

concrete whole is in the form of being, of immediacy, constitutes determinateness as such.¹ The occultists take literally the non-being in 'simple unity with being', and their kind of concreteness is a surreptitious short-cut from the whole to the determinate which can defend itself by claiming that the whole, having once been determined, is no longer the whole. They call to metaphysics: *Hic Rhodus hic salta*: if the philosophic investment of spirit with existence is determinable, then finally, they sense, any scattered piece of existence must be justifiable as a particular spirit. The doctrine of the existence of the Spirit, the ultimate exaltation of bourgeois consciousness, consequently bore teleologically within it the belief in spirits, its ultimate degradation. The shift to existence, always 'positive' and justifying the world, implies at the same time the thesis of the positivity of mind, pinning it down, transposing the absolute into appearance. Whether the whole objective world, as 'product', is to be spirit, or a particular thing a particular spirit, ceases to matter, and the world-spirit becomes the supreme Spirit, the guardian angel of the established, despiritualized order. On this the occultists live: their mysticism is the *enfant terrible* of the mystical moment in Hegel. They take speculation to the point of fraudulent bankruptcy. In passing off determinate being as mind, or spirit, they put objectified mind to the test of existence, which must prove negative. No spirit exists.

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Warning: not to be misused. – The dialectic stems from the sophists; it was a mode of discussion whereby dogmatic assertions were shaken and, as the public prosecutors and comic writers put it, the lesser word made the stronger. It subsequently developed, as against *philosophia perennis*, into a perennial method of criticism, a refuge for all the thoughts of the oppressed, even those unthought by them. But as a means of proving oneself right it was also from the first an instrument of domination, a formal technique of apologetics unconcerned with content, serviceable to those who could pay: the principle of constantly and successfully turning the tables. Its truth or untruth, therefore, is not inherent in the method itself, but in its intention in the historical process. The splitting of the

1. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke 5*, p. 116 (*Hegel's Science of Logic*, London 1969, p. 110).

Hegelian school into a left and a right wing was founded in the ambiguity of the theory no less than in the political situation preceding the 1848 revolution. Dialectical thought includes not only the Marxian doctrine that the proletariat as the absolute object of history is capable of becoming its first social subject, and realizing the conscious self-determination of mankind, but also the joke that Gustave Doré¹ attributes to a parliamentary representative of the *ancien régime*: that without Louis XVI there would never have been a revolution, so that he is to be thanked for the rights of man. Negative philosophy, dissolving everything, dissolves even the dissolvent. But the new form in which it claims to suspend and preserve both, dissolved and dissolvent, can never emerge in a pure state from an antagonistic society. As long as domination reproduces itself, the old quality reappears unrefined in the dissolving of the dissolvent: in a radical sense no leap is made at all. That would happen only with the liberating event. Because the dialectical determination of the new quality always finds itself referred back to the violence of the objective tendency that propagates domination, it is placed under the almost inescapable compulsion, whenever it has conceptually achieved the negation of the negation, to substitute, even in thought, the bad old order for the non-existent alternative. The depth to which it penetrates objectivity is bought with complicity in the lie that objectivity is truth. By strictly limiting itself to extrapolating the image of a privilege-free state, from that which owes to the historical process the privilege of existing, it bows to restoration. This is registered by private existence. Hegel taxed the latter with nullity. Mere subjectivity, he argued, insisting on the purity of its own principle, becomes entangled in antinomies. It is brought down by its own mischief, by hypocrisy and evil, in so far as it is not objectified in society and state. Morality, autonomy founded on pure self-certainty, together with conscience, is mere illusion. If 'there is no moral reality',² it is consistent that in the *Philosophy of Right* marriage is ranked above conscience, and that the latter, even on its own level, which Hegel, with Romanticism, determines as that of irony, is accused of 'subjective vanity' in its bifocal understanding. This dialectical motif, operating on all levels of the system, is at once true and untrue. True because it unmasks

1. Gustave Doré (1832–83): French painter and illustrator.

2. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *Werke* 3, p. 452 (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 626).

the particular as a necessary illusion, the false consciousness of isolated things as being themselves alone and not moments of the whole; and this false consciousness it breaks down with the power of the whole. Untrue because the motif of objectification, 'alienation', becoming a pretext for bourgeois self-assertion of the subject, is degraded to a mere rationalization, as long as objectivity, contrasted by thought to bad subjectivity, is unfree and does not measure up to the subject's criticism. The word alienation [*Ent-äusserung*], expressing the expectation of release from private wilfulness through obedience of the private will, acknowledges by the very tenacity with which it views the alien external world as institutionally opposed to the subject – in spite of all its protestations of reconciliation – the continuing irreconcilability of subject and object, which constitutes the theme of dialectical criticism. The act of self-alienation amounts to the renunciation that Goethe called salvation, and thus to a justification of the status quo, now as then. From his insight into, for example, the mutilation of women by patriarchal society, and into the impossibility of eliminating anthropological deformation without its pre-condition, precisely the intransigently realistic dialectician could derive the master-of-the-house standpoint, and lend his voice to the continuance of the patriarchal relationship. In this he lacks neither valid reasons, such as the impossibility of different relations under the present conditions, nor even humanity towards the oppressed, who have to suffer the consequences of false emancipation; but all this truth would become ideology in the hands of male interest. The dialectician knows the unhappiness and vulnerability of the ageing spinster, the murderousness of divorce. But in anti-romantically giving objectified marriage precedence over ephemeral passion which is not preserved in a shared life, he makes himself the mouth-piece of those who practise marriage at the expense of affection, love what they are married to, that is, the abstract property-relationship. The logical conclusion of such wisdom¹ would be that people do not matter, provided they accommodate themselves to the given constellation and do what is asked of them. To protect itself from such temptations an enlightened dialectic needs to guard incessantly against this apologetic, restorative element which is, after all, inherent in sophistication. The threatening relapse of

1. *Dieser Weisheit letzter Schluss*: ironic reprise of the words of Faust's final monologue in Goethe's play.

reflection into unreflectedness gives itself away by the facility with which the dialectical procedure shuttles its arguments, as if it were itself that immediate knowledge of the whole which the very principle of the dialectic precludes. The standpoint of totality is adopted in order, with a schoolmasterly *That-is-not-what-I-meant*, to deprive one's opponent of any definite negative judgement, and at the same time violently to break off the movement of concepts, to arrest the dialectic by pointing to the insuperable inertia of facts. The harm is done by the *thema probandum*: the thinker uses the dialectic instead of giving himself up to it. In this way thought, masterfully dialectical, reverts to the pre-dialectical stage: the serene demonstration of the fact that there are two sides to everything.

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Finale. – The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.