World War I, fought on both sides in the name of the defence of "culture," made this presupposition into a transparent lie. And the historical experiences which followed, nowhere more brutally than in Germany, made mockery of the belief that the spread of culture by its own power can guide humanity towards a more rational and meaningful, more free and more humane life. This is a dream of the Enlightenment which we truly have dreamt right through.

There were also other social processes that made the very problem that philosophies of culture tried to address ill-stated, or at least anachronistically irrelevant. In a sense these theories came already too late. Because the social stratum for whom culture in the singular, the unity of culture, represented at

least a vital ideal, the *Kulturbürgertum* (the traditional addressee of philosophy as well), was fast disappearing when they made their appearance. And this was the result not only of social transformations, the replacement of Buddenbrooks by Hagenströms, but equally the outcome of cultural changes. It is not only the case that processes of ever more narrow specialisation, proceeding with chaotic spontaneity, made the idea of a generally comprehensible, unitary "scientific world-picture" a matter for popularisers, transforming the idea of the unity of sciences at best into a high-level epistemological abstraction (thereby also abandoning whole problem-complexes – e.g. that of the "correct" classification of sciences – that in earlier periods played crucial role in philosophy's concern with science). In its effect something similar occurred also in the realm of the arts. With the rise and the almost immediately following fragmentation of the avant-garde, with the disappearance of any epochal style, the notion of "contemporary art" also lost all but a merely temporal meaning. Simultaneously also the public of art has been sharply divided, on the one hand, into a broad group of "lovers of art" whose interest is almost exclusively directed at the artworks of a musealised past (the compass of which is, paradoxically, incessantly expanding) and, on the other hand, into the diverse, usually quite small factions of committed supporters of this or that modernist (or post-modernist) artistic movement or tendency.

Under these conditions it is certainly not inexplicable that "culture" as a unitary topic and a singular, conceptually coherent field of inquiry has disappeared from philosophy (to transmigrate to anthropology and sociology). Its notion certainly plays some role in a number of diverse philosophical disciplines. In its broad sense it is usually quite central for philosophical anthropology, but it may also be discussed in some variants of a philosophy of language or religion. And, of course, the two great constituents of "high culture" are the specific and separate subjects of the thriving disciplines of philosophy of science, on the one hand, and aesthetics, on the other. The supposition, however, that there can be some unified theoretical framework allowing to bring together in some sense and from some well-defined viewpoint all these unrelated discourses, disclosing structural relations between them and the ways they bear upon each other – such a supposition lacks today evident sense.

There are, however, some signs indicating that such a lack may well limit our understanding of the phenomena concerned. It is, of course, generally

recognised that the various components of "culture" – the self-understandable meaningful organisation of everyday life and popular culture, popular culture and high culture, the sciences and the arts – with various degrees of intensity interact with, and influence, each other. This in itself would hardly justify the claim just made. There are, however, also some less evident and perhaps more striking correspondences and connections between these separated domains and/or the discourses concerning them.

In the first place there is some strange parallelism in the actual situations, the completely unrelated contemporary discourses concerning the sciences and the arts find themselves in regard to their objects. I mean here the seemingly unresolvable conflict between the "internalist" and the "externalist" images of both science and art. In the simplest terms: traditionally oriented theories in philosophy of science, respectively aesthetics, clarify, usually through ideal reconstructions, those constitutive characteristics of these practices and their products which explain on what grounds, in what sense and under what conditions they can legitimately claim recognition/appreciation by everyone; they explicate the binding validity of the internal criteria of their appropriately understood success. But then come the empirical and historical sociologies of science and art (in their presently dominant "revisionist" varieties) and through the analysis of a host of representative, present and past cases demonstrate that in fact these internal criteria play perhaps only a subordinate role in the direction of these creative activities as well as in the selective social recognition of their creations. Actually these are largely determined by "external" causes and considerations connected with the pragmatic motives of power, prestige and interest. And while there are no good grounds to doubt the empirical adequacy of a large number of such descriptions, their generalisation seem to lead only to an untenable relativism incapable of explaining either the technical effectivity of science, or the persistent social interest in art, except perhaps as a (very ineffective) ideological instrument of establishing and maintaining social distinctions. No doubt, there are many compromises between the normatively oriented "internalist" and empirically oriented "externalist" images of both the sciences and the arts, but there is no coherent conceptual framework capable to mediate between these opposed approaches resolving their apparent incompatibility.

At the same time some considerations may suggest that if such a mediating framework is possible at all, it must be a common one encompassing all the

separate domains and constituents of culture. For cultural modernity manifests a paradoxical unity in the continuing historical persistence of that very split and contradiction which co-determines its internal dynamics. At least from the late eighteenth century on, this history is characterised by the dispute and struggle of two opposed tendencies and projects that in ever renewed forms maintain the same essential pattern of antithetical commitments and evaluations. Aestheticising reconciliation with nature as opposed to its scientific mastery; culture as particularising or as "cosmopolitan," universalising instance; reunification of culture with life *versus* differentiation and clear demarcation of its fields; folk or popular culture *versus* high culture; the arts against the sciences – these are some of the opposed poles of those choices that constitute what I have earlier called, in an ideal-typical sense, "Romanticism" and "Enlightenment." Their strife and the see-saw movement between them, in which once the first, once the second attains for a time relative predominance, keep cultural modernity in the state of a permanent crisis and make it and its crisis just to go on, acquiring new and new forms.

Is then a new philosophy of culture possible which, without metaphysical or pseudo-metaphysical postulates, were able to account for this paradox unity and coherence of cultural modernity realised only through its persisting dynamic diremption and structural fragmentation? If it were, it could well have more than merely an academic relevance. We live again amidst rampant cultural nationalisms, ideologies of ethnic and social exclusion formulated prevalently in cultural terms, under the shadow of predictions of the coming collisions of the great world cultures. If the faith in culture as the free guiding power of an autonomous human reason and creative imagination had evaporated, culture – no less distortingly – sometimes appears today as our fate. The question about the power and impotence, coherence and contradictions of culture has some practical significance. But a philosophy of culture, able to shed some light upon these questions, should depart from the full awareness of human finitude, implying, among other things, the accidentality of the historical origins of our culture. And implying no less the radical openness of its future: the persistence of its identity only due to the continuity of its crisis, the maintenance of its structuration only through practices which, posited as innovative, not only change its concrete content, but also as much challenge as reconfirm its normative principles. In this respect, however, only one thing is clear —such a theory of culture is nowhere around.

Chapter Eighteen

Life and the Soul: The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture

> Every human being of substance has just one thought; indeed, one may ask whether thought can ever have a plural.
>
> György Lukács

"[F]rom one Sunday to the next he turned from Saul into Paul," says Anna Lesznai,[1] one of Lukács' closest friends, writing in her own memoirs of the philosopher's conversion to Bolshevism in 1918. Not only does this picture of sharp rupture recur constantly in the reminiscences of former students and friends, but it is also one of the basic themes of the ever-increasing body of interpretative literature on Lukács' philosophical development – and not without reason. An examination of his early career seems to confirm this picture. In December 1918 the philosopher and critic, at thirty-four by no means still a young man, joined the Hungarian Communist Party and from then on dedicated his life and work to the realisation of the ideas and ideals of his chosen movement. It was a commitment that was to survive both historical and

[1] Quotation from David Kettler, "Culture and Revolution: Lukács in the Hungarian Revolution of 1918–19," *Telos*, 10, 1971, p. 69.

personal crises. With baffling suddenness, without any transition it seemed, Lukács made a radical break with all his earlier work, work that, if only on account of its influence on his contemporaries, cannot simply be labelled dismissively as "immature" or "escapist." The year 1918 did not, however, mark Lukács' first intellectual encounter with Marxism and socialism as representing both a problem and an alternative. They were present in his first important work, *History of the Development of the Modern Drama*, and he himself characterised his study *Remarks on the Theory of Literary History*, written in 1909, as an attempt to provide a coherent explication of his position regarding historical materialism, a position that was "complex and difficult to explain."[2] And nothing demonstrates better the paradox of the road that led him to Marxism than the fact that up until the turning-point in 1918 his view of it, as it emerged in repeated intellectual confrontations, became increasingly critical and – especially in regard to its practical importance – increasingly resigned. (One only has to compare the relevant passages in his history of the development of the drama, completed in 1909, with the essay "Aesthetic Culture," written just a year later, or with his verdict on Marxism in the study *Fatal Youth* of 1916.)

The picture becomes even more paradoxical when we consider those aspects of Lukács' thought that were central to his intellectual conversion. If one compares the essay *Bolshevism as an Ethical Problem*, which appeared in 1918, with *Tactics and Ethics*, written only a few months later (before the Räterepublik was proclaimed in 1919), one finds that the same problem is raised in both pieces. Parallel trains of thought can be identified at more than one level, and even identical formulations. But whereas the first piece reaches the conclusion that the "ethical dilemma" of Bolshevism is fundamentally insoluble, and rejects the Bolshevist position, the second takes upon itself, with passionate commitment, the task of finding an active historical solution to this dilemma.[3] In the first article Lukács could still write that "the choice between the two positions therefore is, like every ethical question, a question of faith."[4]

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[2] Letter to the poet Mihály Babits, March 1910 (ms).

[3] A more detailed discussion may be found in Mihály Vajda, "A dialektika nyomában" ("On the Track of the Dialectic") (ms).

[4] *Történelem és osztálytudat* (History and Class Consciousness), Budapest, Magvetö, 1971, p. 17.

And it does indeed seem as if the *hiatus irrationalis* between the two positions can be bridged – in some impenetrable way – only by a climactic, voluntaristic decision, by a conversion of faith.

Yet, paradoxically, the extraordinary sharpness of the break, which emerges quite clearly from a comparison of these two works, points immediately to the fact that the connection between the two periods of Lukács' *oeuvre* cannot adequately be described by reference to concepts such as discontinuity or hiatus. "Yes" and "no" are diametrical opposites, but where two points of view so clearly contradict each other they must, by the very nature of this relationship, be intimately linked in some way. Where the answers can be polar opposites, the question must be the same. And, indeed, a more thorough analysis of Lukács' "early" works not only reveals the presence, right from the beginning, of a series of subjective motifs of radical change (as he himself pointed out in his later writings on his intellectual development),[5] but also discovers parallels, both in content and in ideas, with the later Marxist writings. These parallels are irrefutable evidence of the existence of these deeper-level links. Of particular importance in this regard are the *Heidelberg Manuscripts on Aesthetics*, written between 1912 and early 1918. There is no space here for detailed discussion of these still unpublished works,[6] but it should be mentioned that some of the most fundamental ideas and categories contained in the great late work of synthesis, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, can be found here, often expressed in the same terms: the concept of objectivation, the distinction between "the whole man" and "man as a whole," the category of the homogeneous medium, the conception of the work of art as a self-enclosed totality, and so on. Also to be found there is Lukács' characterisation of the world of the work of art as the utopian reality appropriate to man's needs – the fundamental idea in his late, Marxist aesthetics concerned with the defetishising mission of art.

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[5] One thinks in the first instance of the prefaces to various volumes of his *Selected Works* in Hungarian.

[6] In the meantime these manuscripts have been published in German by F. Benseler and myself under the title *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst (1912–14)* and *Heidelberger Aesthetik (1916–18)*, volumes 16–17 of Lukács' works, Darmstadt–Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1974 and 1975.

In pointing out these parallels, the intention is not to replace the generally accepted picture of a discontinuity in the development of Lukács' thought[7] with an equally one-sided – indeed, even more misleading – stress on its "continuity." There is simply no doubt that the conversion of 1918 had a profound effect on Lukács' view of the world and influenced the way in which he solved particular theoretical problems. Precisely because the theoretical premises shared by the two works on aesthetics are embedded in different theoretical and ideological contexts, a more detailed analysis could show clearly that even they are given radically differing interpretations and functions and, in some cases, contradict each other outright. A single example must suffice here too: the utopian function of art in creating a reality appropriate to man's needs is interpreted by the young Lukács (in some of his writings, at least) as the "Satanism" of art. The work of art creates harmony and fulfilment in advance of, or without, man's true redemption.

In view of – indeed, because of – the existence of this strange web of parallels and contradictions, the parallels between individual motifs, however significant, shed very little light on what actually links the two great periods of Lukács' career. To understand the road taken by Lukács as a thinker, and its individual stages, it is far more important to examine what underlies both positions, to look at the identical ways in which the problems are framed. The real link between the *Heidelberg Manuscripts* and the late *Aesthetics* is that both works – although they were separated by almost half a century, use completely different conceptual tools and frequently come to opposite conclusions – are nevertheless devoted to solving one and the same theoretical problem. Both are attempts to establish the place and function of art within the system of human activities and to explain its relationship with everyday life (in the terminology employed by the young Lukács, its relationship with

[7] Of course, this picture of Lukács is not the only one that has been put forward in the literature on the subject. In particular, there are two studies on which I have based my comments to a large extent, both in this connection and in other respects: Ferenc Fehér, "Balázs Béla és Lukács György szövetsége a forradalomig" ("The Alliance between Béla Balázs and György Lukács up to the Hungarian Revolution of 1918"), *Irodalomtörteneti Tanulmányok*, Budapest, 1969; and Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Path to Marxism (1910–23)," *Telos*, 7, 1971.

"experienced reality") and with the "generic" forms of human activity and objectivation (in early terminology, the fundamental forms of the "transcendental constitution") that shape and appropriate reality. But behind the fact that the two works set themselves identical philosophical objectives lies a problem that always presented itself as more than just a theoretical challenge to Lukács (indeed, it was one that embraced his entire life and work): the question of *the possibility of culture*. This essay attempts to examine the early period of his work, if only in broad outline, from this point of view.

Culture was the "single" thought of Lukács' life. Is culture possible today? To answer this question and at the same time to contribute, through his own activity, to the creation or realisation of this possibility remained one of the central concerns of his life. But right from the start, this concept of culture embraced far more than high art or philosophy, extended far beyond the bounds of "high culture." For Lukács, the question of culture was synonymous with the question of life, with the "immanence of meaning in life." For

> culture … is the unity of life, the life-enhancing, life-enriching power of unity … All culture is the conquest of life, the unifying of all life's phenomena with a single force … so that whatever part of the totality of life you look at, you always see, in its innermost depths, the same thing. In an authentic culture, everything becomes symbolic. …[8]

Through culture, people and events become part of a meaningful totality.[9] It invests the most diverse and unrelated facts with living meaning that is perceived in the same way by everybody and so guarantees that they are interpreted and evaluated consistently within a view of the world founded on the concerns of real life. Unity of subject and object, individual and society, one's innermost convictions and external institutions, becomes possible only within an authentic culture – not in the sense that conflicts are abolished or excluded, but in the sense that the culture traces the path along which they can be resolved and so ensures that "development is no longer subject to the

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[8] G. Lukács, "Esztétikai kultura" ("Aesthetic Culture") in the volume of the same name, Budapest, Atheneum, 1913, pp. 12, 14 (abbreviated here as AC). The essay itself is also published in *Müvészet és Társadalom* (Art and Society), Budapest, Gondolat, 1969, pp. 72–84.

[9] See *Die Theorie des Romans*, Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1971, p. 131 (hereafter *ThR*).

vagaries of chance."[10] Only in an authentic culture can the forms of "high culture" – art, philosophy and so on – cease to be alienated from life and life from them, for in it these forms are only "the emergence into consciousness of what had lain dormant as a vague longing in all that had yet to be given form."[11]

In other words, from the beginning of his development as a thinker the question of culture meant for Lukács the question of whether it is possible to live a life free from alienation. But behind this question lay his passionate diagnosis of the hostility to culture, the "crisis of culture," that characterised modern bourgeois existence, and his own determined rejection of it. This awareness of crisis was by no means unique to Lukács. One can point also to Dilthey, Simmel and Weber (to mention only thinkers whose influence on the formation of Lukács' views can be demonstrated directly). What set Lukács apart was his sensitivity to the extent of the contradictions, the tragic power of his struggle against them, the "pathos" of his philosophy that characterised his writings in the first decade of the century, that "happy time of peace." The whole of Lukács' pre-Marxist period was a constant struggle to arrive at a precise conceptual diagnosis of these contradictions, this "crisis," and to discover, by theoretical means, ways out of them, or at least the norms of proper human conduct appropriate to dealing with them.

In Lukács' diagnosis during this period one can detect two parallel forms of analysis, one metaphysical and existential, the other historical. The two processes, or levels of analysis, change from work to work, often merging within one and the same essay to such an extent that any sharp distinction or opposition can, in a certain sense, only be a construct imposed for the purposes of interpretation. With almost periodic regularity Lukács himself tried to clarify their relationship, both in principle and methodologically.[12]

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[10] *Zur romantischen Lebensphilosophie: Novalis*, in *Die Seele und die Formen* (Soul and Form), Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1971 (hereafter *SuF*).

[11] *ThR*, p. 26.

[12] To mention just the most important of these attempts: "Megjegyzések az irodalomtörténet elméletéhez" ("Remarks on the Theory of Literary History"), in *Müvészet és Társadalom* (Art and Society), Budapest, Gondolat, 1968, pp. 31–56 (the essay is abbreviated hereafter as "Remarks"); ch. 3 of *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*; the first few chapters of *ThR*.

However, between these two types of analysis there remain, at least implicitly, unresolved yet fruitful contradictions, relating not only to questions of methodology. (This failure to achieve a resolution may perhaps have been the reason for the frequency of Lukács' "attempts at unification.") For underlying this problem of methodological "parallelism" is a deeper problem, a philosophical dilemma (although the two are not identical, nor can one be reduced to the other). The issue is whether the condition of the age in which he lived was an expression of the existential and ontological tragedy of culture or of a historical crisis from which recovery was possible.

It is this unremitting and unrewarded theoretical struggle that distinguishes Lukács' works from those of his contemporaries during this early period and makes the whole course of the development of his ideas so strange and unique. The reason why the development of his thought early on is difficult to trace is that the positive answers and solutions he offers change kaleidoscopically from work to work. Each is an intellectual experiment, usually pushed to its limits, exploring a position that often becomes the object of ruthless criticism in the next work. To give just one example, *The Metaphysics of Tragedy* is one of the best-known and most frequently analysed of Lukács' early essays. Several critics, among them Lucien Goldmann, have pointed out quite correctly that it testifies to links with the later world of existentialist thought. It is, however, much less well-known that at almost exactly the same time as he formulated this position he also wrote a passionate critique of it in the essay "Aesthetic Culture." In this critique "life before the Last Judgement"[13] is branded "the greatest frivolity: "anything is permissible when everybody is living in expectation of a great final accounting, which, however, never arrives; for on the day of the Last Judgement all things will in any case be found to be easy, and the communal feeling of tragedy will grant absolution for every frivolity."[14]

The essay, as he himself understood the term, can therefore be regarded as the "representative" genre of Lukács' early period. According to the introductory study in *Soul and Form*, the essay as a form mediates between art and philosophy. It uses facts drawn from life, or representations of those facts, to express conceptually a view of the world as *experience*, as a question of *life*. But it does

[13] *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie: Paul Ernst*, in *SuF*, p. 128.

[14] *AC*, pp. 22–23.

not offer clear-cut, conceptual answers. "The essay is a court, but (unlike of in the legal system) it is not the verdict that is important, that sets standards and creates precedents, but the process of examining and judging."[15] At times the dialectic of polemic and counter-polemic even becomes a structural element of the essay itself, determining its form. It is no accident that some of the essays that are most central to an understanding of his philosophy (the essay on Sterne *in Soul and Form* or *On Spiritual Poverty*, for instance) are written in the form of dialogues.

The fundamental categories of Lukács' "philosophical," metaphysical and existential analysis are – in the terminology of the "representative" essays, with which we shall be primarily concerned here – the concepts of "life" ("ordinary" life), the "soul" (and, closely linked with it, "real" or "living life") and "form." *Life* is, above all, the world of "impersonal, mechanical forces,"[16] a world of rigid forms (conventions and institutions) alien to man. These were once created by the *soul*, guided by reason and by clear goals, but they have inevitably turned into external forces that merely exist but are no longer alive. They have become second nature, "which can only be described, by analogy with first nature, as the sum total of known but meaningless necessities." This world of "ordinary life" is "something frozen, alien, a complex of sense-expressions (*Sinngebilde*) that no longer elicits a response from the inner, spiritual life of man. It is a Golgotha of decayed spiritual lives,"[17] a tight web of inescapable necessities, yet one that "is fundamentally contingent and meaningless:" the necessity "of being trapped and held fast in a web of a thousand threads, a thousand contingent connections and relationships."[18]

The concept of life, however, designates phenomena not only on the level of "interpersonal" objectivity but also on the subjective level. The empirical individual of ordinary life is lonely and isolated; they search blindly for a way of making contact with other individuals. But the conventions governing these forms of social interaction make it impossible for them to find a way, and mean that they can experience themself only peripherally

[15] "Über Wesen und Form des Essays," in *SuF*, p. 31.

[16] *Von der Armut am Geiste, Neue Blatter*, II, 1912, 5–6, p. 73.

[17] *ThR*, pp. 53, 55.

[18] *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie*, p. 225.

as well.[19] Only two basic types of behaviour are possible in this life: either a person immerses themself completely in the world of conventions, and so loses their real personality, or they escape from the pressure of irrational, external necessity into pure introversion. However, this second response, complete abandonment to (indeed, dissolution in) a stream of transitory moods and sense experiences, also means giving up the self:

> since everything comes from within, nothing can really come from within: only things in the outside world can induce moods, and enjoyment of one's own soul as an aesthetic experience amounts only to passive observation of something that chance happens to put in one's way. Complete freedom is the most terrible form of bondage.[20]

In the end, this division of life into inside and outside, subjectivity and objectivity, never actually develops into an outright conflict in which one principle or the other could come to dominate.

> To speak of dissonance would be to overestimate [ordinary life]. Dissonance is possible only in a system of notes, that is, in a world that is already a unified whole: frustration, inhibition and chaos are not even dissonant.[21]

> Life is an anarchy of light and shadow. Nothing in it ever reaches its full potential and nothing ever reaches an end; new, bewildering voices constantly join in the chaos of earlier sounds. Everything flows and flows together, wildly, in an impure mixture; everything is frustrated and destroyed. Nothing ever blooms into real life. Life means being able to live things to the full. In *this* life nothing is ever lived completely to the full. Life is the most unreal and lifeless form of being it is possible to imagine.[22]

"Ordinary life" is the sphere of "mere existence," of inauthentic being.

Authentic being means the *soul*, and it means it in two ways. On the one hand, in a metaphysical sense, the soul is the substance of man's world, the creative and founding principle of every social institution and work of culture. On the

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[19] *ibid*., p. 224.

[20] *AC*, p. 16.

[21] *Von der Armut am Geiste*, p. 86.

[22] *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie*, p. 219.

other hand, in an existential sense, the soul means authentic individuality, the "nucleus" that makes every personality fundamentally unique and irreplaceable and gives it its intrinsic value. This aspect of the Lukácsian conception has unmistakably polemical overtones, at least during his "essay period" (1908–11). The polemic is directed against classical German philosophy, above all against the Hegelian conception of spirit:

> it is quite certain that subjectivity is truth; the individual thing is all there is; the individual human being is the reality behind the idea of "man."[23]

> only the individual, only individuality pushed to its furthest limits, really exists. Whatever is general is colourless, formless and all-embracing, too weak in its openness to any and every interpretation, too empty in its homogeneity, ever to be real.[24]

And the only life that is "real," authentic, is "that which can be reached in the experience of full and genuine selfhood, in the soul's experience of itself."[25]

This sharpened dualism of life and soul, authentic and inauthentic being, forms what is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the philosophy of the young Lukács. We are using "dualism" in an avowedly metaphysical sense of the word, for in asserting the substantial nature of the subject, which shapes the human world and its history, Lukács certainly does not claim that the objective world, created by the subjects and then abandoned as inhuman and mechanical, is merely a distorted illusion. Inauthentic being, the world of the structures of ordinary life, stands opposed to the soul as a principle that has equal status, though not equal value. And it has a power of its own, the often crushing power of inertia:

> every individual thing, once it has entered life, has a life of its own that is independent of its originator and of any intended goal, independent of its usefulness or harmfulness, of whether it is good or bad. … What is important here is the category of existence, mere existence as a force, a value, a category which plays a crucial role in shaping the whole of life. … Its own life [the life of every product of human creation] is separate from that of its creator and from any intended goal; it has a life of its own. It begins to grow,

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[23] *Das Zerschellen der Form am Leben: Sören Kierkegaard und Regine Olsen*, *SuF*, p. 39.

[24] *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie*, p. 232.

[25] *ThR*, p. 132.

> perhaps in other ways and in different directions from those which had been intended. It might perhaps turn against its creator and destroy what it had been intended to strengthen and support. The means becomes the end, and no one can know either in advance or in retrospect what great power to influence situations and events is stored in objects, in things.[26]

Thus the category of "ordinary" life, inauthentic life, becomes for Lukács a synonym for alienation; this alienation is passionately rejected, but it is recognised as an unavoidable metaphysical feature of human existence.

It should not be necessary to establish and document the links between Lukács' views under discussion here and the various currents within contemporary *Lebensphilosophie* (above all, of course, his relationship with Simmel). The fact that these links obviously existed should not, however, be allowed to obscure the no less significant differences and even outright conflicts. These emerge straightaway from the various interpretations of the concept of the soul. In general, consistent proponents of *Lebensphilosophie* identified creative subjectivity, which they opposed to the mechanical world of things and material relations, with the irrational and incommunicable stream of psychical experience, purified of all traces of the conceptual. This view was alien to Lukács, and not merely as a consequence of the sharp and explicit anti-psychologism that is evident in his writings from the very beginning.[27] He was also opposed to it for other, deeper, philosophical reasons. We have seen that he always conceived of the world of "pure introversion" as a typical manifestation of inauthentic being, of "ordinary life." (His firmly dismissive attitude towards all forms of impressionism also stemmed from this conception. It was not just artistic impressionism that he rejected.)[28] The "soul" is

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[26] *A modern dráma fejlödésének története* (History of the Development of the Modern Drama), Budapest, Franklin 1911, pp. 100–101 (abbreviated hereafter as *Dev. Drama*.) This concept of "mere existence" later becomes a key term in Lukács' system of thought. See, for example, *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie*, or ch. 3 of *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*.

[27] Characteristically, in his *Obituary for Dilthey*, Budapest, Szellem, 1911, p. 253, Lukács names psychologism as the reason for the complete failure of Dilthey's efforts to bring about a philosophical renaissance.

[28] This is formulated most clearly in "Az utak elváltak" ("The Ways have Parted"), in *AC*.

experience or, more accurately, it can become experience, but it is not in any way identical with the sum total or stream of one's experiences. "Soul" means, in fact, the maximum development, the highest possible intensification, of the powers of an individual's will,[29] their capabilities and their "psychical energies," those unique potentialities that every human being is capable of developing, and ought to develop, in order to become a real personality. The "soul" is, as it were, the "vocation" of an individual. And this "vocation" is directed outwards, towards the outside world and other human beings. For authenticity is nothing other than actively using one's abilities to the full, shaping everything that happens to one into a personal destiny that expresses one's innermost nature.

It is not for nothing that we have been flirting with Fichte's terminology in this discussion. For even ignoring the evidence for direct influence,[30] there is no doubt that right from the start the philosophy of the young Lukács had many points of contact with Fichte's (and Hegel's) dialectic. In Lukács' eyes too, man is not what he is but what he *could be*. The dualism in his philosophy mentioned above always meant a dialectical struggle between opposing forces. It was not only alienation that seemed to him to be a "metaphysical" necessity, but also the *active struggle against it*.

At the same time, and in a way that is obviously correlated with it, this interpretation of the concept of "soul" is also an expression of Lukács' ceaseless efforts to overcome the fundamental subjectivism of *Lebensphilosophie* and its consequent relativism. If authenticity means the narcissistic self-enjoyment of the individual and his acceptance of his isolation as an immutable fact, then

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[29] See, for example, *Dev. Drama*, vol. I, pp. 12–13: "man's whole being can only manifest itself with immediate energy in his will and in his actions initiated by his will. … For emotions and thoughts are transient and variable in form, much more elastic in their nature and more exposed to outside influences than the will. The individual does not know how far his emotions and thoughts are really his own (or how far they have become so). He only knows this with complete certainty when they are tested for some reason, that is, when he has to act in accordance with them, when they become part of his will and result in actions."

[30] *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 153, refers to Fichte as the common source of the philosophy of Stirner and of Marx.

the stream of fundamentally incommunicable experiences, each unique and equally valid, destroys all values and value distinctions.

> The self has flowed out into the world and, through its moods and sensations, has absorbed the world into itself. But since this means that the world has also flowed into the self, all barriers between the two have been removed. … If things are no longer solid, stable entities, then neither is the self. And when facts disappear, so do values. Nothing is left within or between individuals except moods and sensations, none of which is more justified or more meaningful than any other.[31]

If, on the other hand, authentic life, as an active manifestation of the soul, means the development to its full potential of a unique personality that expresses itself in actions and welds all of life into a single unity, then this development simultaneously transcends what is purely individual. This process of self-realisation is the transformation into action, into fact, of a way of living, a possibility of human life, that cannot be duplicated but can be normative and can serve as a model far everyone.

> The way of the soul is: to strip away everything that is not truly part of oneself, to make the soul truly individual; yet what results transcends the purely individual. That is why such a life can serve as a model. It is because the self-realisation of a single human being means that self-realisation is possible for all.[32]

Only through this intensified struggle of the soul with life can the individual attain that which will remain forever interpersonal and absolute, and hence truly universal – what Lukács calls the *work*: "from out of our poverty and limitation redemption is born."[33]

The "work" means for Lukács the type of objectivity, of "what is," that does not simply *remain in being* through the inertia of mere existence" but *remains valid* as a source of meaning and value. It means the objectivations that have arisen historically but have become timeless by constantly assuming new life

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[31] "The Ways have Parted," *AC*, p. 33.

[32] *AC*, p. 29.

[33] *Obituary for Leo Popper, Pester Lloyd*, 19 Dec. 1911.

and meaning: consummate works of art, the great philosophical and religious systems, science taken as a whole, in its unbroken development. (Lukács' attention, of course, was focused primarily on the work of art.)

This, however, is the point where the philosophy of the young Lukács clearly diverges from the various currents within *Lebensphilosophie* and makes contact with the traditions of classical German philosophy. As he himself stated unambiguously in the article on Croce that appeared in 1915, this point concerns the question of "absolute spirit" and, more broadly, the question of objectivations.[34] For whereas, according to *Lebensphilosophie*, it is in principle impossible to transcend the purely individual and pointless to try, Lukács always recognises cultural objectivations of "absolute spirit" as irrefutable evidence that this transcendence is, in fact, possible. The "work" (and the "form" without which it could not exist) provides a guarantee that the struggle against the meaningless, mechanical and isolating empiricism of "life," the striving towards a meaningful order and real interpersonal communication, is not only something that is necessary but is also not inevitably doomed to fail.

> The resolution – the redeeming power of form – will not be reached until the end of all paths and all sufferings, in the faith, beyond any possibility of proof, that the diverging paths of the soul will come together again at some distant time and place, that they must come together again, since they all started from one central point. Form, however, is the only proof that this faith is justified, for it is its living realisation, more truly alive than all of life.[35]

Yet the work or, more accurately, the work of art, regarded by Lukács as of utmost importance, grows out of life, not simply in the sense that as an

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[34] The aim of this study is to outline the basic structural features of the philosophy of the young Lukács. We cannot go into detail about the more complicated aspects of his development. In general terms, this development moves in the direction of an increasing rejection of *Lebensphilosophie*. The last substantial systematic work of this pre-Marxist period, *Aesthetics* (written 1916–18), is clearly Kantian in character, although it is a very idiosyncratic, distinctly *dualistic* form of Kantianism. Lukács makes this point himself in the first chapter of his *Aesthetics*, when he refers explicitly to the connection between his views in general and those of Rickert and Lask.

[35] *AC*, p. 28.

objectivation produced by a real individual it inevitably displays all the characteristics of its age, but also because it is in essence nothing other than a representation of life, the imposition of a specific form on life. But how is it possible that out of this transient and meaningless chaos something can emerge that is generally valid and has universal significance? If there is *within* life no way in which one soul can communicate with another, how can one build *out of* life a bridge that will last for ever and that all men can use? That is the ultimate philosophical meaning of the question that forms the starting-point of the young Lukács' two systematic works on aesthetics, *Philosophy of Art* (1912–14) and *Aesthetics* (1916–18), written in Heidelberg: "Works of art exist – how are they possible?"

The question is to be answered, according to Lukács, by reference to the concept of form. The concept of form is more all-embracing than that of the "work." For Lukács, form designates all the functions connected with the creation of meaning. It enables the multiplicity of facts, events and all the other elements of life to be arranged into *meaningful* structures, *organised patterns of meaning*. (Accordingly, form is related not only to the sphere of "absolute spirit" but also to that of "objective spirit.") Each separate form is a particular way in which the soul responds to life. Through these forms, on the one hand, the soul becomes pure and homogeneous, since it is centred upon a single value; on the other hand, using this single value, the soul can bring order to the chaos of life, of "mere existence," and can invest it with meaning. As the principle of objectivation, the principle of the validity of objectivation, form is also the principle of mediation between life and the soul, although it can never finally resolve the antagonism, the dualism, between them.

The work of art is only one of these ways of "giving form" to life.[36] From the threads in the fabric of life, running in a thousand different directions and

[36] The *plurality* and the *autonomy* of the various forms are basic themes in the philosophy of the young Lukács. His *Aesthetics* refers to this question as one of the most important theoretical considerations that turned him against Hegelian philosophy (the manuscript contains an elaborated critical confrontation with Hegel). Hegel's monism and panlogism are based on the assumption that all forms of transcendental constitution can be reduced to one single type, namely theoretical logical constitution – more accurately, that they can be deduced logically from its principles. By contrast, Lukács

reaching out towards infinity, from the endless sea of reasons and motives, the artist must choose just a few, and must do so in such a way that they are intimately connected with each other and form a homogeneous system, self-enclosed and complete in itself, which can be surveyed in its entirety from one point. The work of art as an abstract concept is nothing other than "a system of schemata which mediate experiences. It is so perfectly self-enclosed that it is dependent for its effect only on the immanent relations of its constituent elements."[37]

The schema in accordance with which the material of life is selected, ordered and structured, a schema that will vary depending on genre, style, and so on, is the *aesthetic form*:

> the form which arranges the material of life into a self-contained whole, and which prescribes its tempo, rhythm, fluctuations, density and fluidity, hardness and softness; it accents what is felt to be important, eliminates what is less important; it places things either in the foreground or the background and organises them into groups within this pattern.[38]

Through this shaping process the amorphous chaos of life becomes, in the work of art, an ordered cosmos, a new life, but one which, however – by contrast with ordinary life – is now unambiguous and perspicuous. Every work of art embodies a way of perceiving and understanding life; art is, therefore, the process of investing life with meaning and raising it into consciousness, of transcending the chaos of life. It is a "judgement on life"[39] and gives "mastery over things."[40] The existence of art is proof that the alienation of "ordinary" life can be overcome.

This is true, however, in relation not only to objectivity but also to subjectivity. Each form embodies a vision, an immediate interpretation of life as

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formulates the Kantian "basic thesis" of his own system as "the complete independence of all autonomous forms of constitution from each other and the complete impossibility of deriving any one of them from any of the others" (*Aesthetics*, ch. 1).

[37] *Philosophie der Kunst*, ch. 2. This fragment of a chapter was published in *Arion*, 5, 1972, p. 39.

[38] "Remarks," p. 38.

[39] *ibid.*, p. 39.

[40] *AC*, p. 17.

experienced – not an interpretation in the sense of a subjective response on the part of a self divorced from life but an interpretation within the schema of a creative arrangement of the raw material of life. This schema is inseparable from the concrete material of the work of art and is itself a source of experiences. It is expressed through the objective structure of the work of art. This is the reason why form is also the principle that ensures communion and communication between individuals, between the creator of a work of art and those who experience it: "Form is the truly social element in literature … the connecting link between creator and audience, the only category of literature that is both social and aesthetic."[41] Those works of art in which truly great forms are realised, which form perfect, integrated wholes, inspire, *by virtue of their structure*, a vision of life, an interpretation and evaluation of life, to all intents and purposes a world view. And they have an irresistibly evocative power that can inspire everyone with this vision. This explains the universality and eternal validity and influence of the work of art.

But this relationship between life and the soul, the soul's power over life and the transcendence of alienation that is represented by art (and by every other valid cultural "work"), cannot of itself solve the immediate problems of life raised by its dualistic, antagonistic nature. Art transcends the alienation of ordinary life, but it does not abolish it. For although the work of art springs from life, it also inevitably breaks away from it, and breaks away sharply, simply because it is totally self-enclosed, a complete universe in itself. It is a new life, which, as it is self-contained and complete in itself, has (and can have) no point of contact with anything beyond itself from the moment it comes into being.[42] The relationship between the work of art and life (the reception of art), therefore, can never be anything but momentary contact between different spheres, through which "inauthentic life" can never be redeemed. One can perceive a meaning in life in and through the work, but that does not mean that one can order one's own life accordingly or invest it with meaning.

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[41] "Remarks," p. 36.

[42] This is the basic starting-point of the critique of naturalism that recurs throughout Lukács' early writings. See, in particular, *Dev. Drama*, chs 7–10, and *Philosophie der Kunst*, ch. 2, "Phaenomenologische Skizze des schöpferischen und receptiven Verhaltens."

Equally, art cannot abolish the inadequacies of human communication that isolate the individual – not only because of the inevitably elitist character of artistic communication (the concept of "genius" is one of the young Lukács' basic categories) but also because of its inherent nature. The work of art forges a universally valid link between creator and audience, since the link is created *exclusively* by the form objectified in the work. For precisely this reason, however, the link can never be adequate as far as content is concerned, partly because the world view objectively embodied and expressed in the form of the work does not necessarily stand in any relationship to the views and intentions of its creator (according to the aesthetics of the young Lukács, intention and completed work are separated by an "irrational leap") and partly because the experiences evoked by the work are *eo ipso* the receiver's own experiences. The quality of these experiences – that which makes the experiences unique to the receiver and the effect of the work of art immediate and particular – can never correspond in any way to that of the experiences of the artist.

> This process of self-discovery through the work, the experience of being affected by it at the innermost and most personal level – whose endless repeatability forms the basis of its eternal influence – precludes any possibility of a sharing of experience between creator and audience. The possibility of misunderstanding, which in empirical reality was only a *vérité de fait*, becomes here a *vérité éternelle*.[43]

The inadequacy of everyday processes of communication, the possibility of "misunderstanding," is not abolished by art; it is merely eternalised. It is changed from an empirical to a constituitive category.

Thus the mediation between life and the soul, represented by the cultural objectivations of "absolute spirit," by "works," itself becomes the starting-point for new and tragic conflicts. One of these is the "tragedy of the artist," which Lukács discusses in great detail. We have already touched on the most important aspect of this tragedy, namely, the "unredeemed state" of artists, the fact that

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[43] *Philosophie der Kunst*, ch. 2. The first two chapters of the work treat the problem touched on here most fully and systematically.

> all the perfection they give to their works, all the depths of experience which they pour into them, are in vain. They remain more silent, less able to express themselves, than people in ordinary life, who are all locked up in themselves. Their works may be the highest achievement of which man is capable, yet they themselves are the most unfortunate creatures of all and least capable of achieving redemption.[44]

In this way, Lukács establishes philosophically what we simply took for granted at the beginning of this study: that the problem of culture is not identical with the question of "high culture," and that its crisis cannot be solved in this area alone. The guarantee provided by the great cultural objectivations, that the struggle against the alienation of ordinary life is not in vain, either in human or in historical terms, offers only hope. It does not supply proof that the goal of this struggle can actually be reached. For the great question of whether culture is "possible," to use the language of the young Lukács' philosophy, cannot simply be reduced to the issue of whether it is possible to create out of the raw material of life eternally valid, objective forms, forms that must necessarily be divorced from life; it turns primarily on whether it is possible to shape life itself, if only in ways that, from a historical perspective, may be no more than transitory.

This question constitutes the basic problem of the young Lukács' ethics. Agnes Heller has made a thorough study of it.[45] Obviously, we can touch only on those aspects of this complex of problems that relate directly to the very general question that interests us here.

Broadly, we can say that whenever Lukács broaches the question of the possibility of culture in general terms and in the context of systematic analyses, the answer is negative. One can point to a number of absolutely unambiguous formulations of this answer. The most explicit and decisive is that given in the *Philosophy of Art*: the shaping of life according to ethical principles is impossible, for the self, as the product of the ethical will is incapable not only of transforming the facts of the outside world but also of penetrating the soul in its entirety. There is no way in which an individual's inner life can be

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[44] *ibid*. See also *Arion*, 5, 1972, p. 46.

[45] "Jenseits der Pflicht," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 106, 1973, pp. 439ff.

transformed into "fate," that is, into a meaningful totality determined by the ethical nature of the personality.

> In the light of these facts, the idea of stylising life according to purely ethical criteria is no longer tenable. Such a stylisation can neither destroy the raw material which flows in upon it nor inform it with an ethical vision. And if it should presume to claim the status of a form which could be imposed on the totality of life, it would be an inappropriate form, an allegory.[46]

At precisely this point in the manuscript of 1912–14, however, Lukács refers – with every justification – to his Kierkegaard essay (from 1909) as a work in which he had already formulated this position, and one can also find similar ideas expressed in his *Metaphysics of Tragedy*. In the essay on Kierkegaard, too, authentic life, "true life," seems "always [to be] impossible in the empirical world of everyday experience," for "one cannot live life at its peak of intensity, fulfil one's ultimate potentialities, all of the time. One has to come back down to dull existence. One has to deny life in order to live."[47]

Realisation of the unity of fate and life, of the inner world of the self and outer events, of meaning and being, is granted only to the tragic chosen few, and to them only for a moment: "This moment is a beginning and an end. Nothing can follow from it or arise out of it, and it can have no connection with life. It is a moment; it does not mean life; it is life, a life different from ordinary life, and the two are mutually exclusive."[48]

The struggle for culture, the eternal, restless longing of man "to make the pinnacle of his existence the plane on which he lives his life, to make its meaning part of everyday reality,"[49] is tragically hopeless. For although this struggle, which must never be abandoned, is not in vain – it is out of this struggle that the great moral examples emerge that, like works of art, although created by man, possess timeless validity, signify the pinnacle of our existence and our potentialities and give them their truly human dimension – it cannot (in principle) achieve its immediate goal. The "crisis" of culture is only one manifestation of the metaphysical tragedy of human existence.

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[46] *Philosophie der Kunst*, ch. 2.

[47] *SuF*, p., 219.

[48] *ibid*., p. 226.

[49] *ibid*., p. 233.

Alongside this conception, however, Lukács' early works also offer another perspective, namely, that it is possible to shape life through culture. It should be said that this solution is generally to be found in less systematic contexts than that discussed above. It occurs either in the course of the analysis of specific historical or sociological contexts of a particular kind or in the Utopias that are usually no more than hinted at, yet in many ways characterise the ideological direction of the early works. (Those analyses that are distinctly historical in their approach will be examined below, but we can point here, by way of example, to the essay on Storm, which provides a kind of counterpoint to the Kierkegaard essay, visualising the "shaping" of life by a bourgeois moral system founded on a vocational ethics of duty.) It is also clear that the actual content of these Utopias often changes within the same work.[50] To cite simply the best-known example, in his *The Theory of the Novel* two different Utopias coexist in perfect harmony. On the one hand, there is that of "Wilhelm Meister," a world in which human beings actively shape, according to their own goals, the objective structures of society in a spirit of inner community and harmonious cooperation.[51] On the other hand, Lukács also proclaims the approach of the "pure reality of the soul" depicted in the works of Dostoevsky, a "new world" transcending all social determination and social forms and abolishing the duality of self and world in an immediate communion of souls beyond all objectifications.[52] Yet behind all these differences (one might even

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[50] For more on the Utopias of the young Lukács, see the studies by F. Fehér and A. Heller (see notes 7 and 45).

[51] See *ThR*, pp. 117–119, 128.

[52] *ibid*., pp. 137–138. See also "Halálos fiatalsag" ("Fatal Youth"), in *Magyar irodalom, magyar kultura* (Hungarian Literature, Hungarian Culture), Budapest, Gondolat, 1970, pp. 113–116. To understand the role played by the "Dostoevsky Utopia" in the development of Lukács' thought, one should bear in mind that the outbreak of war led to a distinct shift (albeit short-lived) in the direction of irrationalism. This accompanied a resurgence of the influence of *Lebenphilosophie*, which had earlier faded. The reasons for this shift emerge clearly in his letters to Paul Ernst. On 14 April 1915, for example, he writes: "The power of forms seems to be constantly increasing, and for most people they seem to be more real than what actually exists. But – and this is for me *the* experience of the war – we must not concede to it. We must keep on emphasising that the only really essential things are we ourselves, our souls, and even their eternal *a priori* objectivations are (to borrow a beautiful image created by Ernst Bloch) only paper

say contradictions) as far as the actual content is concerned, there is a hidden common factor: a belief in the possibility of a world organised in accordance with man's authentic nature, a world in which the unbridgeable gulf between his deepest needs and desires and the objective structures of "external" social existence vanishes, and human beings are no longer condemned to a life of infinite loneliness, alienated from each other. It is a belief in the possibility of a culture that embraces and unifies the whole of life, permeating all aspects of man's everyday existence. And if – disregarding explicitly negative answers – the great diversity in content exhibited by these Utopias may itself

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money, whose value depends on its convertibility into gold. The very real power of forms cannot be denied. But German thought ever since Hegel has been guilty of a deadly intellectual sin of investing every power with metaphysical significance." Less than a month later, on 4 May, he replies to Ernst's comments: "When you say that the state is part of the self, you are correct. When you say that it is part of the soul, you are wrong. Everything to which we are in any way related is part of our self (even the subject-matter of mathematics), but this self which "creates" these objects (in the sense that they are synthesised by our reason), and makes them an inseparable part of itself, is an *abstract* methodological concept, and the annexation to the self of objects created in this way is a purely methodological relation. The mistake is to treat the self as if it were the soul. Since by giving the subject the status of something permanent and substantial one automatically accords the same status to the corresponding object, "forms" become real and metaphysical. And *only the soul* possesses metaphysical reality. That is not a solipsism. The problem is to find the paths which lead from one soul to another." (A substantial part of this correspondence was published in *MTA II, Osztályának Közleményei* (Budapest), 20, 1972, pp. 284, 296.) However, this irrationalist negation of historical objectivations is no longer present in the *Aesthetics*, on which Lukács was working from 1916 onwards. This work is a clear extension of the basic trend of Lukács' development, within which his move in the direction of irrationalism (which partly reflected the direct influence of historico-philosophical mysticism) proved to be no more than a short-lived interruption. The biographical material relating to the young Lukács in Hungarian (most of it still unpublished), by contrast, highlights mainly this mystical, irrational element in his thought or reacts to it in some way. (Important sources are passages from the diaries of Béla Balázs, Anna Lesznai and others, and the reminiscences of individual members of Lukács' early circle of friends.) It seems, however, that the emphasis in this biographical material is at least as much a product of the intellectual attitudes of the members of Lukács' circle as a reflection of the views of the philosopher himself.

be taken as a sign that this belief of Lukács' pre-Marxist period was not, in fact, based on a fully worked-out social program and a concrete historical perspective, then the constant occurrence of these Utopias in contexts in which they function as critiques of philosophical arguments demonstrating the "metaphysical impossibility" of culture is clear evidence of the existence of another no less characteristic and consistent feature of his thought: his passionate rejection of an alienated, "cultureless" world. Despite all the convincing, or apparently convincing, arguments that Lukács advances to demonstrate that the state of the world is unalterable, this rejection makes it impossible for him to come to terms with such a possibility.

Up to now we have been concerned with Lukács' metaphysical and existential analysis of the alienated conditions of modern life and its hostility towards culture. As has been pointed out, however, this was accompanied throughout the early period of his work by a different type of analysis, which in part complemented and in part contradicted it: an interpretation and characterisation of the same problems and facts as socially determined, temporal-historical phenomena, that is, an interpretation from the point of view of sociology or the philosophy of history, a historical interpretation. In this analysis the crisis of culture appears to be an essential characteristic of modern bourgeois society, determined by its economic and class structure.

The conceptual background and framework of this interpretation is the historiosophic distinction drawn between closed, organic societies (exemplified first and foremost by ancient Greek society) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, open yet mechanistic bourgeois society. These concepts appear as explicit terms in *The Theory of the Novel*, but in its logical structure Lukács' *History of the Development of the Modern Drama* also starts from the same historical comparison; the whole basis of this work is the contrast between antique and modern drama, which is explained and interpreted in terms of this distinction. From the beginning, Lukács regarded the Greek *polis* as the historical example of a society in which culture had become everyday reality. In the *polis*, as an organic community, there was "common agreement on ethical values in relation to the most important questions of life."[53] It was "an absolute ideology, which tolerated no debate or even doubt," a unified world view

[53] *Dev. Drama*, vol. I, p. 173.

that was no longer perceived as an ideology. It had "such an exclusively emotional character that it was as if it no longer contained consciously formulated values."[54] This "monoethism" of the ancient Greeks, this power of culture to permeate and organise the everyday life and consciousness of men in a way that seemed quite natural and self-evident, made the world in which the individual lived one in which he felt at home. It did so by investing all aspects of the world, individually and collectively, with a clear and consistent meaning and value that was accessible to every individual. This world order was "based on foundations which are as firm as rock." It might on occasion be shaken by "fate," manifest in the unpredictability of external events or in the irrationality of individual characters, but "its foaming waves will roll back over whatever has disturbed their calm, and the surface will become still and motionless again, as if nothing about it had changed."[55] This also shows the extent to which this world was "self-enclosed." Greek antiquity knew neither the continual development of intellectual and material productivity nor the degree of individuality that have been brought about by modern bourgeois society. It was a self-enclosed world that did not extend beyond the boundaries of society, and it was, to a certain extent, bound by rigid forms. The system of human relationships, which was based on precedence and subordination and the place of the individual within that system, had been established and reinforced by the inertial force of centuries-old traditions.[56] But because these relationships were organic, "making demands upon the whole personality of the individual" and inseparable from the personality, the individual did not perceive them as in any way restrictive. On the contrary, they provided a stable framework within which the individual's actions could have meaning and importance:

> In short … once it was life itself which was individualistic; today it is the people, or rather it is their convictions and the principles according to which they live their lives. Once ideology was one of the bonds which helped people to perceive themselves as fitting into a system of relationships which was part of the natural order of things. On the other hand, every detail of their

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[54] *ibid*.

[55] *ibid*., pp. 195–196.

[56] See *ibid*., pp. 160–161

> lives afforded opportunities to express their personality in their actions and in the things around them. That is why this kind of individualism could be spontaneous and unquestioned; today… it is conscious and problematic.[57]

Without question, bourgeois society dissolves this personal dimension of the relations between individuals and, with it, the bonds characteristic of closed societies. This doubtless creates new values – right from the beginning, Lukács believed that the development of human productivity and the increasing introversion ("subjectivisation") of the individual contained elements of value – but these are gained at the price of the creation of new bonds, which are not personal but reified: the individual becomes dependent on a system of impersonal, dead institutions based on commodity and money relations, which become ever more complex and whose function no one any longer understands. "This new life liberates man from many of the old bonds and makes him perceive every kind of bond, since it is no longer organic, as a fetter. At the same time it creates around him a whole series of more abstract and complex bonds."[58] While his "feeling of autonomy in relation to other people" constantly increases,[59] the individual exists "more and more only in relation to the things outside him, as the sum total of his relationships to them."[60]

This "problematisation" of the individual, however, means that his world also becomes problematic: his life and fate are controlled by a web of things and reified processes that is impenetrable and meaningless, yet has an irresistible logic of its own. In the place of an "ethical world order" is the "modern fate"

> that consists of an intimately linked and horrifyingly logical combination of things (institutions, ignorance of others and of life, the conditions of life, inheritance, etc.), which, looked at in themselves, are relative and contingent. It is no help if people recognise the uselessness or wrongness of individual parts; they are facts which exert their influence with a power all of their own, like links in a chain of cause and effect, regardless of whether they are justified or not.[61]

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[57] *ibid.*, pp. 148–149.

[58] *ibid.*, p. 152.

[59] *ibid.*, p. 160.

[60] *ibid.*, p. 105.

[61] *ibid.*, p. 453.

This world is governed by laws that are irrational in origin, incomprehensible and indifferent to human values. It has ceased to be home for man.

With the decay of organic relations that appear to be part of the natural order, the new principle that governs relations between individuals is that of *competition*. All forms of dependence on others seem intolerable to the individual. He tries to assert himself against them. But if his personality is to assert himself, it must assert itself *against somebody else*. And this other person is just as anxious to preserve his own autonomy. "One of the greatest antinomies of individualism is … that the personality cannot assert itself without suppressing the personality of others, who can defend themselves only by destroying that individual."[62] This antagonistic relationship inevitably results in the increasing isolation and loneliness of each individual human being.

> It perhaps does not need emphasising greatly how much more lonely the individual is today than he used to be … The real personality of each human being is a lonely island in the middle of a raging sea, and no voice can reach it without being distorted by the sound of the sea. Often the voice is drowned completely, so that all one can do is watch the outstretched arms of the other person. But in the end even his gestures too are misunderstood.[63]

On the other hand, this constant collision of wills, which are not only antagonistic towards each other but also continually misunderstand each other (since, willingly or unwillingly, every intention destroys the other), can lead only to one result, a result that no one wants, which is determined not by the conscious goals and interests of individuals but by the abstract and irresistible logic of the circumstances of their lives.

This does not happen merely to the extent that individuality is constantly colliding with the power of external material circumstances. These circumstances also have the effect of levelling (making uniform) all aspects of an individual's life. It is one of the most important indications of just how problematic the modern individual has become that the steadily growing, ever more extreme process of individualisation is closely interwoven with the

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[62] *ibid.*, p. 161.

[63] *ibid.*, pp. 164–166.

diametrically opposed movement towards ever greater uniformity.[64] For economic development controlled by competition is based on the increasing fragmentation and division of labour. An individual's work is becoming more abstract, more divorced from his personality, more alien to himself.

> From the point of view of the individual, the essential aspect of the modern division of labour is perhaps that it makes work independent of the irrational, and therefore only qualitatively definable, abilities of the worker, and makes it dependent on objective factors relating to functionality, which lie outside the individual worker and have no connection with his personality. The relationship between work and worker becomes more and more remote. The worker puts less and less of his own personality into his work, and the work demands less and less of the personality of whoever performs it. The work takes on a separate, objective life of its own, distinct from the personality of the individual, who then has to find some other way to express his individuality than in his work.[65]

However, since this increasing individuality can no longer be manifested in real activity, it is constantly repressed and forced back on itself. It becomes pure introspection, and no effort is made even to attempt to shape the course of "outside" events, of one's own fate.

The crisis of culture is the inevitable product of this historically determined state of affairs in the world. Within the bourgeois world, culture in the true sense of the word is impossible. It is objectively impossible: no general goal, no meaning can be discerned in the abstract and irrational necessity of the conditions created by the "anarchy of production." Its objective laws, alien to man, can no longer be related to the individual in a unified view of the world. But it is also subjectively impossible: in this world, where individuals recognise no goals beside themselves and their subjective experiences, they can no longer be united in a common view, and common experience, of the world.

Basing our comments on Lukács' first important work, the *History of the Development of the Modern Drama*, completed in 1909, we have attempted here to summarise his views about the historical and social causes of the crisis of

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[64] *ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

[65] *ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

culture – without, it must be said, trying in any way to be exhaustive. What we hope to do is simply to demonstrate the existence of a considerable degree of parallelism between the "philosophical" and the historical analyses. It should not be difficult to recognise in the foregoing discussion a socio-historical explanation of the very problems that Lukács characterised by the metaphysical and existential concept of "ordinary," inauthentic life. This correspondence extends even to details. For example, the problem of the "tragedy of the artist" is viewed from the standpoint of the historian as the historically paradoxical task of the modern artist, who is forced to create universal cultural values in a world that has neither community nor culture. The possibility of a unified world view that would guarantee the validity and impact of art must now constantly be recreated by the artist, working alone and with the help only of the formal devices of art. But if they succeed, their work becomes finally and irrevocably divorced from the everyday world (and therefore also from their own life) and stands opposed to it, irreversibly different, transcendent. The "tragedy of the artist" stems from the fact that "what had never been a question of art, and should never have become an artistic problem, did become one."[66]

This discussion is intended merely to illustrate that metaphysical and socio-historical exposition and analysis of the process of alienation as a crisis of culture accompany each other in a complex pattern of parallels and contradictions throughout Lukács' whole pre-Marxist period. (Similarly, lengthy analysis should not be needed to prove that the socio-historical form of analysis indicates right from the beginning the influence of Marx – albeit a Marx viewed through the prism of Simmel's interpretation.) Lukács himself often posed explicitly the question of the relationship between these two methods of investigation and discussion and set himself the task of reconciling them in a logically consistent way. Indeed, this undertaking constitutes the main theme of some of his writings. There is no space here for a detailed analysis of his answers to this question, which differ in detail and sometimes in fundamental respects but all point in the same direction. We must restrict ourselves to the observation that the problem was more profound and more general than the way in which its formulation in Lukács' early works makes it appear.

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[66] *ibid*., pp. 196–197.

Those of his works that address this problem and that we have mentioned earlier restrict themselves in the main to *methodological* considerations. (The central focus of these investigations is the relationship between the *a priori*-aesthetic and socio-historical concepts of form.) Important as these analyses are, the contradictions between the two methods of investigation imply something a great deal more significant. They are evidence of various (in part, contradictory) attempts to find a solution to the crisis of culture; they imply different historical perspectives. One should not, of course, assume simplistically that the conception of the crisis of culture as a historical phenomenon – by contrast with the "metaphysical" interpretation – also automatically postulates a historical solution to this crisis. Not only would such an assumption be a logical *non sequitur*, but in regard to the actual, concrete content of the perspective, the socio-historical analyses, where they pose the question at all, do not in any case offer any solution other than the antinomies already discussed in the context of the philosophical analysis. The conclusion of these works is no more "optimistic" than that of the "philosophical" essays or the systematic writings. The difference lies in Lukács' approach to the question.

In the "philosophical" writings the question of whether culture is possible, of whether it is possible to shape life, appears, as we have seen, to be an *ethical problem*, a question of moral conduct – either active or passive behaviour, but in either case behaviour based on free, individual self-determination or, more generally a question of the way in which the individual leads his life. The form in which the question is posed in the historical analyses, on the other hand, implies by its very nature a concern with the sociologically determined *transformation of society* and its patterns of life, as well as with the mass movements that might bring this about and the possibility of their success, which can at least be defined in sociological terms.

As is apparent from Lukács' incompletely preserved correspondence, at about the beginning of 1918 his interest became focused on the sphere of ethics and, in particular on the relationship between ethics and politics.[67] We will not go

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[67] The first important document relating to this interest is Lukács' contribution to the debate on conservative and progressive idealism in *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* (Society for the Social Sciences). Compare "A konzervativ és progressziv idealizmus

far wrong, however, if we identify the relationship between the "philosophical" and historical analyses – already formulated as a conscious question by Lukács by this time – as the "limiting problem" of the whole of his early development. The antinomy between the two irresistible forces, "one pouring out without reasons from within and the other flowing without meaning in the world,"[68] already implicit in his earliest works, gradually became an explicit and conscious theoretical problem. Seen in this light, Lukács' conversion to Marxism in 1918 was not a break, an irrational hiatus in the evolution of his ideas, but an attempt to find both a theoretical answer and a practical solution to the question that had, in the final analysis, fuelled the whole of his early development.[69]

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vitája" ("The Debate between Conservative and Progressive Idealism"), in *Utam Marxhoz* (My Way to Marx), I, Budapest, Gondolat, 1971, pp. 177–186.

[68] *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie*, p. 241.

[69] Since a number of extremely important early works by Lukács still remain unpublished and others are available only in Hungarian, it would seem necessary, finally, to give a brief survey of them and use them to define, at least formally, the most important phases of his pre-Marxist writings.

From 1906 to 1907, Lukács was working on his first really significant work, *The History of the Development of the Modern Drama*, written as an entry for a competition run by the Kisfaludi Society. He won the prize for the manuscript but revised it substantially in 1908–09, as can be seen from several handwritten chapters of the first version. This revised version appeared in 1911. The study "Remarks on the Theory of Literary History" (see note 12) is in essence an extension of this work, clarifying its most important methodological presuppositions. The "essay period" spans the years 1908 to 1911. All of the essays contained in the volumes *Soul and Form* (in Hungarian, 1910) and *Aesthetic Culture* (1913; see note 8) were written during this period, as well as some of the essays contained in the volume on Béla Balázs (in Hungarian, 1918). In part, the works contained in the earlier volumes are, in accordance with Lukács' principles of selection and editing, "replies," which supplement each other in a polemical debate. We have already pointed this out in connection with a number of specific problems in the course of this study. In any case, one must examine some of the essays in the much less well-known volume *Aesthetic Culture* (above all, the eponymous essay and "The Ways have Parted") and the dialogue *On Spiritual Poverty* (see note 16), not printed in any of these volumes, alongside the most important essays in the volume *Soul and Form* in order to get to know the ideas and views of the young Lukács.

In 1912 Lukács began working on his systematic *Philosophy of Art*. The work was evidently interrupted by World War I; three chapters (about 450 typescript pages) were completed by 1914.

At the end of 1914 Lukács planned a substantial monograph on Dostoevsky. As can be seen from the handwritten synopsis, he wanted to touch on a number of questions (such as religion and atheism, the state, revolution, socialism and terror) in connection with his main theme. After completing the first, introductory, theoretical chapter, however, he stopped work on the project in 1915. The first chapter appeared in 1916 under the title *The Theory of the Novel*.

In 1916 Lukács returned to the philosophy of art and wanted to produce a detailed and systematic treatment of the subject. However, on the basis of a substantially revised conception and a new structural outline, he did not continue the work he had started before the war but made a radical new start. Of the earlier *Philosophy of Art* only the second chapter was to be incorporated into the new manuscript, probably in a revised form. By the beginning of 1918, four chapters of this new *Aesthetics* were finished (about the same length in total as the earlier work he had left unfinished). One of these, the third, "The Subject–Object Relation in Aesthetics," was published in 1917 in *Logos*. In May 1918 Lukács submitted five chapters of the still unfinished book to the University of Heidelberg in order to habilitate. Rickert and H. Meier even wrote their reports on the dissertation, but, of course, it never reached the stage of being discussed.

Chapter Nineteen

Walter Benjamin, or the Commodity as Phantasmagoria

"The artwork as commodity" – such a title would seem to designate an approach to art that is particularly apposite to theories situated within the broadly conceived Marxist tradition. It was, however, only from the early nineteen thirties that elaborate "commodity analyses of art" made their first appearance within this tradition, primarily in the writings of Brecht and Adorno – if one means by this expression endeavours to show that the form of commodity, in which works of art usually appear under modern conditions as marketable goods of specific type, not only determines the manner of their distribution, that is, the way they can reach the potential recipients, but fundamentally influences also both their form and content, in general the fate of art under capitalism.

Marx's own views concerning art were still deeply embedded in the humanist tradition of the aesthetics of German Idealism. The progressing commodification of all products of human activities, including those of "mental labour," was certainly regarded by him as one of those features of capitalist production

which makes it "hostile to art and poetry"[1] in general. But in respect of aesthetic productivity proper, the commodity form of its products appeared to him as an *externally* imposed, aggravating-restricting condition that necessarily remains alien to their own logic and norms. Actually this was already implied by the Marxian analysis of commodity itself, because its central notion, that of the "socially necessary labour time" as the determinant of the objective value of a commodity, can only be applied to products which are socially *reproducible*. Therefore it has no meaning in respect of genuine works of art as strictly individual and irreplaceable objectivations of human creativity (characteristics which Marx accepts as being self-evident). The artwork as universal human value can have no economic value in the proper sense, only an irrational, both economically and aesthetically accidental, *price*. And this means also that the "laws" of capitalist commodity production have no explanatory force in regard to the trends of the historical evolution of the modern art – beyond the general conflict between these two.

In fact there is a strong tendency in the whole oeuvre of Marx, beginning from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, to treat artistic production as the prototype of unalienated human activity.[2] Thus in the *Grundrisse* it is musical composition which he invokes as the existing example of "genuinely free labouring,"[3] and in the manuscript of 1865 (the so-called "seventh chapter of the Capital") he describes the authentic poet, in opposition to the paid scribbler, as someone who produces his work "like the silkworm produces silk, as the active affirmation (*Betätigung*) of *his own* nature."[4] This is the other reason, why genuinely artistic (and scientific) activities can never come to the situation of "real subsumption under capital". As he repeatedly

[1] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, Berlin, Dietz, 1957–1972, vol. 26/1, p. 257.

[2] This point has been underlined not only in the late writings of Lukács or by Ernst Fischer, but convincingly argued also by R. H. Jauss. See Jauss, "The Idealist Embarrassment: Observations on Marxist Aesthetics", *New Literary History* vol. 7, 1975–1976, esp. p. 199.

[3] Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin, Dietz, 1953, p. 505.

[4] Marx, *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*, Frankfurt, Verlag Neue Kritik, 1969, p. 70.

underlined,[5] they can be even "formally" subsumed under capitalist relations of production only to a limited degree.

In *History and Class-Consciousness* Lukács, departing from the Marxian analysis of commodity as the elementary and universal form of social wealth under capitalist conditions, developed the theory of reification. It purported to demonstrate that "in the structure of commodity-relation one can discover the model of all forms of objectivity as well as that of the corresponding to them forms of subjectivity in capitalist society"[6]. Accordingly, the form of commodity is able "to penetrate and to remould in its own image every life-expression of this society."[7] It was the Lukácsian theory of reification – as well as the direct experiences of the commercialisation of arts, especially palpable in the new mass media – that constituted the general starting point of attempts to utilise the basic categories of the Marxian commodity-analysis in the realm of aesthetics. Lukács himself, however, did not take this step, but – following Marx – actually regarded "authentic" art as an exemption from, and a counterveiling factor to, the universal process of reification. Though in *History and Class-Consciousness* problems of art occupy a marginal place, not only is Lukács' whole conception of praxis as subject-object identity essentially modelled upon artistic activity, but he also explicitly treats art as the living example of the possibility of a non-reified relation to reality. It is for him "the creation of a concrete totality due to a conception of the form which is directed at the concrete content of its material substratum."[8] His critique of the "aestheticism" of Schiller and the young Schelling is based not on the denial of the defetishising power of art, but on the argument that the aesthetic attitude necessarily remains a both derivative and contemplative, merely ideal relation of the isolated subject to reality, or else the aesthetical must be

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[5] See Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 26/1, pp. 385–386; and Marx, *Resultate*, pp. 70, 73–74 etc.

[6] G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxists Dialectics,* trans. R. Livingstone, Cambridge, MIT, 1997 p. 257.

[7] *ibid*., p. 259.

[8] *ibid*., pp. 317–318. The explanation of this "defetishising" capacity of genuine art is based at this time on the (later certainly abandoned) idea that art is primarily concerned with "man's encounter with nature," *ibid*., p. 411.

transformed into the constitutive principle of reality itself through a mythologising, irrationalist ontology.[9] Art therefore can only impose a form upon, but cannot provide a real, practical solution to, the antinomies of reification.[10]

It was *Adorno*, who in his brilliant youthful essay of 1932[11] drew the fundamental consequences from the Lukácsian theory of reification for the situation of the modern art: commodification is both the basic social precondition of its autonomy *and* the socio-economic process which threatens with its irrevocable liquidation, and he developed in respect of contemporary production and reception of music the aesthetic implications of this contradiction. Already, however, a year earlier, and on the basis of a radically different orientation, *Brecht* employed elements of the Marxian analysis of commodity to characterise the contemporary situation of arts.

Brecht used his own practical experiences with the filming of the *Threepenny Opera* and with the ensuing legal process over author's rights as a "sociological experiment"[12] to test the accepted ideas about the autonomy of art, spiritual values and authorial independence through their confrontation with the practice of the production of the artwork as commodity. This experiment makes manifest the purely illusory character of these ideas. It demonstrates the "enormous power" and "reshaping force of the commodity-form," the determination of the very structure of the work of art by the "viewpoint of its selling."[13] In its early phases commodification of art, disrupting all direct contacts between the artist and their public,[14] created the conditions for the

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[9] *ibid.*, pp. 320–321.

[10] *ibid.*, p. 341.

[11] T. W. Adorno, "Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der Musik," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1932 vol. 1, nos. 1–2 and 3.

[12] See B. Brecht, "Der Dreigroschenprozess: Ein soziologisches Experiment" [1931], in *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst,* Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1967, vol. 1, pp. 139–209.

[13] *ibid.*, pp. 167, 181–182.

[14] Compare: "Through the centuries-long habituation of dealing with the written work on the market of opinions and descriptions, through the fact that the concern with the written work has been removed from the writer, he received the impression that his client or customer, the middle-man, will transmit what he wrote to everyone … 'writing for someone' became simply 'writing'. One, however, cannot simply

emergence of a secularised conception of autonomous art. In its later development, however, especially in mass media like the film, it directly unmasked this idea as a mere ideology and lie. And Brecht specifically underlines that this is true of every kind and genre of literature and art. "In reality, of course, it is the whole art which without any exception found itself in the new situation … art as a whole becomes commodity or it does not become it at all."[15] By this the traditional concept of a "work of art" loses its applicability in general.

Brecht, however, does not regard this process of commodification as a totally negative one. By destroying the aesthetic ideology of the individual artwork of authorial self-expression and empathic reception, it at least negatively makes way for a new conception and practice of art as a collective "pedagogical discipline."[16] Furthermore, especially within the sphere of commercialised mass culture, technological and technical developments took place (such as the technique of montage) that deeply influence aesthetic production in the "high genres" (such as the novel or drama) of allegedly autonomous art as well. Under the economic husk of commodity new artistic materials and techniques incubate which can be put to a progressive use, *if* the re-functioning of the involved social apparatuses, and with them of the practice of art itself, become social reality.

> In this sense the recasting of spiritual values into commodities (works of art, contracts, legal processes are indeed commodities) is a progressive process and one can only approve it – presupposed that progress is understood as what advances forward, and not as the state of advancement, consequently that also the stage of commodity is regarded as capable of being overcome

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write the truth; one must write it precisely for someone, who can do something with it." Brecht, "Fünf Schwerigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit", *ibid*. pp. 229–230.

[15] *ibid*., p. 159.

[16] *ibid*., p. 158. Brecht's advocacy of a non-autonomous, political-educative, "operative" art in fact amounts to the conscious espousal of returning to the pre-modern understanding of "art" as useful and teachable skill in general. "It would be much more useful not to comprehend the concept 'art' in a too narrow way. One could safely draw into the orbit of its definition such arts as the art of operating, lecturing, machine building and flying." "Notizen über realistische Schreibweise", *ibid*., vol. 2, p. 350.

> through further advancement. The capitalist mode of production smashes to pieces the bourgeois ideology.[17]

> The technique, which is victorious here and which seems unable to deliver anything else but profit for some reptiles and thereby to promote barbarism, in the right hands will be able to do something completely different.[18]

In this way commodity analysis of art allows Brecht – in opposition to the ideology-critical approach of Lukács condemning modernist art in general as a phenomenon of decadence characteristic of a class in decline – to take up a selectively affirmative relation to definite tendencies of aesthetic modernism (and, of course, to make use of them in his own literary practice).[19]

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[17] *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 201.

[18] *ibid.*, p. 204.

[19] On this well-known aspect of the Lukács–Brecht debate see for example H. Brüggemann, "Aspekte einer marxistischen Produktionsästhetik," in *Erweiterung der marxistischen Literaturtheorie durch Bestimmung ihrer Grenzen*, ed. H. Schlaffer, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1974. One point, however, needs to be made against Brüggemann's rather one-sided representation of this dispute (in general characteristic of much of the relevant literature). Brecht's spirited and admirable defence of the "standpoint of production," of artistic innovation with its never avoidable risk of failure, is the demand of a *privilege* for the exceptional "producer" needing appropriate conditions of work – a privilege deserved by, and based upon, the trust in his unconditional commitment. What concerns the *rights* of the individual in general, Brecht's denial of them in the coming, new social order is radical. "We approach the epoch of mass-politics. What sounds comical in the case of the individual ("I do not give myself the freedom of thought"), does not sound so in the case of the masses. The masses do not think individually free … The masses of our epoch, directed by common interests, constantly reorganising themselves in accord with them and nevertheless functioning in unison, these masses are moved by quite determined laws of thought which are not generalisations of individual thinking … The kind of freedom, which the laws of competition force upon the capitalists, will not be preserved by thought in the next stage of development beyond capitalism. But another kind of freedom." *ibid.*, pp. 178–179. One must, however, add that similar ideas and sentiments can be found at this time in the writings of the majority of Leftist intellectuals – not only for example with Lukács of the 1920s, but in the much later essays of Walter Benjamin as well. "In order to endow the collectivity with humane features, the individual must be ble to endure

Some of the late writings of *Walter Benjamin* seem to echo and supplement these views of Brecht. This is particularly true of the two essays that made him in the sixties one of the cult-figures of sections of the Left: *The Author as Producer* and *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction*. Their (at least allegedly) main ideas even today largely determine the image of Benjamin as theorist for a wider interested public: the inevitable demise of autonomous, "auratic" art due to the development of technologies of mass reproduction qualitatively altering the very nature of a work of art; "politisation of art," its transformation into a laboratory of instruction and organisation inseparable from an innovatory artistic technique as the requisite radical answer to the dissolution of aesthetic aura; the critical-emancipatory potential of works of mass culture, first of all of the film, conferred upon them by the progressive technology and technique of their production. Benjamin, reconstructed along these lines, is often regarded as trying "to outbid Brecht in radicalism"[20] – in comparison with the latter his views are supposed to lead to a "fetishisation of technology"[21] as an autonomously developing, in itself progressive force. This is certainly a strange charge against a thinker who has seen in the idolatry of technology and in the faith in an irresistible progress spurred on by the growing mastery over nature "technocratic features later encountered in Fascism."[22] But perhaps it is no more strange than Benjamin's own characterisation of the post-auratic, emancipatory transformation of art in terms of endowing it with a particular "utilisabilty"

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inhumane ones. Humanness (*Menschlichkeit*) must be sacrificed at the level of individual existence, in order to make an appearance at the level of collective existence." *Gesammelte Schriften* (hereafter *GS*), eds. R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1972, vol. II/3, p. 11o2. An illiberal anti-individualism constituted a premiss which in a subterranean way was often shared by the representatives of the Right and the Left – a point which perhaps can offer some lessons for the present, too.

[20] R. Tiedemann, *Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 112.

[21] J. Frow, *Marxism and Literary History*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p. 108. For an elaborate evaluation along these lines see Brüggemann, "Aspekte einer marxistischen Produktionsästhetik."

[22] Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 699.

(*Verwertbarkeit*), with a "revolutionary use-value" (*Gebrauchswert*)[23] – given the fact that he at the same time thought of the emancipated world as one in which "the liberation of things from the compulsion to be useful"[24] becomes reality, since labour will then proceed according to "the model of children's play," being directed not at the production of values, but at making an "improved nature."[25]

Such criticisms are thus not baseless – it is easy to indicate a whole series of formulations in the writings of Benjamin that make them pertinent.[26] These formulations, however, constitute only one of the extreme poles[27] of that "no-man's-land" that Benjamin with so much willed effort conquered for himself

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[23] *Der Autor als Produzent*, *ibid*., vol. II/2, pp. 693, 695.

[24] *Das Passagen Werk, ibid*., vol. V/1, p. 277.

[25] Compare *ibid*., p. 456.

[26] For example, the designation of technical revolutions as those loci of rupture in the development of arts which predate, and direct, the changes both in the form and content of artworks (compare *Erwiderung an Oscar Schmitz*, *ibid*., vol. II/2, p. 752–753); technical progress as the foundation of the author's political progress (compare *Der Autor als Produzent*, *ibid*., p. 693); the possibility of predicting the developmental trends of "superstructure" from observations concerning the changes in the conditions of cultural production, primarily in the ways of reproduction of works of culture, and on the analogy with the Marxian prognoses in regard of the future evolution of the economic base of capitalism (*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit (Zweite Fassung), ibid*., vol. I/2, p. 473) and so on.

[27] "To act always, in all the most important matters, radically, never consistently;" "to decide not once for all, but in each moment – but *to decide*" (*Letter to G. Scholem*, 29 May 1926 – see Benjamin, *Briefe*, ed. G. Scholem and T. W. Adorno, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1978, vol. 1, p. 425). Benjamin's whole oeuvre enacts these advices. This is why all three of his critic-friends are, in their sharply opposed objections and advice, right against him: his writings do ambiguously juxtapose, often without theoretical mediation and resolution, contradictory impulses and insights. This is also why they are fundamentally wrong: they miss that theoretical project and conception which underlies just this practical stand of welcoming seemingly irreconcilable extremes. At the most immediate level this stand corresponds to Benjamin's conviction that the meaning of a concept/conception is to be found not in what all the subsumable phenomena identically *share*, but in the *extremes* it is able to encompass. And if the fundamental undecided ambiguity of Benjamin's oeuvre is located in a problematic

and the isolation of which he so much hated and half-heartedly attempted again and again to overcome – a "no-man's-land"[28] the boundaries of which were drawn by his relations to the three reference-persons of his intellectual life: Brecht, Adorno and Gershom Sholem. For all his, certainly very onesided, solidarity with Brecht cannot – should not – conceal the fact that their endeavours and ends were, even in the essays mentioned, in their essence fundamentally different.

For Brecht the autonomy of art is – and always has been – an ideological illusion hiding only its subservience to the interests of capital. Social-economic changes, directly involving the position of the intellectual in the cultural apparatuses, make its lie palpable. Literary and sociological "experiments" should directly *demonstrate* these facts to create a *critical-political* consciousness that sees through all the phrases about creative freedom and eternal cultural values to their foundation, to the only freedom offered in this society: the freedom of expropriation of surplus value.

For Benjamin, on the other hand, the aura, which expresses and substantiates the autonomous existence of the artwork in the period of classical capitalism, is not a consciously created, misleading ideological facade, but the historically-socially imposed relation of the recipient to the work of art. It is an objective feature of the "collective experience" of art which in this period

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admixture of Messianism and Marxism, then this also should be seen against the background of his life-long, central striving: through its radical profanisation both to overcome and to "save" the mythical. (For an interpretation along these lines see W. Menninghaus, *Schwellenkunde: Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1986.)

[28] I borrowed this expression from an essay of I. Wohlfahrt, "No-man's-land: On Walter Benjamin's 'Destructive Character'," *Diacritics*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1978. The antagonistic impulses governing Benjamin's oeuvre and the fragile unity of an underlying project into which he wove them were first outlined in the pathbreaking interpretative essay of J. Habermas, "Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik," in *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamin*, ed. S. Unsfeld, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1972, that actually initiated – after the various earlier attempts at the onesided "appropriation" of Benjamin – a deeper reception and understanding of his work. On the boundaries and limits of Benjamin's "no-man's land" see also the enlightening paper of S. Radnóti, "Benjamin's Dialectic of Art and Society," *Philosophical Forum*, vol. XV, no. 1–2, 1983–1984.

guides the production of its works, the way they are structured, and equally determines the typical comprehension of works of the more remote past, created under different conditions of production and reception.[29] It defines not what a work means, but the *manner*, the mode, in which it *can mean* something for the contemporary public, because the meaning of a work is not some fixed quality inhering in it, but is inseparable from the (historically changing) ways of its reception, and, more generally, from its pre- and post-history.[30] The dissolution of aura, associated with the new technical possibilities of mass reproduction, is seen by him in, and its significance is assessed by him within, the context (and as a symptom) of profound changes in the collective apperception of reality in general,[31] themselves expressing altered ways of life, new modes of habituation to the world. And the illumination of these connections aims at the *awakening* of consciousness from the dreamlike compulsion of its "natural" way of perceiving the world and endowing it with meaning, a way which is only the unintentional expression of a petrified and reified form of life. It aims to enable consciousness to decipher its images and in this way to set free that "weak Messianistic power," the utopian potential which is dormant even in the most depraved forms of experiencing as collective unconscious meaning-creating activity.

Seen in this broader and – to my mind – more appropriate context, the *Reproduction* essay appears closely and directly related to the task that from the very beginning of his literary activity stood at the centre of Benjamin's

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[29] "A medieval image of the Madonna was indeed not yet 'authentic' (*echt*) at the time of its making; it became 'authentic' in the course of the succeeding centuries and most strikingly so during the last one." *Das Kunstwerk* …, *GS*, Vol. I/2, p. 476.

[30] "For someone who is concerned with the works [of art] from the standpoint of historical dialectic, they integrate both their pre- and their post-history – a post-history due to which also their pre-history becomes comprehensible as being drawn into a continuous change. The works teach this person how their function can outlive their creator, leaving behind his intentions; how their reception by his contemporaries is a part of the effect which the work of art has upon us today; and how this effect rests not solely upon the encounter with the work in question, but also upon that history which allowed it to come down to our own age." *Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker*, *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 467.

[31] Compare *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 503.

philosophical interests:[32] the creation of a new conception and theory of *experience*. Through all the changes in the comprehension and realisation of this task, there remained in his approach to it some fundamental continuities. On the one hand, it always meant a program of regaining "the fullness of the concept of experience of the earlier philosophers"[33] against its narrow Kantian understanding, based upon the subject-object paradigm and tendentially reducing it to scientific observation, that is, to "the minimum of meaning."[34] Furthermore, this reductive conception of experience itself was conceived by him as a "singularly temporal" and "temporally restricted" one.[35] That is, Benjamin from the very beginning insisted upon the radical historicity of experience, including the organisation of sense-perception itself.[36]

> During long stretches of historical time, with alterations in the entire mode of existence of human collectivity, changes take place also in the mode of sense-perception. The way and manner of the organisation of human sense-perception – the medium in which it unfolds – is not only naturally, but also socially conditioned.[37]

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[32] Compare *"Erfahrung"* (1913) and *Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie* (1918), *GS*, vol. II/1, pp. 54–56, 157–171.

[33] *Über die Wahrnehmung* (1917), *GS*, vol. VI, p. 35.

[34] *Über das Programm …*, *GS*, vol. II/1, p. 159. Benjamin here defines his own task as providing "under the typics of Kantian thought the epistemological founding of a higher concept of experience" which would render "not only mechanical but also religious experience logically possible." *ibid.*, pp. 160, 164.

[35] *ibid.*, p. 158.

[36] It is at this point that Benjamin, originally motivated primarily by metaphysical-religious considerations, finds an unexpected coincidence between his own views and those of Lukács concerning history as the sequence of alterations in the principles of object-constitution and the forms of subject-relation corresponding to them. In *History and Class-Consciousness*, writes Benjamin in a letter to Scholem, much predating any general theoretical interest on his side in Marxism, "Lukács comes, on the ground of political considerations, to such propositions in epistemology which are – at least partially and perhaps not in such a far-reaching way as I originally supposed – either well familiar to me or confirm my views." 16 Sept. 1924, *Briefe*, vol. 1, p. 355.

[37] *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 478.

And the key to, and the model of, this changing organisation and mode of experiencing Benjamin found ultimately in *language*. "Every expression of human spiritual life can be conceived as a kind of language, and this conception implies, in the manner of a true method, new ways of posing the questions everywhere."[38]

Experience rests upon the ability to produce and apprehend similarities – upon a mimetic capacity. Human experience is organised around "non-sensuous" similarities and correspondences, the apprehension of which is made possible by language alone.[39] Language, however, is not to be identified with a system of signifiers arbitrarily related – as *means* of communication – to some signified, to some externally associated content. This represents only one aspect of language. One can communicate *what* is meant *through* language, because the *way* it is meant is directly and unintentionally expressed, physiognomically revealed *in* language as the *medium* of communication[40] – just as to understand the intentions of an interlocutor it is not sufficient to comprehend what their words and sentences refer to, but it is also necessary to grasp the pragmatic force of their utterances which may well be in a direct way expressed solely in countenance, in the tone of the voice or the manner of speaking. And great historical changes concern primarily not *what* is experienced and meant, but the *way and manner* they are experienced and meant: the ways the world is perceived and the modalities of meaning socially accepted as appropriate for its characterisation.

But what is directly ("magically") revealed *in* language cannot be formulated and stated *through* it. For the contemporaries their way of experiencing and meaning is "natural," it takes on the appearance of an ahistorical "ever-same." And though the ruinous remnants of other pasts, not least in their works

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[38] *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen* (1916), *GS*, vol. II/1, p. 140.

[39] Compare Tiedemann, *Dialektik im Stillstand*, p. 18. Concerning Benjamin's conception of language, to which here only the most cursory reference can be made, see the insightful interpretation of Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie*.

[40] Compare *Über Sprache …*, *GS*, vol. II/1, pp. 141–143; *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* (1921), *GS*, vol. IV/1, pp. 14–15; *Lehre vom Ähnlichen* (1933), *GS*, vol. II/1, pp. 208–209, and so on.

of art, are at our disposal, their truth being deposited first of all in those insignificant details which jar our habitual sensitivity,[41] they are usually assimilated to our own way of perception and receptivity. To free the historical energies of the present, its promise of a radically other future hidden under the spell of the "ever-same," one needs to "resurrect" the past – not *any* past, but that which, as its "origin,"[42] discloses an affinity with our way of creating and apprehending meaning, allowing in this way what is the most natural to us to appear in an unfamiliar garb as the strange, and what is alien to disclose itself as equally "natural." This labour of recollection demands, however, not the description and explanation of *the* past, of what has been, the continuous sequence of dead facts in their totality causally conditioning the present, but the "blasting out" of *a* past from the continuum of homogeneous time, the construction out of its fragmentary remnants a "dialectical image" which makes it literally re-experiencable, brings it to sensuous presence (*Anschaulichkeit*) again.[43]

"I have nothing to say. Only to show. I will not steal anything valuable, nor appropriate some ingenious formulations. But the trivia, the debris; not to draw up their inventory, but to allow them to come into their own in the only way possible: by using them."[44] Benjamin's certainly idiosyncratic method of

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[41] "The 'insignificant'… is the inconspicuous, or even the shocking (the two are not in contradiction) which survives the times in the genuine works and constitutes the point, in which the content breaks through for the true investigator." *Strenge Kunstwissenschaft (Erste Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. III, p. 366. And: "The appreciation or apology seeks to cover up the revolutionary moments in the course of history. It has the establishment of continuity at heart. It pays attention only to those elements of the work which already have been incorporated into its after-effect. It misses those points at which the transmission breaks down, thus it misses what is rugged and jagged in it, what offers a foothold to the person who intends to get beyond apology." *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 592.

[42] On Benjamin's concept of "origin" see Tiedemann, *Dialektik im Stillstand*, pp. 76–84; and G. Kurz, "Benjamin: Kritisch gelesen," *Philosophische Rundschau*, vol. 23, no. 3–4, 1976, pp. 179–180.

[43] Compare first of all *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, *GS*, vol. I/2, pp. 693ff.

[44] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 574. The first formulation of this thought had a different ending in Benjamin's manuscript: "I will not describe, but exhibit (*vorzeigen*) them." *ibid*., vol. V/2, p. 1030.

"literary montage," of the archaeology of the debris – this seemingly violent juxtaposition of fragments torn from their contexts: of isolated poetic images and literary modes of expression (of Baudelaire, Hugo, Blanqui, Nietzsche and so on) with objects and facts of past social history (arcades, panoramas, department stores, middle-class *intérieurs* and so on) and both of them with some typical ways of conduct and experience (of the *flaneur*, the collector, the gambler, the prostitute and so on) – all this is not, as Adorno suggested,[45] a misguided attempt to make philosophy "surrealistic," nor is it a "poetisation of causal analysis," a development of an aestheticised Marxism in symbolist form.[46] It is connected with the fundamental theoretical premises and the ultimate practical ends of his thought: to endow the past with "a higher degree of actuality than it could have possessed in the moment of its existence," for it is the ability to dialectically penetrate and to bring to sensuous presence (*Vergegenwärtigung*) its past which constitutes "the test of truth of contemporary action."[47]

Benjamin's theoretical turn to Marxism (which significantly postdated his practical solidarity with communist politics) was motivated by the recognition that the historically changing ways of collective experience and meaning-creation are inseparable from changes in the economic life-activities, manifested in the ways of material-practical livelihood of human communities. To exhibit not only the "formal signature of a historical type of perception," but also "to show the social transformations which found their expression in these changes of perception"[48] – this became now his self-chosen task. In the underlying continuity of his theoretical project it meant for him an attempt "to combine the accomplishment of Marxist method with heightened sensuous presencing (*Anschaulichkeit*)."[49] Benjamin was well aware of the eccentricity of this position within the Marxist tradition, of its deviation not only from simplistic economic determinism, but from ideology-critique as well.

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[45] Compare T. W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 26.

[46] Compare E. Lunn, *Marxism and Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, p. 22o.

[47] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/2, pp. 1026–1027.

[48] *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. I/2, pp. 478–479; see also his critique of Wölfflin in *Eduard Fuchs …*, *GS*, vol II/2, p. 480.

[49] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 575.

> Marx describes the causal connection between economy and culture. What matters here is the relation of expression. Not the economic genesis of culture, but the expression of the economy in culture – this must be described. In other words, what is attempted here is the comprehension of the economic process as a sensuously presentable primal phenomenon (*anschauliches Urphänomenon*) from which proceed all the manifestations … of the nineteenth century.[50]

And:

> The question is the following: if the substructure to a certain extent determines the superstructure in respect of the material of thought and experience, but this determination is not that of the simple reflection (*Abspiegeln*), how is it then – quite independently of the question about its originating cause – to be characterised? As its expression. The superstructure is the expression of the substructure. The economic conditions, in which society exists, find their expression in the superstructure; just as in sleeping the full stomach, though it may causally "condition" the content of dreams, finds in them not its reflection, but its expression. The collectivity expresses first of all its conditions of life. They find their expression in the dream, and their interpretation in awakening.[51]

These cursory and inadequate remarks about the general outline of Benjamin's views are necessary for the understanding of the way he applies "commodity analysis" (of a sort) to the interpretation of cultural phenomena. It was, as he repeatedly underlined, the concept of the commodity that should have constituted the theoretical fulcrum of both the great interconnected and equally unfinished projects of his late intellectual career aimed at the disclosure of the origin of modernity: the *Arcades-Work* and the book on Baudelaire.[52] In spite

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[50] *ibid*., pp. 573–574.

[51] *ibid*., pp. 495–496.

[52] In a letter (20 May1935) to Scholem about the *Arcades-Project* Benjamin indicates that its centre will be constituted by the overarching concept of the fetish character of commodity (*Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 654). The same point is made in a letter (20 March 1939) to Gretel Adorno (see *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 1172). Similarly, the concluding, third part of the Baudelaire-book, which should have presented its "philosophical foundation," was intended to make manifest "the commodity as the fulfilment of the allegorical

of the fact that these projects remained in torso, the main characteristics of Benjamin's approach can be reconstructed.

Its most characteristic feature is undoubtedly a negative one: Benjamin's relative lack of attention to commodity as a specific type of the organisation and integration of processes of production and exchange which increasingly draws into its orbit many branches of cultural activity and impacts upon all of them. He does make, of course, a number of acute observations related to such a topic. He points, for example, to changes in literary genres and styles which follow upon the fact that the rivalry among poets now takes the form of competition on an open market.[53] He surveys the process of emancipation of forms of reproduction from art through their commodification, and its multifarious impact both upon artistic development and upon the widening of the circle of goods for sale[54] and so on. But quite clearly it is not through, and due to, such observations that the concept of commodity acquires in his late projects a central theoretical significance.

It is, as Benjamin's own statements also underline, the Marxian theory of *commodity fetishism* which is consistently invoked by him as the conceptual centre of his own endeavours – though, one must add, in a rather specific understanding: as a theory about the depraved-reified form of collective experience under conditions of modernity determining also the alternative possibilities of contemporary art. "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new, dream-laden sleep came over Europe, and with it the reactivating of mythical forces."[55] Benjamin's "physiognomic materialism," revealing the "origin" of modernity, simultaneously intends to *defamiliarise* this way of apprehending reality as a "phantasmagoria," by invoking its early-transitory manifestations that are now present only in ruins striking us

viewpoint of Baudelaire" (letter to Horkheimer, 16 April 1938, and letter to Adorno, 9 Dec. 1938, in *Briefe*, vol. 2, pp. 752, 791–793.) Lastly, it is the fetish character of commodity which he designates as the ultimate "point of convergence" of these two projects: letter to Horkheimer, *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 1166.

[53] Compare especially *GS*, vol. V/1, pp. 422–424.

[54] Compare *ibid.*, pp. 48, 59, 824–846, and especially his remarkable essays on the history of photography, *GS*, vol. II/1, pp. 368–385; vol. III, pp. 495–507.

[55] *Das Passagen-Werk*, vol. V/1, p. 494.

by their strangeness, and at the same time it aims, precisely through such a distancing, to bring our own way of perceiving the world to reflexive, but *sensuous presence*, to make the veil, which our collective dream-images impose upon it, directly open to the waking gaze. For this veil not only conceals reality, but in its very distortions also vaguely outlines the possibilities of another, wanted future as well. "One can say there are two directions in this book: one which goes from the past to the present, and represents the arcades etc. as precursors, and the other, which goes from the present to the past, in order to let the revolutionary completion of these 'precursors' explode in the present …"[56]

It belongs to the very essence of commodity production that it envelops everything encompassed by it with kaleidoscopically changing compulsive images (*Zwangsvorstellungen*): things as commodities acquire for the experiencing subject the character of wish-symbols. A product of labour is a commodity if its actual utility, its use-value, constitutes only the external shell of its generic essence: universal exchangeability, exchange value. To live in a world which appears as the enormous collection of (real or potential) commodities means to endow objects with significations that have nothing to do with their prosaic use, with their useful properties, to confer upon them meanings that, while no longer transcendent but inner-wordly and in fact fabricated (through display, fashion, advertisement and so on), again become reified, since they actually repress and hide their own making, their origin in human labour and construction. This endows the things of everyday with an illusory glitter, an *aureole*: a weak remnant of the sacred. The world of commodity is not so much that of an impoverished rationality, but rather a world of re-enchantment which overlays everything with a spell promising profane enjoyment, but what it offers for enjoyment is the alienation of the individual from their own product and from other individuals, a contemplative empathy with the aesthetic lustre of exchange value.[57] And it is the lure of novelty

[56] *ibid*., vol. V/2, p. 1032.

[57] "[T]he new creations and forms of life which were primarily conditioned by commodity production … enter the universe of a phantasmagoria. It should be demonstrated that it is not first in theoretical elaboration, in ideological transposition that these creations become 'glorified' (*verklärt*), but already in their immediate presence,

that is primarily responsible for the continuous maintenance of this phantasmagoric attraction. "Newness is a quality not dependent upon the use-value of commodity. It is the source of the illusion that belongs inalienably to the image produced by the collective unconscious. It is the quintessence of false consciousness, of which fashion is the tireless agent."[58] It is the externality and arbitrariness of the imposed and sensuously evoked meanings that allow their incessant change, and it is this very instability and flux of significations which ultimately mobilise archaic, unconscious wish-images that reveal their hidden essence in the "ever-same:" the foundation of the world of commodity in the sheer meaninglessness of its ultimate source, abstract labour, work reduced to simple physical effort devoid of qualitative differences and independent of all ends. "The point consists not in the fact that 'again and again the same' happens, and, of course, even less is here the eternal return meant. The point is rather that the physiognomy of the world precisely in what is the newest does not change at all, that this newest in all its parts remains always the same. – This constitutes the eternity of hell."[59] And:

> The thing first exercises its effect in alienating people from one another as commodity. It exercises it through its price. The empathy into the exchange value of the commodity, into its identical substratum – this constitutes the decisive point. (The absolute qualitative identity of time taken by the labour

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in a sensuous way. They manifest themselves as phantasmagories." *Das Passagen-Werk,* vol. V/2, p. 1256. "These images are images of wish and in them the collectivity strives simultaneously to overcome and to glorify both the immaturity of social product and the lack of a social order of production," *ibid*., vol. V/1, pp. 46–47. "The world exhibitions glorify the exchange value of commodities. They create a framework within which their use-value recedes into the background. They open up a phantasmagoria into which people enter to let themselves to be distracted. The entertainment industry makes it easier for them, since it lifts them to the level of commodity. They yield to its manipulations by enjoying their alienation from themselves and from the others," *ibid*., pp. 50–51. "Actually, one can hardly conceive the 'consumption' of the exchange value as anything else but empathy with it," letter to Adorno, 9 Dec. 1938, *Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 799, and so on and so on.

[58] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 55.

[59] *ibid*., vol. V/2, p. 676.

> that produces exchange value – this is the grey background against which the gaudy colours of sensation stand out in relief.)[60]

The antinomy of novelty and the ever-same, which in its most elementary form manifests itself in the conjunction of incessantly changing fashion and mass production, constitutes the essence of the experience of the fetishistic world of modernity.[61]

> The aspect of primal history (*das urgeschichtliche Moment*) in the past – and this is both consequence and precondition of technology – is no longer, as it once was, disguised by the tradition of the church and family. The old prehistoric shudder surrounds already the environing world of our parents, since we no longer are bound to it by tradition. The technical sign-worlds (*Merkwelten*) are dissolved more rapidly, the mythic in them comes to light more rapidly and crassly, a completely different sign-world must be set up and opposed to them more rapidly.[62]

The practical relation of the individual to their surroundings is less and less characterised by competence based on the habitual handling of, and caring for, the stable objects of a familiar milieu at which they are at home – their relation to the "technical sign-world" is increasingly dominated by *taste*.[63] The very structure of contemporary experience acquires aestheticised

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[60] *ibid*., vol. V/1, p. 488.

[61] "The dialectic of commodity production in high capitalism: the novelty of the product acquires – as stimulator of demand – a significance unknown till now. At the same time the 'ever-again-the-same' appears in an obvious manner in mass production," *ibid*., vol. V/1, p. 417. "[T]he antinomy between the new and the ever-same … produces the illusion with which the fetish character of commodity overlays the genuine categories of history," letter to Horkheimer, 3 Aug. 1938, *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 1166.

[62] *Das Passagen-Werk*, vol. V/1, p. 576.

[63] "The consumer … is usually not knowledgeable when he appears as a buyer," while "the importance of his taste increases – both for him and for the manufacturer. For the consumer it has the value of a more or less elaborate masking of his lack of expertness. Its value to the manufacturer is a fresh stimulus to consumption," "Methodenfragment," *GS*, vol. I/3, pp. 1167–1168. "Habits constitute the armature of collectively shared experience (*Erfahrung*), they are disintegrated by the subjective experience of the moment (*Erlebnis*)," *GS*, vol V/1, p. 430.

features – not by chance it is designated by Benjamin by one of the favourite terms of aesthetic modernism: *Erlebnis*. In view of the fact that the objects of this world have lost their constant meaning fixed by tradition, "authentic" experience become privatised, transformed into an incommunicable inward event. With the disintegration of the traditional organisation of experience, of the social cadres of memory, it acquires a shock-like instantaneity, but this instant then – due to the direct coincidence of present, conscious impressions with past, subconscious desires – is invested with an empathic colouring. (Here Benjamin's theory of the shock again clearly parallels the Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean theories of the explosive instanteneity, *Plötzlichkeit*, of aesthetic perception.)[64]

It is, of course, rich in irony that Benjamin finds the central categories of German aesthetics (beautiful illusion, taste, *Erlebnis*, *Plötzlichkeit*) directly realised in the depraved world, the "hell" of commodities. But this is also what is meant by the program of disclosing "the expression of the economy *in* culture," economy understood not as a complex, many-layered and mediated objective form of social-institutional organisation, but as a "sensuously presentable primal phenomenon:" the way their world is lived by the historically situated individuals in, and through, their material-practical activities. For *culture* – the very conception of which is of recent origin, connected with the triumph of commodity production[65] – is precisely what replaces genuine, effective, community-building tradition in the world of modernity. Or to put it differently: "culture" is a historically specific way of integrating past and

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[64] In fact, *Erfahrung*, experience organised and articulated through collectively shared, traditionally fixed meanings *bifurcates* under the conditions of modernity into *Erlebnis*, ineffably privatised, subjectively empathic experience, and *information*, which is unrestrictedly communicable and verifiable, but remains completely unrelated to, and unintegrable into, personal life. In this way the dualistic structure of modern culture, its antinomistic division into the arts and the sciences, directly expresses the structure of everyday experience. Compare first of all *Der Erzähler*, *GS*, vol. II/2, pp. 438–465, and *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*, *GS*, vol. I/2, pp. 607–655.

[65] Compare *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 584; vol. V/2, p. 1256. At times Benjamin states this point in a sharper, more shocking (and rather more questionable) way: "The formation of the concept of culture seems to belong to an early stage of Fascism." *Pariser Brief I* (1936), *GS*, vol. III, p. 485.

present works of art, science and so on into a tradition which by its very character robs them of genuine effectivity: of the ability to guide collective action, to have a "transformative effect."[66] For as "cultural objects" such works are nothing but the "sedimentation of memorable things and events that never broke the surface of human consciousness because they never were truly, that is politically, experienced."[67] Benjamin's critique is primarily directed not against the ideological identification of culture with the "sum of privileges" of the rulers, nor against its actual dependence upon the "monopoly of cultivation" of a minority,[68] though, of course, he is well aware of both these facts. It is directed against culture as such, understood as the particular manner products of "mental" labour acquire nowadays social acknowledgment and significance, an objectively imposed relation to these works which conditions both their creation and their receptive understanding, and which the concept of culture only makes explicit.[69] The centrality of the concept of commodity for the analysis of the culture of modernity therefore does not mean for Benjamin just a concentration upon the fact of commodification

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[66] *ibid.*, p. 489.

[67] *Eduard Fuchs …*, *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 477. Compare also: "To the notion of 'saving' … From what will the phenomena be saved? Not only, and not so much from the disrepute and contempt into which they have fallen, but rather from the catastrophic way they are very often presented in a certain manner of their transmission, in their 'appreciation as heritage' … There is a transmission which is the catastrophe." *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 591.

[68] "It would be absurd to conceive the forms of existence of a classless society on an analogy with the image of a humanity of culture [*Kulturmenschheit*]," *ibid.*, p. 583.

[69] In this respect it is characteristic that in his review of the work of the Frankfurt School (*Ein deutsches Institut freier Forschung* [1938]), referring to Marcuse's famous paper about "affirmative culture," Benjamin emphasises only the *negative* aspect of this concept (compare *GS*, vol III, pp. 525–526). His pronouncedly distanced attitude to the acknowledged "masterpieces" of cultural history also belongs to this context: as thoroughly assimilated to, and foundational for the constitution of, "culture," these works cannot be in the present made into the object of genuine, effective experience. Beyond that, it is, of course, also true that in general "permanence and obsolescence mean … little to him: for he does not understand this history as a legitimate critical authority." Radnóti, "Benjamin's Dialectic of Art and Society," p. 163.

of "spiritual values." It rather concerns the transformation of products of artistic, intellectual etc labour into spiritual *values*, the "spiritualisation" of exchange value. Culture is the phantasmagoria, as it were, of a second order in which "the bourgeoisie enjoys its own false consciousness."[70]

Culture *is* a reified-reifying relation to, and conception of, those human accomplishments that fall into its sphere: it transforms them into objects available and inventarisable once and for all, into valuable "goods" that (at least ideally) constitute the possession of the whole humankind.[71] Their claim to universality follows from their being posited not as everyday, material, but as spiritual goods or values; culture means to conceive them as "ideal objects": unique, self-enclosed, independent, seamlessly coherent *totalities of meaning*. Like the reified-fetishistic experiences of everyday life, cultural experience also acquires its fetishistic character because it conceals and/or mystifies the way these meanings are made and can be remade. "As a sum-total of all those formations (*Gebilde*) which are considered independent, if not from the process of production in which they originate, then from that process in which they endure, the concept of culture carries a fetishistic trait. It appears in a reified form."[72] When Benjamin underlines that every document of culture is at the same time a document of barbarism, since it suppresses what its existence owes to the drudgery of the anonymous many,[73] he means not only the soulless, physical labour of those who – excluded from culture – produce the material conditions which make the "creative effort of great geniuses" possible, but also the equally anonymous labour of the recipients and transmitters of "cultural goods" who keep their meaning not simply preserved, but open and actualisable. In the conception of culture "the awareness is lost that these goods owe to a continuous social labour not only their origin, but also their transmission in which, moreover, they are further worked upon, that is, become changed."[74] The emphasis upon the exceptional "creativity" of

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[70] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 55.

[71] Compare *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 477; vol. III, p. 525; vol. V/1, p. 584 and so on.

[72] *Eduard Fuchs …*, *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 477.

[73] *Über den Begriff …*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 696.

[74] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 1255. One of Benjamin's main objections against the usual practice of ideology-critique follows from this standpoint of the

artistic production as an irrational process fundamentally opposed to all kinds of "fabrication" – an emphasis organically pertaining to the notion of "culture" – actually fulfils the function of fixing the recipients in a purely passive attitude, making them the ideal *consumer* of spiritual "goods."[75]

The transformation of works of art into "cultural values" therefore implies a correspondence under conditions of modernity between the fundamental structural features of the everyday experience of the commodity-world and the sui generis aesthetic experience. This is a parallelism that is also institutionally organised and imposed. The practice of art criticism, and more generally the press, create a genuine market of cultural goods in which they compete with each other.[76] Industrial exhibitions and department stores represent the "secret schema of construction" of the museum.[77] In general what is meant today by aesthetic attitude and experience represents the "spiritualisation" of the experience of commodity. First of all the integration of the work of art into the context of tradition as a unique "cultural treasure," imposing upon its public the attitude of an empathic and contemplative surrender, the literally meant "reception" of its pre-existent, unchangeable and inexhaustible meaning-content, transforms the sensuous aureole of the commodity into the *aesthetic aura* of the work: spiritual elevation creates the awareness of

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creativity of reception and historical openness of meaning. Ideology-critique, exclusively emphasising the connection between the aesthetic signification of a work and the social structure of its time of origin, makes the structure relevant to the deciphering of its meaning fixed, given once for all. "In truth its aspect should change with the different epochs which direct their glance back upon the work," *Pariser Brief II* (1936), *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 500.

[75] Compare *Pariser Brief I*, *ibid.*, p. 493.

[76] Compare *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, pp. 56, 422–423 and so on.

[77] Compare *ibid.*, pp. 239, 522; but see also the characterisation of museums as violently intensified *intérieurs*. It should, however, be strongly underlined that these parallelisms do not involve with Benjamin the supposition of some causal dependence of the forms of cultural organisation upon those of economic ones, or a temporal antecedence of these later. In fact the actual historical relation between the two may well be the inversed: "The contemplative attitude which is educated on the work of art, is slowly transformed into a more covetous one in respect of the stock of commodities," *ibid.*, p. 521.

distance, inapproachability.[78] "What is properly aura? A remarkable tissue from space and time: the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be."[79] "The essentially distant object is the inapproachable one … The closeness one may attain to its material aspect does not impair the distance which it retains in the aspect of its appearance."[80]

At the same time aesthetic aura – being not only a spatial, but equally a temporal phenomenon of experience – implies also the return of the basic antinomy between the "new" and the "ever-same" in the realm of the aesthetical. Aura closely knits together "uniqueness (*Einmäligkeit*) and permanence,"[81] and, in a sense, both objectively and subjectively. The aura as a characteristic pertaining to the work itself is identical with its "authenticity." Authenticity, however, means precisely the empirical singularity of the art-object, its existence "here and now" but only *insofar* as this uniqueness bears witness (in opposition to forgeries) to its belonging to a tradition posited as universally valid, that is, as enduring "forever." "The authenticity of a thing is the sum-total of all that is transmissible (*Tradierbares*) in it from the time of its origin, ranging from its material duration to its historical testimony … The uniqueness of the work of art is identical with its embeddedness in the context of tradition."[82] At the same time this contradictory enmeshment of temporal singularity and permanence constitutes also a basic phenomenological trait of the subjective aesthetic-auratic experience: the experience of an instantaneous gripping illumination in which time itself seems to come to a standstill, the paradox of the "fulfilled present" as the unity of momentariness and eternity. Lastly, the contradictory temporal structure of the everyday experience of commodity is equally expressed in the opposed tendencies of modern artistic activity: in the compulsion to ever more radical innovation, on the one hand, and the tendency towards instantaneous "musealisation" (for example, creation of works from the very beginning intended for exhibition in museum), on the other hand.[83]

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[78] Compare *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 1255.

[79] *Das Kunstwerk … (Erste Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 440.

[80] *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *ibid*., p. 480.

[81] *ibid*., p. 479.

[82] *ibid*., pp. 477, 479.

[83] Compare *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, pp. 55–56, 514.

It has often been argued in the interpretative-critical literature that the connection Benjamin establishes between his own project and the Marxian theory of commodity –or, even more narrowly, with Marx's theory of fetishism – is at best tenuous, and is largely based on misunderstanding. This point has already been raised by Adorno in his critical reaction to the first exposé of the *Arcades-Project*, from 1935.[84] Adorno's principal objections concerned two large problem-complexes. On the one hand, he criticised what he regarded as the hypostasis of collective consciousness, respectively unconsciousness into a supraindividual subject and the allied equation of the archaic elements in dream-images with the truth of utopia (through reference to the classless character of "primitive" societies). Both the appropriateness of these remarks in respect of the first exposé itself and their pertinence to the whole of the *Arcades-Project* (especially to its later elaboration) are a matter of debate into which I cannot enter here. It suffices to say that Benjamin to some degree acknowledged the legitimacy of these critical observations: passages directly giving rise to them disappeared from the later (1939) exposé of the project and also, so it seems, from his later notes to the work as well. On the other hand, a very good case can be made[85] for the essential continuity of the *Arcades-Project* from the time of the inception of its idea, and for the centrality in it of the notion of collective dream-images and their utopian potential.

It is, however, Adorno's second main objection that is directly relevant to our discussion. He charges that Benjamin in an illegitimate way "psychologises" the Marxian conception of commodity fetishism by transposing it into consciousness, owing to which it loses its "dialectical power." "The fetish character of commodity is not a fact of consciousness at all, but dialectical in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness."[86] From this he draws then some basic methodological conclusions concerning the notion of "dialectical image" as an objective constellation which is the self-representation of the social situation, and therefore cannot have some separate social "effect."[87]

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[84] Compare Adorno's letter to Benjamin, 2 Aug. 1935, in Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. 2, pp. 671–683.

[85] This point was most convincingly argued by S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1989, especially. pp. 279–286.

[86] Letter to Benjamin, 2 Aug. 1935, in Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 672.

[87] Compare *ibid*., p. 678.

In general it is difficult to disentangle in Adorno's objections genuinely apposite criticism from arguments based upon the unconscious misrepresentation of the basic intentions of Benjamin's project, on a silent substitution of Adorno's own premises in the place of his. Leaving aside the point that Adorno's categorical formulation (fetishism not being a fact of consciousness at all) is, as a case of Marx-interpretation, at least as questionable as Benjamin's use of these ideas, the charge of "psychologism" (in its more empathic and nastier formulation: "falling under the spell of bourgeois psychology")[88] is at some level rather absurd. Benjamin's fundamental concern is to bring to presence the way experience is historically constituted under the conditions of capitalist modernity, and he uses the Marxian theory of fetishism for *this* purpose: to disclose basic communalities in the perception and the lived, direct interpretation of the world as expressions of the way individuals are socially inserted into it by the very character of their material practice – communalities which under these conditions remain "unconscious," but *can* be transformed into community-forming powers. This *whole* enterprise is "psychologising" if one regards the notion of "experience" as a (solely) psychological concept – but it certainly does not operate (at least not at this level of the generality of intent) with psychological principles of explanation. And in fact it would seem that Adorno questions the meaningfulness of such a project in principle. His formulations suggest that for him the only legitimate way of analysing contemporary society is in terms of a dualistic, polar relation between the objective, reified social structure, on the one hand, and (as its correlate and effect) the alienated, completely atomised individual subject, on the other hand.[89] Whatever the merits or demerits of such a position, it implies a complete rejection of what Benjamin attempts to do and this hardly represents a propitious basis for critical understanding.

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[88] *ibid*., p. 672.

[89] "[W]ho is the subject of the dream? In the nineteenth century certainly only the individual; … [T]he objective surplus value realises itself precisely in the individual subjects and against them. Collective consciousness was invented only in order to divert attention from the true objectivity and its correlate, ie. alienated subjectivity. It is up to us to polarise and to dissolve in a dialectical manner this 'consciousness' between society and the individual, instead of galvanising it as the image-correlate of the commodity-character," *ibid*., pp. 674–675.

On the other hand, however, Adorno's charge concerning the misapprehension and misuse of the Marxian conception of fetishism is in some respects quite legitimate and well founded. Marx consistently underlined the "objectivity" of fetishistic phenomena. At the most elemental level this meant that within the framework of a functioning capitalist economy fetishistic representations *correctly* orient the isolated individual in their economic activities, that is, that they are pragmatically effective. Precisely for this reason they are also constantly confirmed and reinforced by the life-experiences these individuals gain in the overall process of reproduction, to the possibility of which these representations themselves contribute. Benjamin's notions of "phantasmagoria," "dream-image," "wish-symbol" and so on seem to be hardly reconcilable with these ideas of Marx, for whom the content of such representations was quite narrowly circumscribed by the requirements of their pragmatic efficacy and economic functionality. In fact Benjamin's views rather point to a conceptualisation of commodity which was repeatedly and resolutely rejected by Marx: to its (among others: Hegelian) understanding as objectified social *sign*.[90]

There are, however, much more fundamental theoretical oppositions involved in this divergence of views indicated by Adorno. Marx and Benjamin share a dialectical understanding of alienation and reification as historical processes which have not only a "negative" significance, but in all the human devastation they cause, also simultaneously create the positive conditions for a future emancipation. They also both agree not only in regarding fetishistic everyday representations as being objectively conditioned by the character of the life-practices in capitalist society, but equally in acknowledging their social-historical effectivity. They understand, however, both these points in completely different ways.

Marx's theory was primarily that of the *historical process*, centring on the problem of *reproduction,* which allowed him to reconcile the viewpoints of continuity and discontinuity in history. It first of all aimed at dissolving the appearance of the thing-like fixity of social relations, arrangements and

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[90] It should be noticed, however, that Benjamin in his notes to the *Arcades-Project* excerpts one of the places from *The Capital*, in which Marx criticises this conception of commodity: see *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 805.

institutions that for the isolated individual are *de facto* pre-given realities to which he can only adapt. He tried to demonstrate, however, how these relations are produced and reproduced from day to day in the combined social activity of the historically situated individuals, who in this process themselves constantly recreate and change the "external" conditions of their own activity.[91] Fetishistic representations were socially effective for him because he regarded them as *functional* to this process of reproduction. As practical interpretations of environing reality in terms of which actions are understood and motivations formed, they insert individuals in a definite way into this system of relations – in a way that contributed to its historical emergence and continues to contribute to its maintenance. Any idea of their potentially emancipatory role or utopian content was completely alien to his thought, at least in the later period of his theoretical activity.[92] His dialectics located the potential of its revolutionary overcoming, created by capitalism, decidedly elsewhere. Partly in "objective" conditions: in the growing disfunctionalities of its process of economic reproduction which in its incessant extension simultaneously makes less and less secure the conditions of its own possibility. Partly, and not less importantly, he located it on the "subjective" side: in the fact that

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[91] This constituted also the most general premise of the Lukácsian theory of reification: "History consists precisely in the degradation of every kind of fixation into an illusion: *History is nothing but the history of the unceasing transformation of the forms of objectivity that shape the existence of men*." Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* p. 372.

[92] In this respect it may be worthwhile to recall Marx's attitude to the related question of the effectivity of "historical myths." Marx was no less aware than Benjamin of the great role that evoking "the spirit of the past" has played, especially in epochs of revolutionary crisis. He, however, unambiguously restricted this role to the political revolutions of the past. The coming social revolutions cannot draw their motivation and enthusiasm ("their poetry") from world-historical reminiscences – this would only obscure the consciousness of their unique task. They must be oriented toward the future. They "should let the dead bury their dead." Compare Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 8, pp. 115–116. For Benjamin, on the other hand, the image of the working class as "the redeemer of future generations" actually undercuts the sources of its strength. "Such a schooling made it to unlearn both its hatred and its will to sacrifice. For both of these are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors, and not by the ideal of liberated grandchildren." *Über den Begriff …*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 700.)

in the course of this development the direct producers acquire in their everyday working and life-activities such (not merely technical, but broadly social) needs, attitudes and abilities that can only be satisfied and exercised under fundamentally different social conditions, whose establishment they also make possible. It is this accelerated "accumulation" of forces of production and intercourse – which ultimately are "nothing more than the development of individual capacities"[93] and the evolution of which constitutes the axis of continuity in history – that confers upon the world epoch of capitalist alienation a "progressive" character, and makes it a watershed in the history of human *progress*.

Thus Benjamin's devastating critique of the concept of progress,[94] though directly addressed to German Social Democracy, necessarily implicates some of the basic premises of Marx's own theory too. The motives of this criticism certainly are inseparable from the peculiarities of his own intellectual development, from the roots of his thought in the traditions of Jewish Messianism and German Romanticism. But there are also much less idiosyncratic and personal reasons which Benjamin himself formulated with exemplary clarity: "The experience of our generation: that capitalism will not die a natural death."[95] And in this respect it is quite irrelevant whether Marx himself did or did not assume the historical "inevitability" of socialist revolution – he certainly did suppose that its *conditions* mature "naturally" (that is, as the result of the immanent necessity of the economic process of reproduction) in the course of capitalist development.

The untenability of this presupposition was the experience of a whole generation of theorists who lived through the failure of German (and more generally Western) revolution and the rise of Fascism. Since they at the same time accepted as an evident empirical fact (and the experiences of the early 1930s only seemed to confirm this view) the presence of a general, objective-economic crisis of the capitalist system, the problem appeared to them primarily as that of a "deficit of radical motivation" on the side of the revolutionary subject, the proletariat. "Western Marxism" of the 1930s and early 1940s

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[93] Marx–Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 67–68.

[94] Compare primarily *Über den Begriff …*, *GS*, vol. I/2, pp. 697–701.

[95] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/2, p. 819.

represented a series of attempts to find a theoretical orientation as to how this gap between the "objective" and "subjective" conditions can be closed. It was dominated by a search for new sources of revolutionary *motivation*. Gramsci, who perceived the problem largely in political-organisational terms, found the answer in the myth of the "organic intellectual." Lukács invoked the idea of the emancipatory potential of the great cultural tradition, first of all the defetishising capacity of "realist" art. In spite of all the differences in their views, especially concerning their respective judgement upon aesthetic modernism, in its most general direction such a solution was not alien to Adorno, either – only he recognised that this is not a solution at all: under contemporary conditions works of high culture lack mass social effectivity, and he drew from this fact the inevitably pessimistic conclusions for the historical present. The latter problem was clearly recognised by Benjamin as well; it motivated him, however, to search for those forms of *everyday* mass experience upon whose foundations a *counterculture* of revolutionary will and commitment could be built. And in this general intention Benjamin is closer to Marx than most of his contemporaries.

But Benjamin could no longer identify these sought-for life-experiences with those "positive" collective traits that the working class – as both the subject and the object of the "civilising progress" of capitalism – inevitably acquires in its course. For, from the vantage point of later historical experiences, these civilisatory accretions appeared as just those characteristics which *integrate* the proletariat into capitalist society. Faced with this problem, the uniqueness of Benjamin's project lay in the fact that he thought he could uncover an emancipatory potential in those forms of experience, which in the whole Marxist tradition have been regarded – as illusory misrepresentations of its real nature – precisely as "integrative."[96] In a sense one could say that he

[96] Adorno, I think, quite legitimately pointed to the fact that these experiences are certainly not class-specific: "in the dreaming collective there remain no differences between the classes," letter to Benjamin, 2 Aug. 1935, in Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. II, p. 675. Benjamin decidedly and very rigidly upheld the idea of the working class as the sole revolutionary agent – from a Marxist standpoint this is perhaps the most orthodox feature of his thought. The content of his theory, however, points actually toward a much more heterogeneous and flexible conception of the subject of the revolutionary

transposed an argumentative move central to ideology-critique from the level of high cultural creations to that of everyday experience. High ideologies, it was usually argued, as "idealisations" of capitalist society, also create a distance to its empirical reality and therefore in their very "affirmative" character contain also a moment of negation, a utopian potential as well. In a sense Benjamin applies this very idea to the fetishistic consciousness of the everyday. But while in the case of cultural-ideological formations their critical potential was seen as the function of the consciously undertaken effort at the totalisation, universalisation and rationalisation of the de facto relations, endowing them with normative validity, the fetishistic images and experiences of the everyday have for Benjamin the same capacity, due to their dream-like "irrationality," internal incoherence and fragmentation, which transposes what are in fact normative expectation into brute factualities.

This shift involved also a basic change in the very meaning of dialectics. For Benjamin it no longer meant a theory of the contradictory tendencies of a historical process, which in the very reproduction of its structuring characteristics necessarily eliminates or undermines the conditions that alone make this reproduction possible. For him it became a theory of *ambiguity*, of the "frozen unrest" of a historical *moment*[97] that in its essence is only emptily repeated in all its kaleidoscopic change – as long as it is not blasted apart. Ultimately the theories of Marx and Benjamin operate with irreconcilable conceptions of historical time. Benjamin understood the specificity of this latter as a "historical index" which pertains to each "time of the now" (*Jetzzeit*) establishing its figurative (*bildliche*) affinity with particular moments of the past that thereby (and only thereby) become "legible," that is re-evocable as experience in the present.[98] Marx, on the other hand, meant by it primarily the unidirectionality

action. It is not by chance that whenever he invokes its *image*, it is not the organised proletariat, but the amorphous and spontaneous *urban crowd* that appears in his writings.

[97] "Ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) is the figurative appearance of the dialectics, the law of dialectics at the standstill." *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 55. This ambiguity underlies Benjamin's whole conception of history: it is the past whose mythic power is to be destroyed, the past that is "one single catastrophe," which is at the same time the sole legitimate ground of hope for a redemptive future.

[98] Compare *ibid*., pp. 576–578.

and irreversibility of long-term processes of historical change in which discontinuous social metamorphoses are structuring patterns superimposed upon an underlying accumulative material continuity.

These considerations do not aim at providing an answer to the sterile question: was or was not Benjamin a "genuine" Marxist, are his views a supplementation, a corrective revision, or some unassimilable, alien addition to the "orthodox/original" meaning (as some invariable datum) of Marx's theory? This question not only rests on untenable hermeneutical presuppositions, but also is of no real consequence. From the 1950s on Benjamin's views were received (not exclusively, but predominantly) within the context of a Marxist tradition, and they became – at least concerning the understanding of the culture and the art of modernity – an integral constituent of its (in any case highly heterogeneous) corpus. (Though, of course, even this process has not been unambiguous – in not a few cases Benjamin was the stepping stone on a path leading far away from Marx.) The contact and contrast with Marx (and primarily with the views expressed in his late economic works)[99] that we

[99] In any case such a comparison alone does not answer the broader question concerning Benjamin's relation to, and connection with, the whole of the Marxist tradition, quite complex (and contradictory) already in the 1930s. Beyond a number of his explicit references to ideas from early writings of Marx (even one of the chosen mottos to the methodological file of the *Arcades-Project* quotes from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*: "The reform of consciousness consists *only* therein that one wakes the world … out of the dream of itself"), for this broader purpose one should have first of all considered Benjamin's relation and indebtedness to the "unorthodox" Marxism of Ernst Bloch. There is also the influence of Korsch upon whom he mainly relied in the interpretation of the general theoretical content of Marx's economy. There are also less obvious points of contact, for example with the Engelsian depiction of "primitive communism," or with Kautsky's reconstruction of the social origins of Christianity (in general with the "Romantic" tradition within Marxism itself). These latter, of course, should not be overemphasised. Engels and Kautsky have created – for mobilisatory purposes in the present – "historical myths" which they (no doubt, with utter sincerity) regarded as the objective truths of a "scientific" historiography describing "*wie es gewesen war*." For Benjamin, however, it is not the "myths" of the past that can unlock revolutionary energies, but the "awakening" from them: the recognition of their constructed character from the standpoint of the present that allows the utopian motivations they embody to appear in a "profane" form.

drew here served only one purpose: to bring into a clearer focus the fundamental theoretical intention and attitude of Benjamin as it is particularly embodied in his conception of a "dialectics of ambiguity."

This dialectics demands and hopes to find the historically "positive," the potentially radical motivating force for transcending the hell of the present, in those socially "negative" forms of experience, which as deceptive illusions in their direct effect bind the individuals to its conditions since they endow them with the false radiance of seemingly ever new pleasure and beauty.

> It is very easy to establish, according to definite viewpoints, for any given epoch, in respect of its various "spheres," binary divisions of the kind that posit on one side what is "fruitful," "forward-looking," "vital," "positive," while the futile, backward, defunct parts of this epoch all fall on the other side. Even the contours of this positive side will not emerge clearly but only if they are profiled against the negative one. On the other hand, however, every negation has its value only as the background for the outlines of the vital, the positive. It is therefore of decisive importance to apply again to this, distinctly separated negative part a new division of the kind that, with a shift of the point of view (but not of the standards of judging!) reveals even in it a positive element, different from the one previously indicated.[100]

"Conversion" (*Umschlag*), in which "the positive in the negative and the negative in the positive coincide,"[101] constitutes for Benjamin the supreme principle of dialectics.

Therefore he consistently strives to uncover the conversion and coincidence of the "utopian" and the "cynical," of the "threatening" and "alluring"[102] elements in the fetishistic experiences of the commodity world. These experiences, and precisely in those aspects through which they – as phantasmagories – mask reality, at the same time divulge an unconscious drive that in principle transcends the present, a utopian wish as the potential source of radical energies. Thus fashion, on the one hand,

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[100] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 573.

[101] *Ein Jakobiner von heute* (1930), vol. III, p. 265.

[102] Compare *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*,vol. V/1, pp. 51, 96.

> prescribes the ritual by which the fetish commodity wills to be worshiped … It stands in opposition to the organic. It procures the living body for the inorganic world. It affirms the rights of the corpse over the living. Its vital nerve is the fetishism that underlies the sex appeal of the inorganic. The cult of the commodity takes it into its service.[103]

It also serves recognisable class interests: fashion is "the camouflage of quite well-defined concerns of the ruling class."[104] At the same time, however, Benjamin equally underlines "the eccentric, revolutionary and surrealist possibilities of fashion," its "extraordinary anticipations," its "precise contact with the things to come,"[105] "the motif of redemption"[106] in it. Similarly with advertisements: false allure and economic functionality cohabit in them with their "being a simile for the everyday life of the utopia."[107] Of course, as long as these practices evoke only unconscious dream-images projected upon the objects of the commodity world in privatised subjective experience (*Erlebnis*), images, the collective character of which appears only in their compulsive-obsessive nature, they function *solely* by masking and transfiguring the catastrophic present. In their unconsciousness they merely channel utopian energies into the service of its hell. Only "waking up" from the dream can set their radical motivational potential free: they have to be raised to consciousness by transforming their mute commonness, communality into a matter of *collective experience* (*Erfahrung*).

This dialectics of ambiguity – a dialectics at standstill – finds its clearest expression and elaboration in the central concept of Benjamin's aesthetics: the notion of *aura*. At one place he explicates its meaning by almost directly reproducing the Marxian definition of fetishism: "The experience of aura thus rests

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[103] *ibid.*, p. 51. Compare also: "Fashion opens up here a space of dialectical conversion between woman and commodity – between pleasure and the dead body," *ibid.*, p. 111. It is the medium that "lures sexuality in the world of the inorganic," *ibid.*, p. 118. On Benjamin's theory of fashion (with an emphasis, however, mainly on its critical aspect), see Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, especially pp. 97–101.

[104] *ibid.*, p. 121.

[105] *ibid.*, pp. 116, 112.

[106] *Zentralpark*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 677.

[107] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 236.

on the transference of a form of response at home in human society to the relation of the inanimate or nature to man."[108] In a sense this ought to be regarded as the basic characterisation of the concept, since only it explains the *unity* of those two "definitions" of it which prima facie have nothing in common and which are merely juxtaposed by Benjamin: the experience of the aura as the endowment of the thing "with the ability to return the glance,"[109] on the one hand, and its being "the unique manifestation of a distance however close it may be,"[110] on the other hand. For both of these are experiential manifestations of the same fetishistic "personification of things" (Marx) – the inapproachability created by the auratic distancing of the object being nothing else but the transfer of the inviolability of the personal space upon the inanimate.

As I tried to indicate, the auratisation of the work of art which in its secularised form underlies the autonomy of art in modernity[111] is for Benjamin the "spiritualisation" of the fetishism of commodity, "an intensification of the universal fetishistic deception."[112] With a distancing "elevation" it separates art from the context of everyday life, and normatively fixes its recipient in the attitude of passive, privatised absorption; thereby it makes aesthetic experience an isolated instant in life, lacking effectivity, that is, potentially "political" (that is, community-creating and -orienting) significance. The progressive disappearance of the aura – a process initiated by changes in the conditions of reproduction of works of art – is therefore a precondition of its refunctioning, of its regaining a socially active, but now demystifying, possibly emancipatory role.

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[108] *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 646.

[109] *ibid*.

[110] *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *ibid*., p. 480.

[111] Benjamin explicitly equates the aura of art with "the illusion of its autonomy," *ibid*., p. 486. Under conditions of modernity it replaces the embeddedness of premodern art in cultic ritual with its contextual integration into the alienated tradition of "culture." It therefore retains in a secularised form the "theological foundation" (*ibid*., p. 441) of art, its association with, and service to, the illusion of mythic powers governing the fate of human beings.

[112] H. Schweppenhauser, "Die Vorschule der profanen Erleuchtung," in W. Benjamin, *Über Haschisch*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 22.

But: "The decline of aura and the withering away – under conditions of a defensive position in the class-struggle – of the fantasy image of a better nature are the same. Therewith the decline of aura and the decline of potency (*Potenz*) are ultimately the same."[113] The auratic experience of the work of art (and of definite natural objects or phenomena) contains – and precisely in its very reifying character by which it withdraws its object from the context and reach of human action – also an anticipatory-redemptive aspect, the complete loss of which would signal the exhaustion of a fundamental source of radical impulses. The auratic experience offers for a fleeting instance the purely subjective fulfilment of the promise of a "nature" that no longer is the resistant object of our efforts at its utilisation and exploitation, but encounters us in an unenforced way with "favour" (the Kantian *Gunst der Natur*). In this experience the rigid division between subject and object is dissolved in a reciprocal, mimetic-communicative relation between human beings and their world, a world, the things of which became "liberated from the compulsion to be useful." And this, of course, constitutes one of the most fundamental and constant elements in Benjamin's idea of an emancipated future. The aura of the work of art is a historically created and socially imposed (second order) phantasmagoria – but phantasmagories are both (as compulsive-obsessive ideas) the very *opposite*, and at the same time the *depraved exercises* of creative social imagination. This is also the reason why Benjamin did not accept without qualification Adorno's suggestion that unambiguously identified aura with reification: "all reification is forgetting … Is not the aura always the trace of the forgotten human element (*vergessenes Menschliches*) in the thing …?," a human element that is specified by Adorno (certainly in accord with the Marxian–Lukácsian conception of reification) as "the moment of human labour."[114] Benjamin responded: "If it were the case that in aura one genuinely had to deal with a 'forgotten human element', then nevertheless not necessarily with that which is present in labour … There must be a human element in things which is *not* brought about by labour."[115]

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[113] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 457.

[114] Letter to Benjamin, 29 Feb. 1940, in Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, pp. 159–160.

[115] Letter to Adorno, 7 May 1940, in *Briefe*, vol. II, p. 849. It was an unpublished paper by A. MacNamara that drew my attention to the significance of this exchange.

Thus the decay of the aura which Benjamin registers as an ongoing process is itself ambiguous: it designates an emancipatory possibility connected with the radical refunctioning of art *and* a danger, the disappearance not only of the privatised-empathic, autonomous aesthetic experience, but also of the ability to imagine and experience fulfilment, the *gift* of happiness. The traceless vanishing of the aura would mean just this latter. No doubt, under contemporary conditions the "exhibition of aura" is "the affair of fifth-rank poets,"[116] and such an "aestheticism" is serviceable to Fascism.[117] But genuine art, not in complicity with the horrors of the present, has its task in making precisely what in privatised experience (*Erlebnis*) unconsciously evokes the impression of auraticity into the consciously recognisable and examinable object of a potentially collective experience (*Erfahrung*). At places Benjamin calls this task the transformation of aura into the "trace" (*Spur*). "Trace and aura. The trace is the manifestation of a closeness however distanced it may be. The aura is the manifestation of a distance however close it may be. In the trace we enter into the possession of the thing, in the aura the thing overpowers us."[118]

This is how Benjamin interprets the achievement of Baudelaire: an artistic accomplishment that makes him – a poet who has "imposed a taboo upon the

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[116] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 475.

[117] Compare *Pariser Brief I*, *GS*, vol. III, pp. 487–489.

[118] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 560. In a surprisingly one-sided and rather hostile essay Jauss has argued that Benjamin has never been able to realise genuinely the insight expressed in this quote: he ultimately could not overcome a nostalgic relation to the aura and therefore a negative attitude to the development of post-romantic, non-autonomous art; see H. R. Jauss, *Studien zum Epochenwandel der ästhetischen Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1989, pp. 189–215. This is certainly the reversal of the usual criticism of Benjamin, but overall it is perhaps even less convincing than the more common charge in overestimating the potential of post-auratic, "technically progressive" art. Ultimately Jauss' criticism follows from the fact that he (so it seems) rejects – together with Benjamin's Messianism and catastrophic conception of the history of the present – any principally critical attitude to contemporaneity. He seems to accept as unproblematic – and both in aesthetical and in social sense – the success of the "basic intention" of post-romantic art: "to humanise through beauty the materialism of industrial development," *ibid*., p. 195.

future" and whose poetic attitude is "at least in appearance thoroughly 'untimely'" – a "secret agent" of dissatisfaction with the domination of his own class, whose dream is the sister of Blanqui's revolutionary action.[119] Not in the conscious intentions or in the "message" of his poetry lies this achievement, not in what his poems "say," but in what they allow to be brought into the realm of full, genuine experience. Baudelaire, writes Benjamin, "has given the weight of a collective experience (*Erfahrung*)" to private, subjective experiences (*Erlebnisse*). He paid the price for it: "the destruction of the aura" of his own oeuvre.[120] The "destructive rage" of his poetry is directed "not least against the fetishistic notion of art."[121] But he destroyed the aura because he transformed the profane basis of its *production* into the form-giving principle of his own poetry. He transposed the way fetishistic private experiences of the commodity world are structured into the poetic device of meaning-creation, into the "technical" scaffolding and facture of his work. "It was the undertaking of Baudelaire to make manifest on the commodity the aura specific to it."[122]

This is the way Benjamin understands the restitution by Baudelaire of an aesthetic form that his contemporaries regarded as irretrievably outdated, which nevertheless constituted "the guiding principle of his imagination" and "the armature of his poetry"[123]: *allegory*. With its unexpected and shifting, or rather joltingly changing connections between image and meaning lacking any "natural mediation,"[124] with its fragmentation and destruction of the familiar context of significations that habituation confers upon things, Baudelairian allegory fills these "hollowed-out ciphers" with subjectively imposed sense.[125]

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[119] Compare *GS*, vol I/2, pp. 657, 677; vol. I/3, p. 1161; and vol. I/2, p. 604.

[120] Compare *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 653.

[121] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 399.

[122] *Zentralpark*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 471.

[123] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, pp. 465, 408.

[124] Compare *ibid*., p. 466.

[125] "Every intimacy with the things is alien to the allegorical intention. To touch them means to it: to violate them. To apprehend (*erkennen*) them means to it: to see through them. Where it reigns, habit cannot be formed at all. It barely has taken up the thing, it already casts away the situation. They grow for it out of date more rapidly than a new cut for the milliner. To grow out of date, however, means: to become alien," *ibid*., p. 423. See also p. 582.

These allegories, by purely poetic means (and quite unintentionally), recreate the structure of experience which is objectively and unconsciously imposed upon the subject of the world of commodity, to be "veiled," "glorified," "sentimentalised" by its aureole.

> The objective environing world of man ever more ruthlessly takes on the expression of the commodity. At the same time the advertisement aims at blurring over the commodity-character of the things. The deceptive glorification of the world of commodity is opposed by its disfiguring transposition into the allegorical. The commodity tries to look itself in the face.[126]

"The allegories stand for what the commodity makes out of the experiences that people of this century have."[127] "The commodity-form comes to light as the social content of Baudelaire's allegorical form of apprehension (*Anschauungsform*)."[128]

This characterisation is, however, still too general: it does not sufficiently capture what is so striking and individual in Baudelaire's use of allegories. To bring out this specificity Benjamin repeatedly compares them with allegories of the Baroque. "Baroque allegory sees the corpse only from the outside. Baudelaire presents it from the inside."[129] And: "The key figure of early allegory is the corpse. The key figure of later [that is, Baudelairean] allegory is the 'souvenir' (*Andenken*)."[130]

> The souvenir is the secularised relic. – The souvenir is the complement of subjective experience ('*Erlebnis*'). In it is sedimented the increasing self-alienation of man, who takes stock of his past as dead possession. Allegory in the nineteenth century has vacated the external world, in order to settle into the internal world. The relic comes from the corpse, the souvenir from

[126] *Zentralpark*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 671.

[127] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 413.

[128] *ibid.*, p. 422. But see pp. 438–439 about the *failure* of Baudelaire "to trace back the experience of commodity to the allegorical," since it is more "difficult to dissolve the illusion of 'value' than that of the 'meaning'." Perhaps this should be connected also with the remark on p. 468 about the lack of distance of Baudelaire (in comparison with Shelley) to allegory which masters him, instead of being mastered by him.

[129] *ibid.*, p. 415.

[130] *Zentralpark*, *GS*, vol I/2, p. 689.

> the defunct collective experience (*Erfahrung*) which calls itself, euphemistically, lived experience (*Erlebnis*).[131]

Baudelaire's allegories do not so much endow events of the world and external life with some alien-transcendent meaning that strips away from them all their immanent sense and inner vitality. His allegoric intention finds rather its expression in the often brutal transposition of the most intimate, inward subjective states, moods, and also of elevated thoughts into not merely prosaic, but frequently sordid, anorganic objects and happenings of the everyday. The "hollowing-out of the inner life"[132] is the ultimate achievement of his poetry. The allegoric-aesthetic transformation which allows "commodity to look itself in the face," that is, to raise to the level of conscious recognition the unconscious structure of its experience, discloses behind the seemingly free play of subjective meanings the compulsive fragmentation of the subject of experience. And this transforms the reconciling, pseudo-aesthetic halo of commodity into the impulse of a destructive rage, even if this latter remains undirected and objectless. "Baudelaire's allegory bears – in opposition to the Baroque – the traces of the rage which was necessary to break through this world, to lay its harmonious formations in ruins."[133]

> The destructive impulse of Baudelaire is nowhere interested in the abolition of what comes to its way. This finds expression in allegory, and this constitutes its regressive tendency. On the other hand, however, allegory – precisely in its destructive fervour – is concerned with the dispersal of the illusion that proceeds from every "given order," be it of art or life, the transfiguring order of the totality or of the organic, all that which makes it appear bearable. And this is the progressive tendency of allegory.[134]

"The unique significance of Baudelaire consists in being the first who in the most impeccable way apprehended self-alienated man and fixed him with a thing-like solidity (*ding-fest gemacht*), in the double meaning of this word:

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[131] *ibid.*, p. 681.

[132] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 440.

[133] *Zentralpark*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 671.

[134] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 417.

established his identity and armed him against the reified world."[135] The case of Baudelaire demonstrates how works of art, which are seemingly "untimely" and thoroughly apolitical in the common sense of this word, can nevertheless retain a critical potential even under the alienated conditions of cultural modernity.

"There is a place in every true work of art at which the person, who places himself into it, is touched by a freshness like the wind of a coming dawn."[136] But this still requires the ability and the interest to "settle in" at this "place of the new" in the work of art (a place which can only be disclosed by the labour of critical commentary) – and Benjamin has no illusions about the spread of such capacities.

> At no point of time, be it ever so utopian, will one win over the masses for a higher art, but always only for an art that is nearer to them. And the difficulty consists precisely in shaping this latter in such a way that one could affirm with the best conscience: it is a higher art. This will almost never be achieved through what is propagated by the avant-garde of the bourgeoisie. The masses in general demand from the work of art something warming. Here is the fire of hatred waiting to be ignited. Its heat, however, bites or scorches, it does not offer that "comfort of the heart" that qualifies art for use. Whereas kitsch is nothing more but art with the character of a hundred percent, absolute and instantaneous use. Thereby, however, kitsch and art stand in the canonised forms of expression directly, irreconcilably opposed to each other. What concerns, however, the emerging, living forms, they contain in themselves something warming, useful, ultimately something blissful, they take dialectically the "kitsch" into themselves, in this way bringing themselves near to the masses, and nevertheless they are able to overcome

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[135] *ibid.*, p. 405. I have attempted here to follow through only a single thread in Benjamin's complex interpretation of Baudelaire's poetry, and, of course, I merely tried to give a summary account of his views on the role of allegory in it. For an approach to the same topic, indebted, but in its basic thrust polemically opposed to that of Benjamin, see Jauss, *Studien zum Epochenwandel der ästhetischen Moderne*, pp. 166–188. For a deconstructionist interpretation and "defence" of Benjamin against Jauss see P. de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 65–70.

[136] *Das Passagen-Werk*, *GS*, vol. V/1, p. 593.

> kitschiness. Nowadays perhaps only the film is up to this task, in any case it is the closest to this task.[137]

Benjamin's discussion of the "progressive" possibilities opened up by the "emerging, living" forms of mass culture, connected with the new techniques of mechanical reproduction, especially of the "political significance of the film,"[138] has to fulfil therefore a strategic (not to say systematic) function in the whole project of his later oeuvre – only with its help can he provide some kind of answer and solution to the *practical* problem which it faces: that of the "motivational deficit."

In some respects Benjamin's analysis of film, presented in its most elaborate form in the *Reproduction* essay,[139] stands in a close correspondence with, and runs parallel to, his discussion of the emancipatory possibilities of "higher" art, most fully exemplified by the Baudelaire-file of the *Arcades-Project*. For he is again almost exclusively concerned with the way materially conditioned and historically specific modes of experiencing are, or can be, transformed into the meaning-creating devices, the technical facture of the works that raise these ways of spontaneous experience to the level of conscious recognition which liberates their radical potential and which now, in the case of film, possesses also a directly communal, or at least "massed" character. The great accomplishment of film (and photography) consists for Benjamin in the conquest of the "optical unconscious" (an achievement he compares with the discovery of the instinctual unconscious by psychoanalysis) and thus in the opening up of a "new region of consciousness."[140] He means by this not only the enrichment of the field of perception by these new media, their ability to radically extend (both spatially and temporarily) the limits of visibility. He at least ascribes an equal importance to the fact that film constantly interrupts

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[137] *ibid*., pp. 499–500.

[138] *ibid*., p. 499.

[139] Many of the formulations and ideas concerning film in the *Reproduction* essay were, however, taken directly over by him from his earlier (1931) paper *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*.

[140] Compare *Erwiderung an Oscar Schmitz* (1927), *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 752; *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*, *GS*, vol. II/1, p. 371; and *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 500.

the ingrained processes of association, replaces intimacies by the illumination of details.[141] And this refers not merely to the perception of the external world of objects, but to the unconscious mechanisms of self-apprehension as well, both in respect of the maintenance of "normal" self-identity,[142] and in that of the empathic identification with others. Given Benjamin's strongly anti-individualistic image of the emancipated future, it is easy to understand that the expected overcoming of "uniqueness and permanence" by the accentuation of what is "repeatable" and "transitory" in experiences[143] (together with the levelling of the distinctions between author and recipient in a new, generalised cultural "literacy") had for him a radical, transcending significance.

Nevertheless, and in spite of this close analogy in the strategy of analysis and argumentation, there is a fundamental *theoretical break* between the *Arcades-Project* and the writings directly associated with it, on the one hand, and Benjamin's essays dealing with the problems of the new mass media of "mechanical reproduction," on the other. These latter writings (first of all, of course, the *Reproduction* essay itself) have nothing to do with the idea of a "dialectics of ambiguity," with the conversion of the negative into the positive that constitutes the theoretical and methodological premise of the former group of works. They operate with the conception of an accumulative change in the technical conditions of artistic production to which an unambiguously "positive" function, or at least potential, is ascribed, the unfolding of which is then arrested, or perhaps only retarded, by their superimposed conditions of employment.[144] This is just that explanatory scheme of "orthodox" Marxism which has been elsewhere radically rejected by Benjamin with reference to the historical experiences of his generation. This represents, I think, the

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[141] Compare *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 503; vol. II/1, p. 379.

[142] "In the film one does not recognises one's own carriage, on the gramophone one's own voice." *Franz Kafka* (1934), *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 436.

[143] See *GS*, vol. II/1, pp. 378–379; vol. I/2, p. 479.

[144] Compare: "At present the international bourgeois cinema could not find a consistent ideological scheme. This is one of the causes of its crisis. For the conspiring of the technique of film with the milieu that constitutes its most direct reproof, is not compatible with the glorification of the bourgeois," *Erwiderung an Oscar Schmitz*, *GS*, vol. II/2, p. 753.

fundamental, unresolved theoretical perplexity of his late oeuvre (which is inadequately signalled by the frequently encountered charge of "technological determinism") – fundamental, because it is directly related to the solution of that practical task with which he was above all concerned. And the theoretical break in question directly manifests itself in a number of sharply pronounced shifts of conceptualisation or emphasis when one compares these two, by and large simultaneously executed, groups of writings with each other. Here belongs the frequently made observation that in the *Reproduction* essay (but also in such earlier pieces as the essay on the history of photography) the "decay of aura" has an unequivocally progressive significance – all the historically retrogressive tendencies, to which Benjamin refers in these contexts (be they the artificially built up cult of movie stars or the "aesthetisation of politics" by Fascism), are connected with the socially-economically dictated efforts at the conservation or recreation of aura. The idea of the ambiguity and "danger" of the process of its decay is completely absent in these works. Even more significant perhaps is the fact that the notion of commodity fetishism – the focal point in Benjamin's analysis of the "origins" of modernity and a concept that is particularly pertinent when it comes to the phenomena of mass culture – is introduced into these writings, if at all, then only as a marginal and external consideration.

And there remains still the question whether this changed, more "orthodox" conceptualisation achieves its end: whether it provides a coherent argumentation for the existence of an untapped potential associated with the new media. This is at best doubtful, already on the basis of the internal evidence of the texts themselves. Ultimately one has to say that – even if one fully accepts Benjamin's analysis – the connection between the changing structure of experience and a motivation for emancipatory change (a connection which he never explicitly asserts, but certainly strongly suggests by the whole argumentative thrust of the *Reproduction* essay) remains extremely tenuous. The stance of a "distracted expertise and examination," the fostering of which is, according to him, the main accomplishment of the technologically progressive forms of mass culture, may well have a value for the attitudinal "innervation of the masses" to the conditions of a constantly and rapidly changing life world, but it is a world apart both from the notion of a "critical consciousness" in Marx and from that of a "revolting consciousness" in the spirit of the anarchist tradition. And Benjamin himself states this with complete

clarity: "As long as film-capital sets the tenor, one can ascribe to contemporary film no revolutionary merit other than of facilitating a revolutionary critique of the traditional ideas concerning art."[145]

> Radio and film transform not only the function of the professional performer, but equally the function of those who represent themselves before these equipments of recording, as do those who govern … This results in a new selection, a selection before the equipment, from which the star and the dictator emerge victorious.[146]

However, these interspersed cautionary remarks are, as it were, overridden and cancelled out by the relentless directional power of an argumentation that intends and promises to deliver so much more.

Benjamin's project thus ends in a double *échec*: even the abandonment of his most original and hard-won theoretical ideas and insights does not advance the achievement of the practical ends of his theory. One could even query whether this task itself has not been rendered senseless by his own initial diagnosis: the masses look in art for something warming and ultimately blissful. For once the motivating force of the "ideal of the happy grandchildren" (and with it, of the prefigurative, directly utopian function of art) is denied, what could art then offer the masses that would be able to compete with the lustre and pseudo-aesthetic satisfaction of the phantasmagoria of commodity? One could comprehend from this perspective his most dubious and troubling proposal: that of the direct "politisation of the aesthetical" (without, of course, claiming to explain thereby its genesis) as a desperate and failed attempt to close these glaring theoretical and practical gaps in his project. Ultimately the unanimous opinion of his critic-friends – the only point on which these self-appointed mentors, jealously fighting each other, agreed – turned out to be prophetically right: the internal ambiguities of the idea of profane illumination and this-wordly, revolutionary salvation resulted in an oeuvre that represents a torso of unresolved contradictions.[147]

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[145] *Das Kunstwerk … (Zweite Fassung)*, *GS*, vol. I/2, p. 492.

[146] *ibid*., p. 491–492.

[147] I have emphasised here, so to say, the "structural" difficulties and gaps of Benjamin's theory, since they seem to me more significant and symptomatic (at least

I doubt, however, that we, "unhappy grandchildren," can simply accept this evaluation of his involved and committed contemporaries. From our viewpoint of latecomers it constitutes the specific clear-sightedness of Benjamin to have made explicit (whatever have been his own grounds) the theological-religious motivation behind the idea of a final human emancipation, once and for all solving the antinomies besetting the whole of history. Just thereby he

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for the particular ends of this discussion) than the – no doubt, otherwise serious – meritorical objections one can raise against some of the substantive presuppositions of his theoretical construction. I would like, however, at least to signal here in conclusion a few problems in this latter respect, too.

First, there are some very general difficulties concerning the notion of the aura itself. It is with the help of this concept that Benjamin intends to account for the "defunctionalisation" (aesthetisation) and autonomy of the art of classical bourgeois culture in general. But the meaning of this notion is articulated by him in a way that makes it directly applicable only to works of fine arts. What "aura" would mean, for example, in respect of literary-poetic works is not clear, and it is not easy to envisage how the concept could be appropriately amplified. This may well be more than a merely formal difficulty or inadequacy. One of Benjamin's main theses: the historical genesis of the auratic work from the earlier ritual-cultic function of art, becomes (as Jauss has pointed out) quite improbable, once the scope of the notion is somehow extended to encompass literature as well. In general, this thesis represents a (certainly original) version of those theories that interpret the culture of modernity as the secularisation of a religious world-view. Besides general objections against such "theories of secularisation" – most forcefully formulated and argued by Hans Blumenberg – it faces in this specific case also a number of concrete, historical objections. Thus, for example, Benjamin treats the shift from the cultic to the exhibition value of the work of art as a phenomenon of secularisation. It can be, however, convincingly demonstrated that such a shift originates within religious art itself, and is connected with general transformations in the religious consciousness and practices in the West towards an enhanced visualisation and theatralisation, the beginnings of which can be traced back as far as the medieval Renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Whatever the theoretical weight of these considerations, certainly much more practical interest attaches itself to problems that can be raised about the connection postulated by Benjamin between the development of new techniques of reproduction, on the one hand, and the decay of the aura, on the other. His argumentation fundamentally depends here on the presupposition that there exists some qualitative, basic

gave a dramatic poignancy to a failure that he *shared* with the whole Pleiad of the brilliant representatives of Western Marxism of the 1930s and 1940s. They all attempted to find – for want of more mundane forces – in culture, and

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difference between earlier, handcrafted reproductions and the new, industrial-mechanical ones in so far as their effect on the aura and the authenticity of the reproduced object is concerned – a difference that transforms the relation of the recipient public to the originals themselves. Why this would be the case, is, however, not really argued by him at all. First of all, one's uneasiness is raised by the fact that about the historically, no doubt, most important form of mechanical reproduction, that is about *printing*, he tells only that its enormous impact upon literature is "a familiar story." Leaving aside the perhaps too confident character of this assertion, the point is that the impact in question coincided precisely with the beginning of the *autonomisation and aesthetisation* of literary arts, and not with the onset of their dissolution. This uneasiness is enhanced when one realises that the initial stages of autonomisation of fine arts also "coincided" with the development and spread of such forms of artistic-artisanal reproduction as woodcuts and etchings. In general, it is unclear in what sense either the greater fidelity or the greater availability of the new, mechanical forms of reproduction (at least as far as works of fine arts are concerned – for in respect of such forms as film, the applicability of the concept of "reproduction" itself is quite questionable) would change the *function* of all such reproduction in general: to bring close and to give into one's hand an object whose meaning and significance consists in its reference to an *absent original*. It may well be argued that the reproductions of the canonical "chef-d'oeuvres," which today became, from post-cards to advertising images, inescapable elements of our visual environment, largely contribute to their enhanced fetishistic auratisation. (And then it is only of secondary importance that the process of auratisation had in the meantime enveloped also definite forms and objects of reproduction themselves: beginning with the development of such notions as that of the *belle épreuve* and the "artist's original print" at the end of the last century and ending, let us say, with Anselm Kiefer creating a new work of art from a collection of photographs of his own paintings.) Desauratisation may well be one of the important tendencies, coexisting with some opposed to it, countervailing trends of contemporary art. In the fine arts the particularities of this process may have been partly influenced by the competition of paintings with photography and film (the impact of which has been brilliantly analysed by Benjamin). But the direct connection he posits to exist between mechanical reproduction and the decay of the aura, is not demonstrated by him and seems rather untenable.

particularly in art, a motivating power enabling them to solve the great social and political problems of the age. In this way they resurrected and made again meaningful, under much changed historical conditions, those expectations and hopes in the context of which the very notion of culture was originally formed in the Enlightenment – and by their shared failure they demonstrated how incapable "culture" is for the solution of such a task. It is not their answers, but primarily their questions which constitute the legacy for our times – much less desperate than their own, but also much more muddled.

The continuous fascination with Benjamin's writings may partly be due to a personal charisma which somehow shines through his whole oeuvre: a strange combination of an immense receptivity with a most idiosyncratic originality, of an almost narcistically sensitive defence of one's individuality with the never extinguishable lure of community and with the deep moral earnestness of a thinking that is always motivated by a search for answers to the sufferings of anonymous others. This oeuvre, however, offers – I think – beyond its rich but negative lessons and personal magnetism something more, and more positive, to the present, and I am thinking here first of all of his idea of a *dialectic of ambiguity*.

"Critical theory of society" has undergone in its long history so many transformations, has been embodied in such a number of diverse, and partly opposed, theoretical projects that it becomes questionable whether one can still ascribe a coherent meaning to this term. If there remains something which nevertheless still unifies this tradition and makes it continuable today, it is the general idea that one has to find in contemporary social reality itself – and not in some system of atemporal norms and values – the foundation and the principles of its own critique and the potential of its transcending. And in this respect the conception of a "dialectic of ambiguity" seems to suggest an approach more fertile than the much more common idea which envisages the realisation of this program along the scheme of the "struggle of the (objective and subjective) forces of progress with those of reaction," in whatever way these opposed powers be identified. Benjamin has disclosed the deep ambiguities of cultural modernity, both in respect of its constitution (the confluence of the most archaic and the most modern, of the unconscious and the conscious, atomisation as a common bond of new type between the

individuals and so on) and in that of its potential historical function (the unity of its cynical-apologetic or regressive and its utopian, transcending aspects). And even if today one would underline that these potentials are not pre-given (not even as possibilities), that they can only be "discovered" in the light of, and through (real or at least imagined) social practices beyond the cultural sphere proper which attempt to effectuate them, to make them actual, Benjamin's ideas in this respect retain a suggestive and orientative power that survives the collapse of his more concrete historical diagnoses and hope.[148]

[148] I am partly indebted for these concluding remarks to some suggestions of my wife, Maria Markus, and to the critical observations of David Roberts upon an earlier variant of this paper. I would like also to thank Prof. Roberts for his many corrections of the defective English of my manuscript.

Chapter Twenty

Adorno and Mass Culture: Autonomous Art against the Culture Industry

General theories dealing with the relation between high and mass culture up to the late 1950s – until the emergence of a well-differentiated youth culture followed by the counter-culture of the 1960s – overwhelmingly articulated a pronounced negative attitude towards the latter. In a sense they continued the tradition of the condemnation of popular urban culture that from its very birth characterised the attitude of the representatives of high culture. In this regard there is a direct continuity between Matthew Arnold through T. S. Eliot and Ortega y Gasset, the Leavises and Greenberg to Dwight MacDonald and Theodor Adorno (to mention only the most familiar names). In these theories the relation appeared as that between universal human/aesthetic values and the worthless, the trashy, or even destructive counter-value.

It needs, however, to be underlined that this is so only insofar as we are speaking about *general* theories and diagnoses of the contemporary cultural situation. There were also a few theorists – Walter Benjamin is the outstanding example – who presented a much more nuanced and positive evaluation. For this condemnatory view did not necessarily

characterise the broader cultural response towards some phenomena of mass culture even during this period. There were at least some particular mass cultural forms (or what were at the time conceived as pertaining to its realm) toward which significant representatives of different branches of high art expressed positive interest, appreciation or even enthusiasm. This concerns, first of all, photography, film and jazz.

In this respect the case of film is perhaps the most interesting. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and (at least in his early writings) Adorno condemned film as such, as a mere form of money-making that through cheap emotional thrills reduces its audience to a thoughtless passivity. It is rather ironic that in making this judgement Eliot and Adorno, whose views concerning the relation between culture and society could not have been more sharply opposed, employ essentially the same, clearly invalid pseudo-argument. In the cinema, writes Eliot,[1] the "mind is lulled by continuous senseless music and continuous action too rapid for the brain to act upon," resulting in the "listless apathy" of the public. This is essentially the same point made by Adorno:[2] the very fact that what happens in a film is projected upon the screen continuously and "without resistance" reifies the content and liquidates the possibility of the disclosure of conflicts and contradictions, since it reduces everything to the abstract temporal relation of "earlier" and "later."

This attitude stands opposed not merely to the enthusiasm of some representatives of the early avant-garde – first of all the circle of Apollinaire and the Futurists – for the yet largely unproved possibilities of this new kind of art. From the 1920s onwards, explicit theories of the aesthetics and technique of cinema were elaborated together with the appearance of regular, sophisticated film criticism, evoking wider cultural resonance and lively discussions. Undoubtedly, some of the great film directors of the time – above all Eisenstein, Pudovkin and René Clair – played a pioneering role in this respect. There were, however, also intellectuals specifically concerned with these issues – Béla Balázs, Hans Richter, Siegfried Kracauer in Germany, Jean Epstein and

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[1] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, ed. F. Kemmode, London, Faber & Faber, 1975, p. 174. See also F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1952.

[2] T. W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* (hereafter *GS*), 16 vols, ed. R. Tiedemann, Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1970–86, vol. 3, p. 310.

Germaine Dulac in France, Hugo Munsterberg in the United States – to which also some of the leading theorists of fine art and art history (Arnheim, Panofsky) paid active attention. Writers and poets – Aragon and Desnos, Valéry and Sartre – also paid homage to the experience of the cinema. And, of course, some artists and writers actively participated in the making of – mostly experimental or radical – films: Léger and Picabia, Man Ray and Dali, on the one hand, Cocteau and Brecht, on the other.

A similar story, with some temporal retardation, could be told about jazz as well. There are, of course, some differences, largely owing to the fact that film was a completely new cultural form, while jazz had to find its place within the already well-established, sharply divided spheres of serious *versus* light music. During the 1920s cultural interest was primarily directed at "symphonic jazz" (Stravinsky, Milhaud, Copland and Gershwin), automatically regarded as a (legitimate or illegitimate) form of high art. In a more contested way similar claims (being the uniquely American form of art music) were raised on behalf of symphonic arrangements of jazz selections performed from the mid-1920s on in concert halls by orchestras of professional white musicians. Only from the later 1930s did "authentic" or "pure" jazz, distinguished now from big band swing music, become a topic of specific aesthetic appreciation, and also the subject matter of various kinds of artistic representation, by Matisse and Mondrian, or Scott Fitzgerald and Michel Leiris.[3]

It is clearly not by chance that it was these particular artistic forms – photography, film and jazz – that evoked a broader cultural resonance. For they are actually the kinds of cultural production that originated as popular or as mass cultural forms, but ultimately either split apart into artistic *versus* commercial kinds or, like jazz, demarcated in an appropriate way, crossed over to high art. This development was a long, drawn-out process, achieving completion only in the late 1940s or 1950s. (The experimental films of the 1920s and early 1930s have little in common with the art cinema familiar to us today.)

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[3] See P. Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

The theorists of cultural critique mentioned above were in fact deeply opposed to this process itself – in general they manifested a particular hostility precisely towards these forms (as already indicated in respect of film and as attested to, for example, by Adorno's writings concerning jazz). This was not a matter of inherent conservatism, it followed from the way they understood the character and function of high art and the situation of contemporary culture in general. The assumption that film in general is capable of becoming authentic art would have contradicted their premises concerning the destiny of high art in our times. It was a diagnosis of an encompassing cultural (and social) crisis that oriented their aesthetic analyses and evaluations, including the rejection of mass culture in general.

Even a cursory overview of these theories and their history forces us, however, to face at this point a paradox. On the one hand, there are evident and substantive similarities in their rejection of mass art. At the same time they all were equally partisan supporters of some selected tendencies of avant-garde, modernist art, invariably conceived by them in a similar way: as an aesthetic critique of modernity. There are also correspondences in the particular aesthetic justifications they offered for their negative and positive value-judgements. They represent a continuous theoretical tradition that in a sense even manifests the character of a "development." For the early figures of this tradition, like Ortega y Gasset or Eliot, mass culture is not a specific object of interest – its rejection is self-evident, expressed mostly in casual asides. It is only from the mid-1930s on that more ambitious critical analyses appear, culminating in the relevant writings of Adorno (and Horkheimer), still today the theoretically sharpest and most encompassing critique of what they called the "culture industry." This "progress," however, was accompanied by another trend. What originally had been contemptuous neglect gave way to an ever more desperate condemnation. What initially was regarded as aesthetically worthless, one of the minor symptoms of the ills of modernity, increasingly became conceived as a weighty, not merely cultural, but also moral and/or political counter-value, to some degree itself responsible for these ills, or at least significantly contributing to their preservation.

On the other hand these commonalities, in view of which we seem to be dealing with a single tradition, coexisted with extreme differences concerning issues of fundamental import. All these theorists were essentially addressing

the question about the vocation of art and culture in modernity, its actual situation and potential role in contemporary society. And even in this respect they shared a common ground: a negative-critical attitude to this social world of commodification and dominance of industrial and commercial interests. However, their reasons for articulating such a negative attitude were not only diverse, but in the paradigmatic cases diametrically opposed. Ortega y Gasset and Eliot were self-conscious "elitists." They firmly believed that only a hierarchically ordered society, providing an institutionally secured place for a (merit- or class-based) elite, can be culturally (and ultimately also socially) healthy and viable. Massification, the accession of the masses to complete social power, is the root cause of all the anomalies of the present, for, as Ortega y Gasset declares in the first lines of his most influential book, "the masses, by definition, neither should, nor can direct their own personal existence, and still less society in general."[4] The practical-political stand of MacDonald and Adorno, on the other hand, ultimately derived from the Marxian critique of capitalism, and was oriented towards the ideal of socialism as the classless society of free individuals. The first rejected mass culture as the levelling imposition of the infantilistic and crude values of the masses upon the whole system of society, dragging down spiritual activities to the level of base material interests. The second condemned it as the conscious imposition of the values of a system of domination on the exploited and dominated masses, depriving them of the possibility of emancipatory resistance. But however different the deeper motives and reasons, the objects of attack, and in some respects also their characterisation, were the same. This paradoxical coincidence of opposites, the partly real, partly apparent identity of cultural orientations, tied to and motivated by diametrically opposed social-political perspectives, this colliding collusion of the Right and the Left, is ultimately the consequence of a shared fate: the forced retreat of both opposed forms of radical politics into the realm of culture.

Though the conservative stream of cultural critique certainly has its later-day and present continuers (Alan Bloom or Paul Johnson), it was Adorno whose writings exercised and continue to exercise the most lasting influence upon the subsequent discussions, either as an object of criticism or a source

[4] J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1932, p. 11.

of insights. Understandably and deservedly so. In their critical acuity, depth and breadth of theoretical analysis they stand alone in this whole complex tradition. His views therefore demand a closer scrutiny and detailed, immanent examination.

First of all, Adorno's target of critique[5] is not simply mass culture, in the sense that it is usually understood, but the "culture industry" (though he quite often uses these two terms as synonyms). Culture industry certainly encompasses all that is referred to as "mass culture" (what he also often designates as the "entertainment business"), but it cannot be reduced even to the broadest common understanding of this term. He extends its scope to the contemporary performance and reception (in concerts and theatre, radio and records) of works of traditional high culture. This point is made fully clear in respect of music, not only his particular object of interest and competence, but for him also the bourgeois art *par excellence*, "the most unique artistic medium" of the bourgeoisie.[6] As he states in his notes to the unfinished project on musical reproduction, on which he worked for more than thirty years, "the *whole* official interpretation of traditional music, aiming at the façade, not only misses the innermost, it is a piece of culture industry, even measurably *false*."[7] This is not a chance exaggeration. Already in his 1938 essay, "On the Fetish Character of Music and Regression of Listening," he elaborates the grounds for this view. Under contemporary conditions of reification, the socially typical, "normal" perception and apprehension of classical music manifest all the essential attitudinal features that characterise the relation of the average listener to "light" music: absent-minded deconcentration, dissolution of the whole into

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[5] This schematic analysis is based first of all on the earlier writings of Adorno. (He never fundamentally changed his views, but the essays from the 1950s and 1960s introduce some not unimportant modifications and qualifications.) Among these works the most important and influential is certainly the chapter on culture industry in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored with Horkheimer. I refer to this chapter as the work of Adorno. This is, however, merely a matter of convenience. In no way do I intend to deny or prejudge thereby the significance of Horkheimer's contribution to this text.

[6] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 32.

[7] T. W. Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Abteilung I, Bd 2, Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 2001, p. 120.

isolated climatic fragments and effects, attention centred on the sensuous materiality of the sound and the technical perfection of performance and so on.[8] Musical performances, to have any chance of success, must adapt themselves to these predispositions of the audience. In this way all aesthetically relevant differences are abolished between the lover of the "classics" and the enthusiast of "light" music: *Waren-Hören*, commodity listening, a mere comforting *consumption* of cultural "goods" is the fate of everyone – with the exception of the isolated, resisting critical few, the intellectual outsiders.

For the same reason the notion of culture industry encompasses also a third layer: the majority of works that commonly would be considered as *bona fide* examples of modern "high" or "serious" art. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno explicitly mentions Hemingway and Döblin as representatives of the culture industry. Elsewhere he refers to *Jugendstil* in general, and concretely to Wilde, D'Annunzio and Maeterlinck as "preludes" to mass culture. It is, however, again in respect of music, that he develops this idea in greater detail. He traces the emergence of the culture industry back to the mid-nineteenth century, to the seminal figure of Wagner on the threshold of aesthetic modernism and the simultaneous source of both its progressive and regressive tendencies:

> the entrusting of the opera to the autonomous sovereignty of the artist is intertwined with the origin of the culture industry. The enthusiasm of the youthful Nietzsche misrecognised the music of future: in it we witness the birth of film out of the spirit of music … There cannot be a much better refutation of the assumption that mass culture has been merely imposed upon art from outside: owing to its own emancipation art was transformed into its opposite.[9]

This general statement is substantiated by the detailed analysis of Wagner's compositional technique and his idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[10] And while Adorno clearly does not intend to reconstruct the historical origins of mass

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[8] *GS*, vol. 14, pp. 21–23, 27–32.

[9] *GS*, vol. 13, pp. 102–103.

[10] See A. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986; G. Markus, "Adorno's Wagner", *Thesis Eleven*, 56 (1999), pp. 25–56.

culture, his dispersed remarks disclose an uninterrupted line of development of art music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that is characterised by internal commodification, producing a whole inventory of formal means and devices that will be appropriated, technically enhanced and transposed also to other kinds and genres of mass culture. Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, Sibelius, Dvořák and Elgar, Gounod and Puccini, Reger and Richard Strauss – they are all for Adorno examples of highly successful "bad" concert music and opera. They retain the empty shell of classical musical forms (like the tonal system or the sonata form) while abolishing its internal coherence and the principle of "developing variation," the shaping of musical time, replacing it with static, repetitive series of well-calculated effects.[11]

All these fragmentary but quite consistent historical indications are connected with some basic assumptions of Adorno's theory of culture. It is not a simple matter of lack of interest or blindness on his part that he pays no attention to the connection between late popular and mass culture. Already in his first essay in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1932 he argued that "light music" can and must be analysed from the aspect of its consumption alone, because as a form of musical production it offers nothing for consideration: "vulgar music … did not develop an autonomous technique, just in order to be able as commodity to adjust quickly to the demands of consumption."[12] Mass culture in general borrows all its technical-formal means of expression from a "high" art in decline, itself undergoing commercialisation and becoming an integral part of the culture industry.

Therefore the charge of "elitism," so often raised against Adorno, is completely groundless, at least in the usual meaning of this term. What self-styled cultural elites counterpose to mass culture – the available repertoire of "classics" and much of the relatively recent works of art directed at "discerning" audiences – all these constitute for him only a particular branch or layer of the culture industry, whose power partly resides in its ability to differentiate, classify and organise consumers. "Something is provided for everyone, that no one may escape; the distinctions are emphasised and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying

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[11] *GS*, vol. 16, pp. 288–289.

[12] *GS*, vol. 18, p. 769.

quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification."[13] As he repeatedly underlined, in the contemporary, "fully administered" world the traditional divide between the "low" and the "high" becomes a mere ideology. "The old opposition between serious and light, low and high art, autonomous art and entertainment, no longer describes the phenomena. All art as means to fill leisure time becomes entertainment, that now incorporates also the materials and forms of traditional autonomous art as 'cultural goods.' "[14]

What Adorno counterposes to this vastly extended notion of culture industry is not even the esoteric art of the avant-garde, toward most of the trends of which he manifests no interest whatever or is even hostile. The culture industry is opposed only by a few solitary figures of "authentic" art: Proust and Joyce, Kafka and Beckett in literature, Kandinsky and Klee in painting and, of course and above all, Schönberg and the Second Vienna School in music. Usually misunderstood even by their few devotees, they represent the line of artistic progress, still realising the vocation of art: the disclosure of truth about this world, to which the work, in its total isolation, by its negation, belongs. They render aesthetically manifest the total alienation and reification of the seemingly all-powerful subject, who transgresses all the inherited conventions of the sphere of its own activity, imposes its own rational domination upon the historically transmitted material of this activity – only to lose itself in, and succumb to, the inhuman and impersonal rationality of its own system. The artistic price to be paid for such a success is also equally high – not only the refusal of communication, the willed absence of any stable supporting audience, but also the decomposition of the aesthetic values and categories that defined autonomous art, dissociating thereby expression and meaning. These works realise the *Entkunstung*[15] of art, they are genuine works of art *after* the end of art, which does not itself end, but just goes on.

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[13] *GS*, vol. 3, p. 123.

[14] *GS*, vol. 15, p. 11.

[15] The term is untranslatable. "De-aesthetisation", as it is usually rendered in English, is rather misleading, since for Adorno art (*Kunst*) is a narrower concept than that of the aesthetical.

While Adorno thus regards the multilayered character of the culture industry, its ability to fit its products to the well-researched dispositions and expectations of various groups of culture consumers, as an important component of its power over them, at the same time he also categorically maintains: "Under monopoly all mass culture is identical"[16] (a statement which is rather striking from such a committed critic of identity-thinking). For the heterogeneity of the "tastes" so satisfied is only a surface phenomenon, concealing the underlying homogeneity of subject-attitudes, an effect of the structural features of the products of the culture industry as a conscious *psychotechnology*. "The autonomy of music is replaced by a mere socio-psychological function."[17] No doubt, Adorno's characterisation of these features, as his critics have underlined, is extremely abstract and general. And the points made by him are not necessarily novel. What makes his critique particularly powerful is bringing them together in a coherent *Gestalt* of a sustained practice, whose functional, systemic rationality is thus disclosed.

All products of the culture industry are first of all characterised by the dissolution of the inner consistency and coherence of the work of art. It is fragmented into a mere sequence of recurring effects, sensuous or emotive stimulants, interconnected only by the most stereotyped formulae. But repetition characterises not only the individual products; the whole culture industry represents the unceasing repetition of the same standardised, generic types (from the whodunit to the hit-song). Of course, under conditions of modernity every work must appear as new, original, but this is a pseudo-individuation, mere surface variations of well-tested and familiar archetypes. Thus each such work and the culture industry itself in its processual totality produces only a stasis, in its Benjaminian formulation: the return of the ever-same in the new. This "infantilistic compulsion to repetition"[18] on the side of its consumers is itself a structural effect of the culture industry, for its products only promise to deliver a state of pure pleasure, at least a momentary bliss. Hollywood's film industry only declares itself to be a "dream factory."

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[16] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 141–142.

[17] T. W. Adorno and G. Simpson, "On Popular Music", *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, 9 (1941), p. 39.

[18] *GS*, vol. 3, p. 305.

Such works do not offer either a reflexive aesthetical or (as some works of the pre-industrial popular culture still did) direct bodily satisfaction. They are only temporary distractions that last precisely as long as their consumption lasts. They can only be repeated, because they disappear, without leaving anything to be savoured and remembered.

It is, however, the *function* of the culture industry that primarily concerns Adorno, and this constitutes also the most influential and disputed aspect of his theory. Against both the liberal defenders and the conservative critics of mass culture, who justify or reject it on the basis that it simply satisfies what the masses as consumers desire, he argues that "the disposition of the public which ostensibly and actually favours the system of culture industry is part of the system, and not an excuse for it."[19] His analysis proceeds on two levels. In general the mind-numbing, mechanical character of all working activities and the existential insecurity of all individuals in contemporary capitalist society rob them of the capacity for genuine leisure. "Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of labour. … All amusement suffers from this incurable malady. Pleasure hardens into boredom because, to remain pleasure, it ought not to demand any effort and therefore it strictly follows the worn grooves of association."[20]

The culture industry, however, not only exploits this incapacity brought about by the objective situation of individuals. It itself creates a psychological constitution that conditions and cultivates the passivity of individuals. It produces the very needs it promises to satisfy. In general, in Adorno's understanding the stability of "organised" capitalism is based upon the fact that the needs that sustain the system to a large extent are the products of this system itself. Material needs, however, still retain some connection with a natural substratum in humankind. The needs related to a fully developed culture industry are, however, totally artificial and "steered": it creates the need in its illusory promise of effortless, thoughtless, "pure" pleasure that it withdraws to satisfy, in this way perpetuating itself.

This certainly assures the "rationality" of a self-reproducing system. From the side of the individuals, however, this ongoing process is completely irrational.

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[19] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 142–143.

[20] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 159–160.

Why are they incapable of recognising its irrationality and resisting it actively? Adorno answers this question by indicating what the culture industry actually delivers, pointing to a subconscious need of irrational, pathological character that is produced and in fact also satisfied by it.

The fragmented, stereotyped and repetitive products of mass culture actually pre-program the manner of their reception, transform it into a "system of response mechanisms."[21] In this way, however, the culture industry as psychotechnology has more far-reaching effects than the mere perpetuation of its own existence. It imposes upon individuals simplified and homogenised patterns of reality-perception, not so much through the thinly disguised ideological messages usually transmitted by it, but through its destructive impact: the systematic atrophy of the capacity of spontaneous imagination and reflection, for the development and exercise of which art had regularly provided the exempted terrain under conditions of civilisation. "In respect of mass culture reification is not a metaphor."[22] These distorted and predigested schemes of immediate world-interpretation are – like fetishism with Marx – pragmatically successful. In general they ensure the adaptation of the individual to the functional requirements of the system, of which they are only a disposable and always replaceable element. Impairing the subject's capacity for spontaneous experience (*Erfahrung*) and fatally weakening the ego in the situation of perpetual anxiety that is the fate of everyone (as "virtual unemployed") in late capitalism, the culture industry also offers a regressive-pathological compensation for this loss. At a subconscious level it redirects the drive energies of the self towards a vicarious identification with anonymous collectivities through adoption of synthetically produced, shared stereotypes of judgement and conduct as its support. (Thus, under appropriate social and political conditions, it is particularly conductive to the emergence of the psychological type of the "authoritarian personality.") "Such systems provide those who are deprived of the continuity of judgement and experience with schemata for coping with reality. They certainly do not grasp reality, but compensate for the anxiety about what cannot be comprehended."[23] The culture industry

[21] Adorno and Simpson, "On Popular Music", p. 22.

[22] *GS*, vol. 3, p. 334.

[23] *GS*, vol. 8, pp. 116–117.

substantially contributes to the very malaise for which it offers a mere palliative, in this way perpetuating itself and the system, of which it is a necessary constituent.

Fetishism thus settles for Adorno into the innermost layers of the psychological household of subjects. He usually characterises its psychosocial impact as the deliberate *pathologisation* of individuals, though he is rather generously vague as to the character of the psychotic state so induced.[24] He is perhaps most convincing when he describes it as the socially imposed *infantilisation* of the subject. The overrationalised demands, excluding all spontaneity, imposed upon the activity of individuals, coupled with the permanent existential insecurity of their situation, exercise a rigid and unceasing adaptive pressure upon the psyche that is comparable only to what children encounter in the process of their elementary socialisation. The culture industry relieves this strain by replacing "inner-directed" conduct with standardised reactions to social signals. By organising life into "a continuous initiation rite," it is able "to deceive adults concerning the prolonged childhood which is prepared for them in order that they can function in a more adult way."[25] Thus the culture industry largely takes over the function of the socialisation of individuals, imbuing them at all levels of their psychological constitution with common patterns of reality-interpretation and behaviour, making them thereby unresisting executors of the required functions of an encompassing system of impersonal domination. It is "the social cement," "the glue which still keeps together commodity society today, after it has already been condemned economically."[26] For "the need that might have somehow resisted central control is already repressed by the control of individual consciousness."[27]

This is the fatal, seemingly invulnerable circle of manipulation and retroactive needs, to break out of which one can only appeal to the unforeseeable openness of history. Authentic art and philosophy are to keep this hope

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[24] At various places he speaks about neurosis, paranoia, schizophrenia, sadomasochism and narcissism (see *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 115–117; vol. 14, pp. 26 and 45; vol. 17, pp. 98–99 etc.).

[25] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 176 and 300.

[26] *GS*, vol. 14, p. 25.

[27] *GS*, vol. 3, p. 142.

alive, by disclosing all the inhuman negativity of this system of absolute reification.

> Domination settles into the inside of men. They need not be "influenced," as liberals, with their idea of the market, are apt to think. Mass culture only makes them once again into what, under the compulsion of the system, in any case they already are – it controls the gaps, introduces additionally to practice its official counterpart as public morality, provides people with models to imitate … Dehumanisation is no power acting from outside, no propaganda of any kind, no exclusion from culture. It is actually the immanence of the oppressed in the system, from which once they were excluded owing to their poverty, while today their poverty consists in the fact that they cannot get out of it.[28]

As with what it discloses, this argument moves (knowingly) in a circle. It is the objective situation of individuals, their wholesale determination by the logic of the system that completely undermines their spontaneity and makes thereby the alleged subject into a passive and pliable object of the culture industry. But it is the latter that irrevocably cements the total subsumption and integration of individuals, allowing the system to "settle into the inside of men." For it stimulates its consumers to accomplish, through their unreflective pseudo-activity, those identifications that are demanded by the objective logic of an impersonal domination, making it inescapable. The culture industry is the glue that holds together an intact and in fact closed system that is invulnerable, owing to the fact that the culture industry made the individuals in its own image in a way that is irresistible, since the system has already liquidated all the resources of a critical resistance and so on. The argument moves in a vicious circle that renders it in principle irrefutable. But its theoretically vicious character merely mimics the practical viciousness of the system that it lays bare.

Whatever one's logical or substantive objections to this complex analysis, it is certainly a theoretical *tour de force* that can accommodate the objections of its critics with relative ease. From Adorno's own standpoint, however, it does not seem to be fully satisfactory or sufficient, probably because this

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[28] *GS*, vol. 8, pp. 390–391.

interpretation cannot be applied to the *whole* of the culture industry, in the extended scope of this concept. To regard the performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony conducted by Toscanini as substantively contributing to that "cement" which keeps the social system together does not seem to make sense at all, neither psychologically nor sociologically. The culture industry as the psychotechnical pathologisation or infantilisation of its consumers, be it right or wrong, makes sense in respect of mass culture in its usual, more narrow understanding – it is, however, rather evidently inadequate in respect of Adorno's extension of the concept. The latter, however, is not a marginal aspect of his theory. It pertains to the core endeavour of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, to unmask the fetishistic, "affirmative" conception of culture as an integral and important part of the project of a (self-)critique of the miscarried Enlightenment.

In any case, for this or for some other reason, in the second half of the chapter on the culture industry Adorno suddenly changes tack, without much connection with the earlier analysis. He returns to the starting point of his discussion: in late capitalism all works of culture are commodities, human products with the double determination of use and exchange value. In modernity, however, everything that in any way intimates or pretends to be a work of art cannot have any pragmatic function, as autonomous art is assumed to be valuable in and for itself. So, in so far as alleged works of art become cultural "goods," it is their exchange value (expressed in their relative prices) that becomes their use value itself, that is, their capacity to satisfy some socially recognised, codified need. Only those solitary works that radically resist commodification, that is, any appeal to a socially recognisable audience, can escape this fate.

> In so far as the demand for valorisation of art becomes total, a shift begins to occur in the inner economic structure of cultural commodities. For the use that people in antagonistic society hope for from the work of art is still the very existence of the useless, which is now, however, completely abolished through the total subsumption under use. In so far as the work of art completely assimilates itself to need, it already cheats the people out of that liberation from the principle of utility which it should have provided. What one could call the use value in the reception of cultural goods is replaced by exchange value; being there and knowing best take the place of enjoyment,

> the prestige seeker that of the connoisseur. The consumer becomes the ideology of the culture industry, whose institutions he cannot escape … Something possesses value not because it is what it is, but because it can be exchanged. The use value of art, its mode of being (*Sein*), is treated as fetish, and then the fetish, its social ranking – misrecognised as its artistic status – becomes its sole use value, its only quality that people actually enjoy.[29]

Adorno had formulated this "economic deduction"[30] of culture industry already in 1938.

> Since commodity is always composed of exchange value and use value, so now pure use value, the illusion of which must be retained by cultural goods in a thoroughly capitalistic society, becomes replaced by pure exchange value, which precisely as exchange value deceptively takes over the function of use value. The specific fetish-character of music is constituted through this *quid pro quo*: the effects directed at exchange value create the appearance of immediacy, which is simultaneously denied by the unrelatedness to the object. The latter is based upon the abstractness of exchange value. All the derivatively "psychological," all pseudo-fulfilment (*Ersatzbefriedigung*) depends on such social substitution.[31]

Adorno certainly regards this analysis as a development of the Marxian theory of commodity, its application to the cultural sphere of late capitalism. In fact, however, this is a mere translation of the *prestige theory* of cultural consumption into universalising economic terms (used in a rather questionable way). In a terminology more familiar to us Adorno here conceives (in some respects prefiguring Bourdieu) the consumption of the variegated goods of the culture industry as the affirmation and maintenance of "social distinctions" reduced to an economic "basis." "The consumer is rather worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert. He literally 'made' the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognising himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert, but rather by buying the ticket." And: "The refinement which as commodity sign alone remains from great music clearly possesses a

[29] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 181–182.

[30] *GS*, vol. 7, p. 331.

[31] *GS*, vol. 14, pp. 24–25.

class-related sense. It serves the end of neatly distinguishing the consumer of expensive cultural goods from the insolvent miserable plebs."[32]

As these quotes indicate, this explanation is intended by Adorno to account for the more "sophisticated" layers of his conception of culture industry. The problem is that it cannot be restricted to them alone. It is rendered impossible by the very character of this explanation, since its premise relates to a completely general state of affairs: the commodity character of all cultural goods in capitalist society. No less importantly, such a move would undermine the very idea of the culture industry, based on the assumption of the homogeneity and identity of the attitudes of all culture consumers, independent of whether the products chosen by them are commonly regarded as examples of "serious" or mass art. Adorno thus must extend this analysis to the full scope of this concept. Thereby, however, this "economic deduction" now takes the form of the assumption of an externally imposed, socially enforced coercion that makes everyone conform "spontaneously" to the pre-established category of their social place and function in the whole compass of their consumptive behaviour. (This serves then as the basis for the final conclusion of Adorno concerning the deep affinity between the culture industry and fascism.) "Everybody must behave, as if spontaneously, in accordance with his level, determined beforehand by appropriate indexes, and reach out for that category of mass products that is fabricated for his type."[33]

> The old slogan of bourgeois amusement: "You must see it," which was a harmless swindle of the market, now, when amusement and market have been abolished, becomes a matter of deadly seriousness. Earlier the fictive sanction consisted in the fact that one could not participate in conversation, today one's existence is threatened if the person cannot talk in the right way, namely cannot effortlessly reproduce as if his own the formulas, conventions and judgements of mass culture. One is then under the suspicion of being an idiot or an intellectual.[34]

Let's call this, merely for brevity's sake, the "status compulsion" theory of cultural consumption.

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[32] *ibid*.

[33] *GS*, vol. 3, p. 144.

[34] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 330–331.

In this way, however, an open contradiction emerges between the "psychosocial" and the "status compulsion" approaches, the juxtaposition of which constitutes Adorno's complete critical theory of the culture industry. No doubt, they do share some fundamental presuppositions: the reified and fetishistic relation of modern individuals to all the products created by their own activities. But the two approaches that concretise this premise in its application to the objects of the culture industry are simply incompatible. The first maintains that these objects fulfil an indispensable social function owing to their ability to impact upon the psychological household of individuals, because they compensate for that very weakening of subjectivity which they themselves partly produce. The second assumes that the character of these products is completely accidental and ephemeral, since they are unrelated either to the real or to the false needs of their consumers. They are simply imposed upon them by anonymous, external pressure that they have to obey to safeguard their (always insecure) existence. And Adorno is a truly significant thinker, because he is deadly consistent in his inconsistencies, and so he draws at some points this latter conclusion in the most radical way.

> If most of the radio stations and movie theatres were to close down, the consumer would probably not lose so much. Anyhow to walk from the street into the cinema no longer means to enter the world of dreams, and if the mere existence of these institutions no longer made their use obligatory, there would be no great urge to use them. Such a closure would not be a reactionary machine-wrecking. It would be not so much the enthusiasts, who would feel deprived, but rather those left behind, those who are the eternal losers anyway. For the housewife the darkness of cinema secures – in spite of the films that should further her integration – a place of refuge where she can sit alone for a couple of hours undisturbed, just as she used to look out of the window when there were still homes and repose in the evening.[35]

The very glue that keeps the system together because it allows it to settle into the deepest psychological layers of its subjects is at the same time psychologically superfluous, having no genuinely internalised effect on these subjects. This rather direct contradiction in the conclusions of the theory demands a closer look at its constructive principles and at the method of analysis.

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[35] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 161.

Adorno's whole analysis is based on a dichotomous contrast between authentic art and the culture industry, these torn halves that do not add up to an integral whole. It could, however, be argued, at least on the basis of one of the constitutive aspects of his analysis, that this often quoted summary characterisation of the anomie of our cultural situation states only a trivial logical impossibility. These two do not add up to any kind of a whole because the two concepts (and what they designate) are categorically incompatible. "Authentic art" is a normative-aesthetic notion related to the immanent characteristics of such work. "Culture industry," on the other hand, if one takes its "status compulsion" analysis seriously, is a descriptive sociological concept which fixes a particular social function fulfilled by its objects, in principle independent of their immanent characteristics, since this function is emphatically characterised by its "unrelatedness to the object." There must be, of course, some historical ground for the fact that it is a particular class of works, which for members of a particular stratum fulfils the role of the obligatory but apparently spontaneous reconfirmation of their social position. In respect of the function of such objects as marks of "distinction," this is, however, irrelevant. And if this is so, then it is a matter of a major inconsistency, indeed a category mistake, that Adorno's critique of the culture industry operates against the background of a sometimes explicit, but implicitly always present, comparison with works of authentic modern art.[36] He seems to apply to the former criteria that are irrelevant and ultimately meaningless. Certainly he would not make such comparisons in the case of other objects that equally well, and surely more frequently, serve purposes of status distinctions (such as the cars people drive) – such comparisons would be patently meaningless. For it is not by accident that the products of the culture industry appear as "art," however "low" it is considered to be. In particular such a contrast is required in view of his extension of the scope of this notion. "Bad," commercialised forms of allegedly serious art are not somehow accidentally related to the development of authentic art. The path leading from Wagner to Strauss, Puccini or Gershwin makes sense only in an aesthetic comparison with the line of progress from Wagner through Brahms and

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[36] See U. W. Hohendahl, *Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno*, Lincoln, NE, Nebraska University Press, 1995, p. 140.

Mahler to Schönberg. The "status compulsion" theory of the culture industry, that legitimates this extended concept, in this way seems to rely on what contradicts it, the "psychosocial" conception which prima facie seems to be applicable only to narrowly understood mass art.

For this "psychosocial" conception, with which Adorno's analysis begins, actually unifies what is supposed to be unrelated in the next stage of discussion ("status compulsion" interpretation): the aesthetic versus the social characteristics of the assumed dichotomy between authentic and mass art. It thus makes these opposed poles legitimately comparable. The authenticity of a work of modern art can, of course, only be demonstrated through its immanent aesthetical analysis. The fundamental conclusion of such an analysis is, however, the disclosure of the truth-content of such works, which explicates their intimate though negative relation to the social reality from which they, in their radical autonomy, distance and divorce themselves. Making manifest the aesthetic principle of dodecaphonic music in the total rational organisation of the musical material simultaneously justifies its characterisation as the sole realisation of artistic progress. For only in this way does it present the "unreconciled picture of reality" as that of "total repression,"[37] a world of absolute reification, a fully administered society.

On the other hand, while the counterposed analysis of mass culture fundamentally concentrates on the disclosure of its psychosocial function as the "glue" reinforcing the seamless unity of this social totality, this is justified by a preceding (rather summary and perfunctory) indication of those "aesthetic" characteristics which make all its products identical. Both components of this analysis raise legitimate questions and are, no doubt, problematical. Here, of course, we can only deal with some of its aspects concerning the characterisation of the culture industry.

All the decisive "aesthetic-formal" features necessarily and identically pertaining to all its products are, understandably, negative-privative – namely, elimination of the possibility of creating something genuinely new, original and individual; the compulsion to repetition and standardisation, hardly disguised by the pseudo-individuation of such products; fragmentation of the

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[37] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 109.

work, destruction of its inner coherence, its transformation into a sequence of recurrent effects connected only by stereotyped formulae; hence the loss of meaning and meaningful (even sensuous-emotive) satisfaction which is always postponed, serving in this way also as stimulus for repetition; therefore stasis, the recurrence of the ever-same, the freezing of time, exclusion of any teleologically directed inner development; and through all these both expressing and effecting the dissolution of subjectivity, the fatal loss of all vestiges of the autonomy of individuals.

The question to be raised here is not merely that of the adequacy of these extremely sweeping negative characterisations. What we shall ask first is the elementary query: what are all these negativities the negations of? Once posed, the answer is really evident: they are negations of the basic traits of the "classical," organic work of art which, as dynamic totality, the unity of expression and construction, dialectically reconciles the opposition of object and subject, of impersonal rationality and free individuality in a utopian "promise of happiness," prefigured in the serenity of the very work of art. But – and here, so it seems, our question discloses a genuine difficulty – the time for the great, organic works of tradition is irreversibly gone. It is gone because history itself has objectively transformed their utopian promise into a false illusion today, for the moment of its realisation (if it ever was present) has been missed. Therefore the authentic artworks of our epoch must also negate these characteristics. Indeed Adorno not only traces the negative features of the products of culture industry back as far as Wagner, he discloses the very same traits in the works of Schönberg's middle period, the paradigmatic figure of late artistic modernity.

The twelve-tone technique of the Second Vienna School liquidates the possibility of radical artistic novelty, both within and among the particular works.

> The inexorable closure of technique posits a false limit. All that transcends it, everything that is constitutively new … is proscribed by the determined manifold of the technique … In so far as twelve-tone technique elevated the principle of variation to the level of totality, the absolute, it has – in one final transformation of the concept – eliminated this principle. As soon as it becomes total the possibility of musical transcendence disappears. As soon as everything is absorbed to the same degree into variation, no "theme" remains behind, and all musical appearances define themselves without

> any distinction as permutation of a row. In the entirety of change nothing changes any more.[38]

The explicit exclusion of repetitions renders the whole music repetitious – as a discontinuous sequence of variations it destroys all musical dynamics, becomes static and freezes time into space. Such fragmentation depletes music of all directly, sensuously appreciable meaning. "The dissolution of the illusory features in the work of art is demanded by its own consistency. But the process of dissolution – ordered by the meaning of the whole – makes the whole meaningless."[39] The musical artwork becomes a "yawning emptiness."[40] And with this it renounces also the possibility of providing aesthetic pleasure, denies that serenity which its freedom, its autonomy, once offered. Full rational mastery, the total freedom of the emancipated subject in its relation to the naturally and historically pre-given material of music, results in the total submission of the subject to the impersonal rationality of a technique that no longer has any relation to subjective intentions and meaning. Total freedom turns out to be total determination of the "streamlined" fate of a second nature.[41]

At points Adorno himself draws attention to the far-reaching parallels between musical mass culture and authentic art. "The power that mass music exercises over men, survives in its social counterpole, in the music that withdraws from men."[42] "The late Schönberg shares with jazz – moreover also with Stravinsky – the dissociation of musical time. Music projects the picture of a constitution of the world that – for better or worse – no longer recognizes history."[43]

However, as far as Schönberg's dodecaphonic compositions and the twelve-tone technique in general are concerned, these affinities break down at an important point. For their thoroughly rationalised structure stands starkly opposed to the unconnected expressive constituents (invoking standardised

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[38] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 99.

[39] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 71.

[40] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 96.

[41] *GS*, vol. 12, pp. 67–71.

[42] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 69.

[43] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 62.

emotions) of the products of mass music, elements interconnected only by trivial formulae. And it is this that primarily confers upon the works of authentic art music their aesthetic and human significance. For it is the strict rationality of their organisation which makes them immanently an object of reflection (for those few who are still capable of undertaking it) that necessarily discloses their truth: the laying bare of the inhuman, alienated and reified character, the ultimate irrationality of the world of instrumental reason, in which we all live and from which they, in their radical autonomy, seemingly completely withdraw.

In view of Adorno's later reflections on the post-war development of music, however, even this opposition disappears. While the serialism of the 1950s and 1960s (Boulez, Stockhausen) further radicalised the rationalising tendencies of twelve-tone composition, extending them beyond pitch-relations to rhythm, metre and timbre, the aleatoric music of Cage in the name of freedom rejects the very idea of constructive organisation beyond the principle of chance. These two trends represent the opposed poles of a fundamental unity: they both fall "under the category of unburdening the enfeebled Ego (*Entlastung des geschwachten Ichs*)."[44]

With this, it would seem, any *aesthetically* ascertainable difference between the culture industry and authentic art has evaporated. Behind their dichotomy lurks their ultimate unity – they are mirror images of each other. In this sense one can perhaps suggest that the supplementation of the "psychosocial" interpretation of culture industry with its "status compulsion" analysis, in spite of their incompatibility, is nevertheless necessary. For the latter ensures that whatever the formal similarities between mass culture and authentic art, they are ultimately irrelevant. The two are still categorically distinct and incomparable. The direct, elemental functionality of mass culture, coercively reconfirming pre-given social positions and differences, makes it opposed to the radical afunctionality of the autonomous art, an autonomy which now means the complete refusal of the function of communication. It amounts to a conscious self-sacrifice, the break from an understanding audience. In respect of the music of Schönberg, Adorno underlines that, dissociating expression and meaning, it necessarily sacrifices

[44] *GS*, vol. 17, p. 271.

"intuitability" as one of the defining characteristics of a work of art. The work is no longer the object of a self-rewarding aesthetic *experience*, it is "posited as object of thought alone."[45] At one point he refers to it even as becoming the critical "evidence"[46] for philosophical comprehension. Strangely, the most extreme autonomy of art renders it heteronomous – its human significance consists today solely in presenting the only appropriate material for a critical-philosophical understanding of our doomed world.[47] And by becoming in fact a means of knowledge alone, in its hermeneutic structure it also takes on some of the characteristics of "science": it is addressed solely to like-minded practitioners.

These aporias are, no doubt, closely connected with Adorno's frequently evoked "pessimism." He conceives the contemporary world as a "fully administered society," a world of consummate alienation and reification that systematically liquidates all possibilities of practically effective subject-attitudes capable of challenging the system. This is the actual, practical circle in which we live: the circle without exit. At the same time, however, this is a society of universal suffering that cannot and should not be accepted, and all the less, because the *objective* conditions of radical change are already fully present. However, only authentic art and critical philosophical thought, mutually dependent upon each other, can attest to this need for a new beginning, and they too, only in a negative sense. For in view of the absence of rational practical intentions directed at radical social transformation, this transcending "other," even though it is within the realm of objective possibilities, remains unpresentable in imagination and unconcretisable in thought. What art and philosophy can accomplish is only the presentation and comprehension of the inhuman irrationality of this thoroughly rationalised system of instrumental reason. But do not even they ultimately and unwillingly fulfil, in all their negativity, an affirmative role? In the face of rationally ineliminable suffering, what else can one do but try to live with it the best way

[45] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 118.

[46] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 120.

[47] C. Menke, *The Sovereignty of Arts: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, Cambridge, MA, MIT, 1998, pp. 215–217; D. Roberts, *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno*, Lincoln, NE, Nebraska University Press, 1991, pp. 148–151.

one can – waiting for the hidden god of history to come. Is not the emancipatory intent of a critical culture itself a constituent in the closure of the system, for it can only repeat: no exit by our powers? Can one disregard the deep structural affinities between it and mass culture, affinities disclosed by Adorno's own analysis, but ultimately regarded by him as surface similarities; do not they indicate that their polar opposition, on which he insists, in fact collapses into an ultimate identity?

To these unasked questions Adorno, especially in his later writings, does provide a kind of answer, by locating the ultimate, unbridgeable difference between the works of the culture industry and those of authentic art in the very *telos* which they, as intentional human creations, promise to realise. This concerns his fundamental distinction between pleasure and happiness. Objects of the culture industry promise *pleasure* that always means the satisfaction of some pre-existent need. They are presented as objects of enjoyment, amusement, delight. In fact this very promise is mendacious. Its illusion is actually based on the surface similarity of such products with works of art (from which all their devices are borrowed), but works of art as they are *misunderstood* (as usual in our society) in a philistine way or artistically *misused* in the pursuit of popular success. "Whoever concretely enjoys works of art is a philistine … Actually the more artworks are understood, the less they are enjoyed." They are "not means to a higher order enjoyment."[48] The pleasure always on offer by the "goods" of the culture industry also fails to materialise; they merely provide a momentary distraction, which inadvertently discloses the true social meaning of the pleasure principle itself. "Amusement always reveals the influence of business, of sales talk, the quack's spiel in the marketplace. But the original affinity of business and amusement is shown in the very meaning of the latter: the apology of society. To be pleased means being in agreement."[49]

Works of art do not offer thoughtless pleasure, they are "the affront to dominating needs."[50] What they offer is – according to Adorno's beloved Stendhalian–Baudelairean formula – the *promesse du bonheur*. This happiness

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[48] *GS*, vol. 7, pp. 26–27.

[49] *GS*, vol. 3, pp. 166–167.

[50] *GS*, vol. 7, p. 361.

not only differs from, it is fundamentally opposed to pleasure. For to reduce art to the level of a pre-given human need means the betrayal of its claim to truth. Even in respect of classical-organic works of art, whose serenity prefigures the utopian happiness, art "measures its profundity by whether or not it can, through the reconciliation that its formal law brings to contradictions, emphasise all the more the real lack of reconciliation."[51] The happiness promised by the authentic work of art lies beyond the satisfaction of all real or imagined needs with their attendant pleasures; it means emancipation from a life governed by the pursuit of such a "fulfilment," a liberation from all the compulsions dictated by self-preservation. Through that mimetic aspect that pertains to every true work of art, it necessarily refers – as its promise – to the radical utopia of reconciliation between men and nature, the subject and the object, beyond the whole realm of instrumental reason and its labour. This is the "irrational telos"[52] of the artwork that it objectifies by drawing upon the most advanced forms of rationality in its technical-constructive procedures, thereby attesting to "the possibility of the possible:" a form of "reason" beyond the relation of means and ends.

> Art is not only the plenipotentiary of a better praxis than that which has to date predominated, but equally the critique of praxis as the rule of brute self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service. It gives the lie to production for production's sake and opts for a form of praxis beyond the spell of labour. Art's *promesse du bonheur* means not only that hitherto praxis has blocked happiness but that happiness is beyond praxis. The measure of the chasm separating praxis from happiness is taken by the force of negativity in the artwork.[53]

The modernist artwork of our epoch, in which happiness is not only absent, but made also unimaginable by the vicious circle of the system, can present even this promise only negatively. But it does refer to it, by bringing to presence its very absence and unpresentability – this constitutes its authenticity. Authentic artworks today ought to and do renounce all the norms and standards of artistic perfection, all the positive aesthetic values of the tradition of

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[51] *GS*, vol. 11, p. 601.
[52] *GS*, vol. 7, p. 429.
[53] *GS*, vol. 7, p. 26.

autonomous art. And they do so neither as a matter of incapacity or failure, nor as concessions to an easier reception that never was able to appreciate genuine works of art, since they demand thoughtful comprehension as totalities. The aesthetic "defectiveness" of authentic works of artistic modernism is the consequence of their own form-giving principles of construction, it is aesthetically necessary. This self-sacrifice, the *Entkunstung* of art, is the price to be paid for its ongoing existence after its own end. Such works are laments about the absence of what they no longer can evoke. Thereby they provide the crucial "evidence" for critical thought to reflect upon the source and meaning of this inextinguishable striving beyond the realm of the imaginable.

This is perhaps Adorno's ultimate and most consistent answer concerning the relation between mass culture and authentic art, legitimating the unreconcilable opposition between them. The fundamental distinction between pleasure and happiness brings at the most basic level a unity to their aesthetic and social characteristics which also determine the principles of their construction. There is, however, a heavy price to be paid for this success. For the articulation of this distinction now depends on the normative acceptance of a historiosophical perspective which is no longer utopian, but eschatological in its character.[54] The idea of a social form of life not only beyond the burdens of compulsive labour, but beyond practice itself, in so far as the latter still presupposes a distinction between means and ends, considerations of utility in general: this is the picture of a paradisiacal state of absolute abundance as stasis. It is no longer the beginning of the "true history" of mankind, as with Marx, for whom extending the realm of freedom is still conditioned by a form of collective productive life that remains, however humanised, a realm of necessity. With Adorno it is the end of history in a literal, decidedly non-Hegelian sense.

Adorno shares with Benjamin this idea of an ultimate human liberation as (in its Benjaminian formulation) the emancipation of things from the compulsion to be useful, the establishment of a mimetic-communicative relation between human beings and environing nature. There is, however, also a significant

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[54] A. Wellmer, *Dialektik der Moderne und Postmoderne: Vernunftkritik nach Adorno*, Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1985.

difference between them in this respect, with rather paradoxical consequences. Benjamin articulated this idea within a project of "profane illumination," the attempted secularisation of those collective dream-images that historically were predominantly expressed in the language of theology. In this endeavour he retained the central idea of Jewish Messianism. Human intentions and actions alone never can bring about the Messianic completion of time, but redemption is equally impossible without human effort, preparing the ground of the possibility for the unforeseeable coming of the Messiah, the complete break with the catastrophic continuity of history as "progress." Just for this reason all his critical interests were directed at those minutiae of everyday collective practices and experiences that – in spite of their overall fetishistic nature – contain a spark of radical energies, a weak "Messianic" potential, pointing towards the transcendability of the hell of the present. This defined his whole approach to art and mass culture as well.

For Adorno such an approach represents an untenable mixture of affirmative positivism and irrational romanticism. His own views are rooted in a radicalised version of a schema, inherited from the tradition of Western Marxism, to account for the impasse of revolution in the developed West. The assumed ongoing general crisis of capitalism can only be explained by the relative integration of the proletariat as revolutionary agent into the system, attributed to a large extent to the seductions of bourgeois ideology. Adorno takes this explanatory scheme to its extreme, and necessarily so in view of his eschatological radicalisation of the meaning of revolutionary transcendence. Commodity society "has already been condemned economically."[55] He takes this to mean that the objective-material conditions for emancipation from all the pressures of need-satisfaction (insofar as "real" needs are concerned) are already fully present. It seems that this constituted one of the basic points of his disagreement with Horkheimer that rendered the originally planned continuation of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* impossible. In one of their discussions concerning this project in 1946 Horkheimer stated: "In view of scarcity still dominating over the whole Earth, a program of abundance remains for a very long time a mere program." To which Adorno replied: "I do not believe … that scarcity of material goods would even today constitute a

[55] *GS*, vol. 14, p. 25.

serious obstacle."[56] It is this illusory belief that allowed him to draw an absolute dividing line between "pleasure" and "happiness," excluding all mediation between them. Adorno's whole theoretical enterprise was deeply motivated by an impulse of solidarity with all forms and all victims of suffering. At the same time, however, he manifested a somewhat frightening disregard concerning the real causes and character of suffering in the contemporary world (which, in any case, he seems to reduce to the few countries of "fully developed" capitalism and its allegedly socialist rival). It results in a double overburdening of "culture" that superficially aligns his views with the standpoint of the representatives of a conservative culture critique. On the one hand, it is an overburdening of the "culture industry" with the ineradicable, incurable guilt of serving as the "cement" for a system of impersonal domination that absolves the theory from the task of analysing its inner diversity and differentiation. On the other hand, this is an overburdening of art with a task, which *as art*, as the source of aesthetic experience, it cannot fulfil at all today. The sad fact, that in the absence of effective social-political alternatives, "culture" – and culture in the reduced sense of the arts and philosophy – remains the sole accessible terrain of critical activity for radical intellectuals, thus receives an ideological and ultimately circular self-justification. For the essence of ideology consists in the transposition of brute facts into values – even if the ultimate value recognised is the power to contribute to the practical realisation of utopia.

[56] *GS*, vol. 12, p. 599.

Chapter Twenty-One

Antinomies of "Culture"

Our notion of culture, which has a foundational significance for most of the disciplines of humanities, is a typically modern concept. To formulate it in a preliminary and intentionally paradoxical way: this concept to a large extent reflects the ambiguities, uncertainties and contradictions that pertain to modernity *as culture*; it articulates and simultaneously veils, masks the difficulties and the precariousness of the very project of cultural modernity. These ambivalencies and difficulties manifest themselves not only in the now familiar observation that "culture" gains its meaning from an opposition to "nature", an opposition as necessary as conceptually untenable, self-deconstructing. For in fact each of these two conceptual extremes is equally rent by multiple (interrelated, but irreducible), explicit or implicit oppositions of the same character: each of them possesses meaning through a series of systematic distinctions that in no way can be brought to coherent unity. We are, however – and this is the most important point to make – not dealing here only with the systematic ambiguities of a *static* semantic-conceptual field, ambiguities quite common in the case of

concepts constituted by relations of "family" -type. For these become transformed into active contradictions – *dynamic antinomies* –, around which centre two opposed tendencies, cultural processes and programs, each of which attempts to resolve these ambiguities in its own way. The culture of modernity is imprinted and defined by the irreconcilable coexistence and struggle of these two projects. I shall call them "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism", using these terms merely as abstract ideal types: the concrescence of these opposites is manifested, among other things, in the fact that it would be difficult to think of any significant thinker of the modern age who could in all respects be unambiguously situated on the one side of this divide.

Speaking about *our* concept of culture I mean a use of this term that no more refers to a state of (individual or collective) cultivation – in its opposition both to the savage, primitive and to the overrefined, decadent – but designates everything that as inheritable human work and accomplishment fundamentally distinguishes the human way of existence from that of the animals: "culture" as embodied in those results of social practices, human-made material and ideal objectivations that – in opposition to the senseless facticity of the phenomena of "nature" – are endowed with, and transmit, meanings.

There is a well-known narrative that explains the emergence of this conception (which actually took place around the end of the eighteenth century). An instrumental-pragmatic conception of knowledge as power, as tool of mastery – itself, of course, conditioned by those basic social changes that inaugurated early modernity – destroyed the traditional conception of nature as meaningful cosmos or divine creation, as the source of norms. It was henceforth no longer possible to understand the propriety or value of human actions on the basis of their correspondence or non-correspondence to assumed "natural laws". From now on it is nature (a mere "standing in reserve" for all forms of human "making") whose meaning for us must be understood in terms of the requirements and potential of our activities. This transformation alone, however, would leave human actions without any binding, common standard and orientation. The concept of "culture" is invented in order to make up this norm- and value-deficit. Simultaneously it also consummates the self-understanding of human beings as makers. We not only transform nature according to our ends, but also sovereignly create these ends and, indeed, the whole system of meanings in terms of which we

interpret and direct our activities. We are not only the masters of all that is external to us, but of our very lives as well.

This is, no doubt, a great story (today largely appearing as the story of a fateful illusion), and I would not attempt to deny its enlightening power. But it is also a quite simplificatory narrative that glosses over important ambiguities and complexities, both historical and conceptual. By way of introduction, I would like to begin their schematic presentation not from the side of "culture," but from that of its antithesis, the comprehension of "nature" in modernity.

Concerning the historical aspect of these complexities, I must restrict myself to a bare reference. To make the desacralised, scientific/instrumentalist conception of nature the direct, inevitable consequence of the idea and attitude of innerwordly "mastery" is to overlook those powerful *religious* motivations which significantly contributed to this development. For not only was humanity's dominion over nature the fulfilment of its scripturally revealed vocation, but – from Galileo on – the "new sciences" were conceived and legitimated as readings of the second book of God. At times of religious uncertainty, when the interpretation of God's first book – that of the revelation – became a matter of sectarian conflicts, the sciences promised to provide, by disclosing the secrets of nature, a rational access to the divine plan of creation, to God's ultimate intentions for the world and for humanity. This belief in the religious and moral significance of science not only dominated the French Enlightenment, but was much alive in Victorian science as well. And when the sciences of nature are regarded as the source both of a manipulative power and of moral-religious insight, their object, "nature" itself, acquires contradictory features. One needs only to read Bacon: nature is both what is to be subdued, "vexed", "put to the rack" and what is to be listened to with humility, "courted," to be won over for a chaste and lawful marriage – in his writings the attitudes of a violently aggressive domination and empathic responsiveness constantly alternate.

We are not dealing here, however, merely with matters of a bygone age, even if we disregard the fact that quasi-religious interpretations of science are hardly a thing of the past. For when nature is understood in terms of the potentialities of human activity, it necessarily acquires antithetical determinations that can be correlated in opposed ways. Nature is, on the one hand, the

matter to be formed and the energy to be harnessed; being without its own ends, it is the plastic *material* for our ends, the inexhaustible reservoir of the undreamed-of possibilities of human productivity and control. On the other hand, nature is at the same time the general name for all that *resists* our intentions, for the infinity of a power whose inexorable laws are beyond the compass of our will and, in their totality, beyond our comprehension – it is precisely what has escaped our control.

There are two ways in which these opposed determinations can be interconnected. One – corresponding to the familiar image of modernity – is the tendency of "Enlightenment", perhaps best summed up in the Marxian formula *Zurückweichen der Naturschranke* – the idea of constant progress in the transformation of blind, resisting nature into tamed nature, nature as material; a step-by-step approximation to the infinitely distanced goal of absolute mastery. But however dominant this notion may be in practice, we should not forget that *cultural* modernity is characterised by a no less constant countertendency. We are told again and again that the idea of drawing nearer to an end situated in infinity makes no sense, and with every triumph of control also the risk and the fear of its unforeseeable consequences grow. And they are answered by the no less modern demand to restructure, actively and consciously, our relation to nature on the basis of an alternative science and practice: to *make* again, but now primarily *ourselves*, to live in accord with nature. This is the response of "Romanticism." At least since German Romanticism (but we should add here also the name of Fourier and the early Marx) there has been a continuous tradition of utopias of reconciliation, plastic adaptation and dialogic communication with nature – counterpoints to the utopias of domination and mastery. The task is not to conquer and exploit nature – which for us, finite subjects, means not the Universe, but this Earth and its environment – but to make it (perhaps: make it once more) our home. Nor were these projects merely utopian dreams: the tradition of Romantic philosophies of nature – for example, A. von Humboldt's integral science of concrete natural environments – after having been neglected for so long, was rediscovered only quite recently, not only as precursors of contemporary ecological thought, but also in respect of their cultural impact, including their contributions to the "hard" sciences themselves (to theories of electromagnetism, chemistry, cell theory and so on).

The Romantic idea of reconciliation with nature is, however, not only a subordinate countercurrent of modernity – the image of nature that guides it is a fundamental, organic constituent of its culture. For the image of, and attitude to, nature, which is opposed to its comprehension as an alien, endless and valueless objectivity, is not only a survival of premodern, religiously coloured ways of its understanding. A particular form of it has been produced on the proper, entirely secular grounds of modernity itself. This is the idea of nature as a self-presencing normative ideal which, at the same time, does not dictate or impose upon us fixed rules; a nature as another subject, the ultimate partner and respondent in the most human of all our activities, in the various forms of play; a nature which in its beauty and sublimity meets our deepest human needs (to use Kant's words) with favour. It is neither the tamed, nor the wild nature, but the *free nature* of aesthetic creativity and attitude. As Lukács, Ritter, Marquard have convincingly demonstrated, the conception of a cosmic or divine natural order does not become simply *replaced* by that of an infinite universe whose lawfulness is merely a matter of brute facticity: in modernity the first idea actually *bifurcates* into the objectified scientific and subjectivised aesthetic conceptions of nature.

This observation leads us directly to an important aspect of the antinomistic character of the modern conception of *culture*. It would be apposite – before attempting to characterise this latter in its broader context – to discuss the point at which the dichotomy nature/culture inevitably unravels: the notion of *human* nature. Such a discussion would, however, transgress the permissible limits of a paper. I must therefore confine myself again to the bare indication that this notion now takes on the character of an undisguised paradox, superbly expressed by Ferguson: "We speak of art as distinguished from nature; but art itself is natural to man." The concept of culture simultaneously denaturalises humans as beings of culture *and* significantly contributes to their naturalisation, since it no more locates their distinction from animals in some supernatural capacity which pertains to them "by their nature" (such as the rational or immortal soul and so on). Here again there are two opposed and recurring ways in which this paradox can be dissolved: by disclosing nature in culture *or* culture in nature. The first is exemplified by attempts – from Tylor to sociobiology – to assimilate cultural development to the laws of organic evolution, and equally by theories which locate the basic preconditions

of all cultural behaviour in some natural givenness, like the wired-in neural program of the brain in Chomsky or Lévy-Strauss. The second is present in the variously formulated (from Herder through Engels to Gehlen) understanding of humans as *Mangelwesen*, beings of lack (in respect of natural-instinctual determinations) whose biological characteristics themselves (including the cortical development of the brain) are to a significant extent the outcome of prehistoric and historical processes of acculturation.

If from these preliminary remarks we now turn directly to the human world as the opposed supplement of "mere" nature, it again appears to us under a double and contrasting conceptualisation, corresponding to the bifurcation of the concept of nature mentioned above. The world of human existence presents itself, on the one hand, as a vast *causal-functional complex* of patterned actions and interactions with their more or less stable institutions and objectivations: as *society*. On the other hand, it appears as the totality of enacted, materially or ideally embodied meanings, a *Sinnzusammenhang*: as *culture*. The typically modern disciplines of sociology and anthropology emerged simultaneously and from that time on have persisted in an uneasy, competitive relationship. It is "society" which must deal with *resisting* nature, with nature as resistance. It is, however, "culture" which is called upon to provide our activities that transform and utilise nature as *material* with sense and a definite direction.

This latter, the modern concept of culture is itself characterised by a systematic ambiguity. The term has two distinct and, at first glance, completely unrelated meanings. On the one hand, in its *broad or anthropological* sense, it designates some all-pervasive aspect of the biologically non-fixed forms of human behaviour – in its dominant contemporary understanding: the meaning-bearing and meaning-transmitting, or "symbolic" dimension (Geertz) of human practices and their objectivations – all that allows individuals of a community to live in a life-world, the interpretation of which they share to a significant degree, and thus to act in it in ways that are mutually comprehensible. On the other hand, however, this very same term is used – in its *narrow or value-marked* sense – to designate a circumscribed and narrowly specific set of social practices, primarily the arts and the sciences: activities and their objectivations which under conditions of modernity are generally regarded as autonomous, that is, being valuable in themselves.

The conflation of these two, apparently unrelated, meanings in a single term is, however, not accidental. It is rooted in the origin of our concept of culture in the historical Enlightenment. The Enlightenment invented the broad, anthropological notion of culture in its struggle against particularistic traditions, which in their sacrality or antiquity were binding upon, and constraining, the individuals: traditions, which it summarily regarded as mere prejudices. "Culture" was a battle-cry in the project to transform all the inherited/inheritable accomplishments and works of human past – from the most humble to the most sophisticated or exquisite – into a storehouse of *possibilities* to be used freely and selectively for the creation of something new, for rationally meeting the demands of changing conditions of existence. But the Enlightenment organically connected such a non-imitative, but innovative attitude to life with the idea of human *perfectioning*. Not simply unstoppable change, made possible by the ever renewable use of (broad) culture as a social resource, but conferring a unique direction upon change toward the realisation of humanly created, but universally valid ends, ends which can be provided only by culture in its *narrow* sense, by "high" culture as the complex of *sui generis* value-creating activities – this constituted the project of Enlightenment. Just as the broad concept of culture was to replace the idea of fixed and binding traditions, "culture" in its narrow sense aspired to replace the spiritual, but irrational power of religion as ultimate orientation concerning the ends of life. Only scientific and/or aesthetic education can render the people capable of rational self-government – so declared both Condorcet and Schiller. The two meanings of culture necessarily belonged together: culture as the human way of collective life ought to be guided by "high", authentic culture which is directly rooted in humanity's creative freedom and rationality.

The adhesion and interdependence of these two analytically unrelated meanings of "culture" is again not merely an accident of history or an illusion of our past. For modernity itself reconfirms and again necessitates this connection by its own immanent logic. Paradoxically, modernity – that regards all historical societies as forms of culture – can conceive itself as a single culture in the *broad* sense only if it relates the complex everyday activities of modern individuals (this primary subject-matter of anthropological interests) to the autonomous or institutionalised fields of culture in the *narrow* sense: to high

culture and its shadow, mass culture. Because under contemporary conditions these everyday activities do not have – as a rule – *both* a socially shared/shareable *and* for the acting subject experientially transparent meaning. The work activities of the majority become *technicised*. They have for them no inherent sense: their meaningfulness and rationality resides in the sciences applied which underpin the organisation of the process of production as a whole, but which do not exist in the head of the labourer (and in their totality do not exist in anyone's head). The broadly conceived consumptive activities, on the other hand, become to a large extent *individualised* and *aestheticised* – they appear as matters of personal taste. No doubt, these seemingly so individual, inchoate adumbrations of meaning are in fact organised by prefabricated and manipulable social codes; for the individual consumer, however, these remain opaque and veiled. The narrowly conceived, high or institutionalised culture of modernity objectively plays a larger role than ever before in the organisation of the broad, everyday culture, but it is definitely not the highest expression or systematisation of this latter – the two must be thought of both as necessarily interrelated and as quite incongruent.

The most important consequence of this state of affairs is the frequent, or even dominant, self-perception of modernity as *culturally deficient*, as a world lacking in meaning. And this deficiency can again be articulated from two opposed viewpoints, depending whether "technicisation" or "pseudo-aesthetisation" of worldly activities is regarded as the defining symptom of its malaises. From the first viewpoint modernity appears as a world of incomplete and imperfect demythologisation/*disenchantment*: a state of one-sided, truncated rationality that reduces everything to the status of mere means, to a system of universal fungibility which ultimately leaves the individuals at the mercy of forces – a kind of "second nature" – created, but uncontrollable by them. From the second viewpoint modernity appears as a world of manipulated *re-enchantment* in which things are enveloped by a fabricated halo of pseudo-aesthetic significations mobilising unconscious impulses – not to unify, but to reinforce the individuals in their competitive isolation and incapacity for genuine communication.

The first diagnosis may then lead to the "Enlightenment" project of carrying through the task of full rationalisation, of mastering now the course and powers of history itself: to the utopia of a *rational* – and rationally

designed – *society* of the future. The second may give rise to a yearning for the spontaneous cultural unity of a nostalgically evoked past and to the "Romantic" idea of the willed advent of a "new mythology", or – in a more pragmatic vein – to the fabrication of "traditions" that would allow the individuals to regain the security and warmth of some particularistic *organic community*. For, from this latter standpoint, only such a community could provide the social preconditions of an authentic individuation and stable personal relations based on shared values irreducible to mutual egotisms and interchangeable functional roles.

These two meanings/notions of "culture" – the broad and the narrow – are, however, themselves – each separately – exposed to considerable conceptual stress and paradoxes. As far as the first, the anthropological concept is concerned, I will restrict myself to some very broad remarks – the bare minimum that the logic of this exposition would seem to demand, since concerning this topic I am hardly competent.

"Culture" in its broad sense is both a universal and a differential concept. It designates, on the one hand, that general attribute or generic realm that all humans share, respectively in which they necessarily participate. On the other hand, it signifies precisely what distinguishes temporarily and/or spatially distinct societies from each other: the complex of characteristics, which unifies a particular social unit in its contingent difference from the others. In both of its aspects the concept is beset by problems. I have already earlier referred to the aporetic character of the idea of "cultural invariants:" it seems that empirically oriented theories of "cultural universals" must ultimately locate them – precisely to ensure and legitimate their universality – in "nature" as the opposite of culture. But there are difficulties in the particularising use of the culture concept as well. The idea of culture as the specific difference, which identifies one social unit in its distinction from others, runs counter to the fact that every socially significant unit is itself culturally differentiated, or at least contains a set of specific and distinct, often opposed, socio-cultural positions and roles. The differential notion of unique and unitary "cultures" again proves to be an unstable idealising construct hypostatising the idea of macrocultural identity.

There is, however, another and more specific aspect of these latter difficulties, concerning the comprehension of one specific culture (or rather a set of such

cultures sharing some basic generic characteristics): that of modernity. I have already argued that, from the viewpoint of the broad concept of culture, modern society appears as essentially deficient. But at the same time – and from the perspective of this very same concept – modernity takes on the character of the paradigmatic or "most fully developed" culture because it is the culture which self-reflexively knows itself *as* culture. By recognising all others as equal cultures, cultural modernity posits itself as more equal than others. It is its very particularity – that is, its self-reflexive character – that makes it universal: the recognition of other societies as "cultures" confers upon it the task and the right to assimilate/acquire/take into possession their "cultural achievements" – of course, what it qualifies as such.

This leads back to the question of the *relation* between these two, the universalistic and the differential aspects of the broad culture concept – the manner in which they can be thought and be brought together, and not only theoretically, but also in practical attitudes, ideologies and projects. I shall mention here merely the fundamental types of opposition that emerge in this respect. *Theoretically* a straightforward evolutionism (a unifying reduction of differences through their temporalisation) stands opposed to cultural relativism (the codification and fixation of differences through their spatialisation) as the two poles of anthropological theorising. Then, as far as *ideological attitudes* are concerned, an "enlightened" cosmopolitanism stands opposed – within the history of anthropology itself – to recurrent forms of Romantic-nostalgic primitivism, and – in everyday social consciousness – to various shades of ethnic or cultural nationalism. Lastly, in terms of projects and *strategies of action*, the levelling idea of a general modernisation is set against the programs of socio-cultural separatism. These pairs of opposites, though in some respects analogous, are not identifiable with, or reducible to, each other. Nor can one attach a single unambiguous content and social significance to them. "Modernisation" can be equally an externally imposed, coercive force obliterating all differences, and an indigenous impulse to improve one's lot and the standing of one's country. In great many cases it is a mixture of the two. "Separatism" can be an expression of efforts to create a consciousness of collective solidarity for a disadvantaged or stigmatised group in its striving for recognition and autonomy; on the other hand, it can be an attempt to conserve ossified power structures by insulating them from the potentially destabilising effects of foreign contacts, not to mention that it may well be a mere facade for policies of apartheid or ethnic cleansing.

These opposed trends and tendencies are, however, not restricted to the comprehension and practice of intersocietal relations alone. Analogues of them are operative and effective also *within* modern societies. Modernity equally can be conceived (and, of course, criticised) as a society of universal levelling, whose mechanisms efface all differences, *and* as a society that externally imposes fixed differences upon the individuals, confining them to ethnic zoos or social ghettos, and forcing them to accept restrictive and exclusive, non-communicating group solidarities. By dissolving the ascriptively pre-set, as it were "in-born", identities and forms of solidarities, modernity transformed them into something to be created – but this leaves open the question: created by whom? No doubt, under its conditions identities can be achieved, chosen or at least freely and consciously accepted: I *am,* and choose to be, an Aborigine, a Jew, feminine or working class. But how much more often and more decisively are such identities imposed by others: you are – and don't try to hide or deny – an Abo, a dirty Jew, merely a woman or just a crude upstart from the working class. If culture is that reservoir of meanings in terms of which identities and solidarities are formed, modernity cannot escape the double bind: in its self-reflexivity it cannot fail to recognise how far and how radically its own culture is something made and re-makeable, and simultaneously: how little can it be formed and even chosen by the individuals.

This is perhaps the appropriate point at which to turn from this rhapsodic digression, loosely connected with the broad, anthropological notion of culture, to its conceptual supplement: culture in its narrow, value-marked sense of "high" culture. For it may be thought that at least in this more restricted sense cultural modernity escapes the double bind. Because, according to its very concept, high culture is precisely that which can only be genuinely created, on the one side, and freely accepted, on the other side, since its appropriation is nothing else but the act of its selective understanding.

The first thing, however, that strikes us, if we turn our attention to "high" culture, is the fact that its notion emerged simultaneously with, and makes sense only in relation to, a new opposite. This latter may be called "popular", "commercial", "mass" and so on but in general means *low* culture, for its essential contents are usually conceived of as (poor) substitutes for those of high culture. This is again a modern dichotomy. It is true that most hierarchically organised societies have made some distinction between activities befitting the gentleman or gentlewoman being worthy to exercise for their own

sake, and those which are "servile", because valuable only in view of the utility of that what they produce or make happen – a distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*, between liberal and mechanical arts and so on. But it is not only the case that the actual composition of the concerned activities had very little in common with our divide between high and popular culture. Even more importantly: the "servile" or mechanical activities were in no way regarded as inadequate substitutes for (or perhaps legitimate competitors of) "liberal" activities – they were codified simply as different in kind. What women sang in the spinnery or in the fields was not considered as comparable with a Gregorian mass in the church, just as the performance of the ballad-singer at the fair was classed together with that of the bear-dancer, juggler or beggar and not with what the clerck/cleric was doing when writing learned verses in Latin. And I must say that if these pre-modern segregations of human activities served only to reconfirm, as untranscendable, the boundaries of social inequalities, they also contained – in comparison with our own dichotomy – a grain of sanity. For there is, I think, something slightly absurd in the presupposition suggested by it that liking rock music is in some way an alternative to listening to Schönberg, or that reading a thriller is a substitute – worthless or healthy – for reading *Finnegans Wake*.

But, of course, cultural modernity makes the thriller and Joyce, the Rolling Stones and Schönberg not only comparable, but actually a matter of alternative choice. It does so by means of the very process which first made the emergence of both these concepts, high *versus* low culture, at all possible: the process of *commodification*. In a bookshop or a CD-store the works mentioned are all there, stocked just a few metres apart – for you to choose. It was commodification that destroyed the network of patronage relations which directly conferred an instrumental functionality upon works of high culture, and just thereby made it possible for the Enlightenment to conceive of them as works of high culture: as embodiments of free, autonomous spiritual activities that alone can guide us towards universally valid ends. It was, however, this same commodification that immediately destroyed this illusion of the Enlightenment. Open competition in the cultural marketplace resulted in works that genuinely enlighten, or offer cultivated and cultivating pleasure, losing out to those which – from the viewpoint of the Enlightenment – expressed and merely reconfirmed the worst prejudices and the crude tastes of an uncultivated general public. To the ideal claim pertaining to the very

notion of a high culture, the claim to universal significance and validity, stands opposed the undisputable fact of its highly restricted and socially conditioned spread and effectivity. If the idea of "high" culture originally expressed the hopeful project of the Enlightenment, the conception immediately following upon it of a popular, in the sense of "low," culture articulated its frustrated disillusionment with its incapacity to enlighten the "people," who, of course, were then blamed for this failure as well.

As soon as this dichotomy became articulated, it was, however, reshaped and reinterpreted by "Romanticism" which replaced "popular" with "folk," or whatever substitutes are found for it (such as "working-class culture") in theories of cultural populism. Just as the individual can acquire a stable and harmonious self-identity only if it is recognised by a supportive and cohesive community, the objectivations of an autonomous high culture have genuine value and significance only if they are rooted in the spontaneous and largely anonymous creations of the appropriate collectivity. Only then can the alienation of high culture, autonomously following the dictates of its own logic and thereby becoming ever more separated from the life-interests of the individuals, be overcome; only then can its creations again become relevant for the conscious formation of their self-identity. The struggle between the opposed understandings of the significance and potentialities of high and low culture does not begin with the dispute between Adorno and "cultural studies" – it goes back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

At this point a historical remark may be apposite. It is evident that this dichotomy can be applied only to some components of the value-marked concept of culture: primarily to the arts (broadly conceived), to a lesser degree to the humanities, but not to the "hard" sciences. We ought to remember, however, that from the middle of the eighteenth century until that of the nineteenth, a struggle – and during the French Revolution, a bloody one – was also going on between two opposed conceptions of the sciences of nature: the science of expert specialists *versus* "popular" science, a science based upon everyday experiences or at least experiments performable as popular spectacles and so open to the judgement of all and to the active participation of amateurs. In this case, however, one side – that of the experts – irrevocably triumphed, a victory institutionally fixed by the destruction of local/regional academies and their replacement by the professional organisations of scientist specialists.

Marat lost out – and not to Condorcet, but to Lavoisier. This latter won, because his science – while retaining its autonomy as pure science – acquired in the course of the nineteenth century a function indispensable for the survival and continuation of modernity: it became, in Marx's words, a "direct productive force." The permanence of the dispute between the high and the popular arts indicates that art, in all its varieties, possesses no such assured or presumed functions, that any social significance it can attain to has to be invented and probed out ever anew by the artist, the critic and the audience.

This is born out clearly by the very character of this dispute. For what is constant in it is only the general structure of the opposed evaluations and interpretations, not their actual contents which prove to be not only variable, but interchangeable, depending upon the current socio-political constellation and the strategies found appropriate by cultural specialists for pursuing their differing ideological objectives. Thus high culture can be upheld as a great conservative force, being the embodiment of that "canon" which alone can ensure the preservation of an endangered national (or more broadly: Western) identity, in opposition to the fashion driven instability of an ever more international, and thus "alien," commercial culture. But it equally can be presented as the sole bearer of a radically critical or utopian attitude, since its very principle – autonomy – essentially negates the universal domination of the profit motive that permeates not only culture industry, but all walks of life. And one can apply similar and similarly opposed characterisations to "popular" or mass culture as well. On the one hand, it can be portrayed as the mere instrument of cynical manipulation; on the other, it can be argued that it owes its effective appeal to those real needs and utopian impulses, which it unconsciously and unwittingly expresses. All these operations are, no doubt, facilitated by the fact that it is always the critical intellectual who actually defines which works of art are truly autonomous or genuinely popular.

Lastly, it is not only the opposed evaluations of this dichotomy that structurally pertain to cultural modernity; equally persistent are the attempts to overcome this divide, and again from opposite directions. The Enlightenment project of gradually raising the culture of general public to the level of autonomous high culture still lives on, perceiving a small victory in every *Pride and Prejudice* on the television and in every blockbuster exhibition of Impressionists. I should not be, however, too ironical in this respect, without

confessing to my nostalgic sympathy with it: I still would like to believe that making universities socially more accessible does not necessarily mean their transformation into educational marketplaces providing "customers" with specialised training, in outright denial of their idea as institutions of general education.

On the other hand, efforts to overcome this divide by abolishing the autonomy of art through its reunification with life or by imploding it from within – from the historical Romanticism through Dada to post-modernism – have been no less vital and persisting. These recurring efforts have been no more successful than the first ones. The ability of institutionalised art to "musealise" (and to commodify) works of an anti-art is truly impressive: today not only are Duchamp's "Fountain" or the exact replicas of Tatlin's projects hallowed museum exhibits, but also, through photos and videos, "happenings" and Christo's landscape art have taken their peaceful place in museums of contemporary art.

Here at last, at the end of this topographic survey, we have arrived at the narrow concept of culture, at high culture itself. One can distinguish schematically a fourfold accomplishment or outcome of this conceptualisation, or rather of those socio-cultural processes, which it actively expresses and articulates.

First, this concept unifies a number of social practices and their products that are quite heterogeneous in regard to both their immanent characteristics and their traditional social evaluation. It unifies them not simply by assigning them to a single general category, but by *conceptually homogenising* them in some essential respects. Activities are admitted to the realm of high culture only on the following terms:

1. If they can be conceived not merely as performative – as exercises of individual capacities – but as objectifying activities, producing "works" of some kind.
2. If they are not merely reproductive, but "creative," their "works" being novel and original.
3. If their objectivations, in whatever way be they materially embodied, can be regarded as having a general significance solely because they are essentially ideal objects: complexes of meaning.
4. If their significance, the validity of these meanings, can in principle be judged according to criteria wholly internal to these practices and, at the same time, directly

related to basic human values – in the classical understanding, to beauty and truth.

It was the result of cultural transformations and struggles lasting centuries (a good example is the rise of *opus* music and the triumph of the idea of a "musical work of art" as against the understanding and practice of music as improvisatory performance) that some social practices become endowed with, and submitted to, these demands of objectivisation, novelty/creativity, idealisation/dematerialisation and autonomy, and only in this way was our idea of high culture formulable and comprehensible at all. Furthermore, not only did the general notion of high culture emerge through such a homogenising unification: its basic constituents are also the outcomes of similar processes of conceptual amalgamation. Not only is our concept of "art" – with its subdivision into its five classical kinds – the result of a post-Renaissance development that reached its conclusion only at the end of the eighteenth century. Also the paradigmatic form and concept of "science" – that of the "hard" natural sciences – came into being only by abolishing divisions that even early modernity – from Bacon to the French *Encyclopédie* – intended to preserve: the boundary line between deductive "natural philosophy" as the form of necessary knowledge and empirical "natural history" as the form of contingent, merely probable knowledge.

Secondly, by means of this homogenisation high cultural activities became demarcated from, and elevated above, other forms of social practices: they are posited now as activities whose works represent immanent values, which are valuable independently of any possible subsequent use. Their autonomy meant emancipation from any fixed and pre-set social task, and it was realised through processes of social disembedding and defunctionalisation. This in no way implies the denial of their social significance, the negation of their ability to fulfil socially essential functions – only it is not this latter which directly determines their value, but it is the satisfaction of their immanent value-criteria that is thought of as endowing them with such a capacity.

This posited connection between the realisation of some fundamental values, on the one hand, and definite codified and specialised practices, on the other, resulted at the same time in an enormous *value reduction*. In a society that claims to be able to produce truth and beauty regularly in ever new objectified forms, *other* values – values which in pre-modern societies were certainly

regarded as no less binding and fundamental – take on the character of a diminished or questionable objectivity. The "good" and the "sacred" retreat, on the one hand, into the interiority of private conscience and faith. On the other hand, they are now "up for grabs," they become objects for the contending forms and powers of institutionalised high culture, each promising alone to deliver, guarantee or substitute for them.

Because, and this is the third point to make, high cultural practices – despite, and on the background of, their homogenisation – are dichotomically organised into a conflictual field. High culture consists of the arts and the sciences codified as polar opposites, with the humanities in a no-man's-land somewhere between. In the sciences and arts respectively, reason stands opposed to sensuous imagination; impersonal and depersonalised objectivity to the irreplaceable self-expression of individual subjectivity; an institutionally restricted form of communication to an indefinite and culturally open one; novel discoveries surpassing and invalidating their own tradition to original works which merely add to and extend this tradition, conferring upon it new meanings and renewed relevance; and so on.

At this stage it would be not only impossible, but hopefully also unnecessary and boring to elaborate the point that around these contrarieties are formed: the opposed projects of an "enlightened" scientisation and a "Romantic" aesthetisation of culture, or, more ambitiously, of life in general. Under the conditions of cultural modernity the scientific and aesthetic "attitudes" have become universalised: they no longer have some pre-established domain deemed appropriate to the "dignity" of their interests. Anything and everything can, in principle, become the object of scientific investigation *or* of aesthetic experience (and artistic representation). The requirements and validity criteria of the two, however, exclude each other. They enter into conflict, the Weberian "war of the gods." The culture wars of modernity – some aspects of which have already been mentioned – are to a significant degree struggles for hegemony between these adversaries and for the relegation of the other to the position of a subordinate supplement. There is, however, one consequence of this on-going competition that pertains to the very nature of modern high culture and which deserves to be mentioned separately as the fourth aspect of its outcomes: the *progressive erosion of the substantive content* of the values that originally legitimated the autonomy of high cultural activities.

The modern sciences, emancipated from forms of direct social control, were originally presented as the cognitively and methodologically certain way, the sole safe path to the discovery of objective truth. With the autonomy of their development, however, objective truth itself became identified ever more closely with what the sciences can actually deliver – and *what* can they deliver, this is precisely the bone of contention in our culture wars. Thus suspicion arises that in fact "truth" means no more than what is pragmatically serviceable to the general domination of those social powers which – indirectly at least – co-determine their development. The autonomous arts promised to create ever-new works of beauty, but their own evolution has outgrown and shattered this value concept. What their widely differing trends and practices can offer today is some illusive and contentless "aesthetic quality" in general, a mere name for what they deliver in common, if there is such a thing at all. They are therefore open to the suspicion that they merely provide material to make old social distinctions in new and subtler ways. As a result, the very notion of "culture" appears now in an ambivalent light. Is it something deeply important, the analysis of which is fundamental for any attempt to understand (and perhaps to challenge and change) modernity? Or is "culture" merely the "opium of the idle," and the preoccupation with it only a way of avoiding inquiry into "society"?

As this process of erosion continues, suspicion falls also upon the projects of "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism." This is, I think, a perfectly legitimate and sane suspicion. What they promised and tried to achieve – the idea of a scientifically designed, rational society *versus* that of the aesthetic realisation of imagined, close communities – are not so much distant utopias, but dystopias and dangers. Nor is it possible – as I tried to illustrate – to ascribe some stable, constant social-political significance to either of these tendencies, even as an open, uncompletable project. Neither of them is inherently progressive or reactionary, democratic or elitist, whatever these words may mean.

But the suspicion directed towards them, however legitimate it may be, is also futile. For "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism" are the two great projects and tendencies structurally related to cultural modernity. While both aim at overcoming the multiple ambiguities and antinomies of its constitution, their see-saw struggle is actually the mechanism by which this very structure is dynamically reproduced and owing to which modernity achieved and

continues to achieve as much cultural integration as it is capable of accomplishing.

This summary statement is not, however, a conclusion that may legitimately be drawn from the present paper, which aims at providing only a conceptual topography: an idealising description directed mostly at the past. It expresses merely a personal opinion, something which – according to Hegel (and I concur) – has no place in philosophy. I could perhaps reformulate it to accord better with the modest claims this paper can raise. But since philosophy also demands from its practitioners not to hide behind an enigmatic incognito concerning their relation to the pressing problems of the present, I rather chose here, at the end, to go on with this mere opining, by trying to give some inconclusive answers to two possible objections against this illegitimate, but emphatic, non-conclusion that I have just formulated.

One objection that might be raised points out that the historical failure of all the great attempts to reconcile or synthetise "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism" in no way proves the illegitimacy or impossibility of such an endeavour in general. This is certainly true – in fact, I doubt whether philosophy, with the inherent vagueness of its concepts, can provide stringent proofs of historical impossibility. Nevertheless, I would reply to this objection by indicating that such a desired or hoped-for reconciliation is just what actually took and takes place in the on-going history of modernity through the very strife of these opposed tendencies. For "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism" not only consistently failed, they also consistently succeeded – though no doubt in unforeseen and unsatisfactory ways. Not only did the technicisation and scientisation of the life-world proceed together with its ever-growing aestheticisation. It was also the successful advance of an "enlightened," objectifying attitude to nature which simultaneously transformed the whole Earth into a human habitat, the "home" for the whole of humanity – even if in a way that for Romanticism would be the mockery of this idea. But it was the growing "mastery" of nature which broke down the traditional division of the environments into the domesticated, befitting humans, and the spheres of an alien beyond: the wild, appropriate only for subhumans, and the sacred as the locus of the divine. Today, tourists trample where the gods once dwelt, and photographs, films, television bring every corner of the Earth into our homes with reassuring familiarity. The idea of "reconciliation" certainly

implies something other and more than this mutual advancement of opposed tendencies through the constant struggle of institutionally separated realms, each striving for exclusive universality. It demands the establishment of a well-defined and stable space for each within an encompassing, preferably moral framework. For this very reason, however, this idea amounts not to the overcoming of the *contradictions* of modernity, but to the abandonment of modernity itself, for it denies that conflictual, agonistic pluralism that is the basic source of its dynamism.

Such an overcoming of modernity is, however, precisely what is actually happening or has already happened, at least in respect of its culture – this may well be a second objection raised in the name of "postmodernity." From the viewpoint of its representatives the antagonism between "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism" has now become irrelevant, since the orienting categories in terms of which it has been and can only be formulated – the contrast between high and low, elite and mass, left and right, "real" and "virtual" – have in fact lost their validity. Insofar as this is intended – as is usually the case – to represent the description of what is the actual situation today, it seems to me (to put it mildly) a gross overstatement. Without question, there are signs of genuinely structural changes in contemporary culture: forms of scientific communication are changing due to the information revolution, but also in the arts tendencies may be observed towards de-objectivisation, dissolving the traditional concept of a "work" of art, towards rematerialisation and so on. These are, however, still partial and by no means dominant trends whose long-range consequences are exceptionally difficult to foresee.

If, however, what are actually utopias or dystopias of a future are now appearing in these theories as straightforward descriptions of the present, this is symptomatic. It is symptomatic of a state of affairs when the projects of Enlightenment and Romanticism are becoming increasingly irrelevant, but irrelevant for a very specific, single group of social actors: the intellectuals. This term usually designated not cultural specialists in general, but "specialists" in cultural critique and the critique of culture. Traditionally, it was the intellectuals who formulated, and again and again reformulated, spearheaded the feuding projects of Enlightenment and Romanticism. This is a role, however, which – in my judgemental opinion – is becoming ever more difficult to fulfil consistently with a good intellectual conscience today. More importantly,

however, intellectuals are no longer really needed for this purpose – this role has been taken over largely by the genuine experts: the managers and PR persons of various cultural institutions and media, and their patrons and allies in social and political establishments. In future, the traditional intellectual may become the new structurally unemployed of cultural life. And this is, I think, a *danger* because it would undercut the uneasy, but – in modernity – persistent connection between culture and critique. One may even argue that this task has never been more necessary than now, when culture in its various meanings and constituents has become deeply entrenched institutionally: to raise the question of the *good* in relation to its separated, autonomous realms. Are they "good" – in what respect, for what and for whom? But the problem of whether there are still coherent intellectual positions which no longer subscribe to the illusions of "Enlightenment" and "Romanticism", and from which such questions can be meaningfully and convincingly raised – this is a problem not for this, in its basic content merely descriptive paper, but perhaps for the collective reflection of all of us who live from, and perhaps to some degree also for, culture.

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