Materialism and Morality

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That human beings autonomously attempt to decide whether their actions are good or evil appears to be a late historical phenomenon.[1] A highly-developed European individual can bring into the light of clear consciousness and morally evaluate not just important decisions, but also those primarily instinctual and habitual reactions of which his life for the most part consists. However, human actions appear more compulsive as their subjects belong to earlier historical formations. The capacity to subject instinctual reactions to moral criticism and to change them on the basis of individual considerations could only develop with the growing differentiation of society. Even the authority principle of the Middle Ages, the undermining of which marks the starting-point of modern moral inquiry, is an expression of a later phase of this process. The unbroken religious faith which preceded the dominance of this principle was an already tremendously complicated mediation between naive experience and instinctual reaction; therefore, the medieval criterion of tradition sanctioned by the church (whose exclusive validity surely still carried a strongly compulsive character) already indicates a moral conflict.

Originally published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, II/2 (1933), pp. 162-195. Translated by G. Frederick Hunter and John Torpey.

1. Translators' comment on some terms in the article: *Allgemeinheit*: As used by Horkheimer, this term usually has a triple meaning that encompasses the Kantian "universality," the Hegelian "generality," and the more common meaning "society at large." Where the term contains all three of these aspects (which in "Materialism and Morality" is most of the time), it has been rendered as "generality." The term is thus quasi-technical in the translation, since it connotes "society at large" much more weakly than does "*Allgemeinheit*." It is nevertheless the least distorting among the possible choices; where the term more strongly has one of the other connotations, it has been rendered either as "universality" or "society at large."
Aufheben: The choice for the translator in regard to this bugaboo is to either render it according to whether it is used "positively" (supercede, transcend) or "negatively" (annul, abolish), or to pick one term and render it consistently. Although the former

When Augustine[2] declares: "*Ego vero evangelio non crederum misi me catholicae ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas*," this affirmation already presupposes — as Dilthey[3] recognized — a doubting of faith. The social life-process of the modern period has presently so advanced human powers that at least the members of certain strata in the most developed countries are capable, in a relatively wide range of their exist-

alternative is often chosen by translators of material from the Hegelian and Marxist traditions, we have opted for the latter alternative and have chosen the homely "sublate" or "sublation" wherever it has the Hegelian/Marxist shading, which it most often does. Although this technical term was once derided as "baroque" in this journal, none of the other available renderings in English carry both the positive and negative senses of the term (supersession comes the closest, but still connotes neither the *preservation* of contradiction at a higher level of unity, nor any sense of annulment) or sustains this unity in opposition across contexts. Cf. *The Logic of Hegel* [the *Lesser Logic*, tr. Wm. Wallace, 2nd ed., London, 1904, p. 180, and *The Science of Logic,* tr. A.V. Miller, London, 1969, pp. 106f.]

Gebot: In light of Kant's use of the term, we find the usual "precept" (Beck's choice) too weak and "command" (Paton's choice) too imprecise. *Ein Gebot* has the character of a *law*, with all the connotations of universality that this term has in Kant. Neither "precept" nor "command" catches this. At one point in the *Grundlegung*, Kant in fact equates "*Gesetze*" and "*Gebote*" (Akadamie-Ausgabe, p. 416). We therefore have adopted the term "commandment," which is also the rendering in the English abstract of "*Materialismus und Moral*" that is appended to the original in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Although the German "*Gebot*" does not inherently have the strong biblical connotation of "commandment," neither do we feel this connotation to be completely off the mark, either. The term "precept" we have reserved for "[*moralische*] *Vorschrift*."

Moral: In the abovementioned English abstract of "*Materialismus und Moral*," the title is rendered "Materialism and Ethics." However, Horkheimer consistently distinguishes *Ethik* from *Moral* in the article; while both could be rendered as "moral philosophy," only the latter retains the connotation of a moment in the totality, and since this is the primary focus of the article, we have retained this distinction and always rendered derivatives of *Ethik* as "ethics" or "ethical," and *Moral* as "morality" or "moral philosophy."

moralisches Gefühl: In their translations of Kant's *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, both H.J. Paton and L.W. Beck render this as "moral feeling." Yet the term in German is Kant's own rendering of "moral sentiment," the term used by the Scottish moralists, whose "heteronomous" ethical theories Kant is (often only implicitly) criticizing in the *Grundlegung*; we have thus always rendered it as "moral sentiment" (which is also the rendering that appears in the *ZfS*'s abstract mentioned above).

Wissenschaft: "Science" is always a translation of *Wissenschaft*, but this latter term can also mean "scholarship," "knowledge," etc., depending on the context. Its connotations are as philosophical and humanities-oriented as they are "scientistic," which should be borne in mind as the word "science" is encountered in the article.

2. C. ep. Manich. 6.

3. Cf. *Gesammelte Schriften [Collected Writings]* vol. II, Leipzig and Berlin, 1921, p. 110 ff.

ence, of not merely following instinct or habit, but of choosing autonomously among several possible aims. The exercise of this capacity admittedly takes place on a much smaller scale than is commonly believed. Even if the deliberations concerning the technique and the means which should be applied to a given purpose have become extremely refined in many areas of social and individual life, the aims of human beings nonetheless continue to be rigidly fixed. Precisely in those actions which in their totality are socially and historically significant, human beings in general behave in a quite typical manner, that is, in conformity with a definite scheme of motives which are characteristic of their social group. Only in non-essential, private affairs do people occasionally examine their motives conscientiously and apply their intellectual powers to the determination of goals. Within contemporary society and especially among younger people, nonetheless, proper goals have been energetically questioned. As the principle of authority was undermined and a significant number of individuals acquired substantial decision-making power over the conduct of their lives, the need emerged for a spiritual guideline which could substitute for this principle's eroding bases in orienting the individual in this world. The acquisition of moral principles was important for members of the higher social strata, since their position constantly demanded that they make intervening decisions of which they had earlier been absolved by authority. At the same time, a rationally grounded morality for the purpose of dominating the masses in the state became all the more necessary when a mode of action that diverged from the their life-interests was demanded of them.

The idealist philosophers of the modern period met this need through axiomatic construction. In accordance with the conditions which, since the Renaissance, force the individual back upon himself, they sought to authenticate these maxims with reason — that is, with reasons that are in principle generally accessible. As distinctive as the systems of Leibniz, Spinoza, and of the Enlightenment may be, they all bear the marks of an effort to justify a particular kind of behavior as that which is proper for all times on the basis of the eternal constitution of the world and of the individual. They therefore make a claim to unconditional validity. Those standards characterized as correct are admittedly quite general for the most part and offer — with the exception of several materialist and militant theories of the French Enlightenment — few definite directives. In the last centuries, life has demanded too much capacity for conformity to

both religion and morality for substantively elaborated precepts to preserve even the appearance of permanence. Even modern moral philosophers who decisively attack the formalism of earlier moral teachings hardly diverge from them in this respect. "Ethics does not teach directly what ought here and now to happen in any given case," writes Nicolai Hartmann,[4] "but in general how that is constituted which ought to happen universally.... Ethics furnishes the bird's-eye view from which the actual can be seen objectively." Idealist moral philosophy purchases the belief in its own unconditionality by taking no position with respect to an historical moment. It does not take sides. Though its perceptions may accord perfectly well with or even benefit a group of individuals in collective historical struggle, it nonetheless prescribes no position. Hartmann declares: "What a man ought to do, when he is confronted with a serious conflict that is fraught with responsibility, is this: to decide according to his best conscience; that is, according to his own living sense of the relative height of the respective values..."[5] Ethics "does not mix itself up with the conflicts of life, gives no precepts coined *ad hoc*; it is no code, as law is, of commandments and prohibitions. It turns its attention directly to the creative in man, challenges it afresh in every new case to observe, to divine, as it were, what ought here and now to happen."[6] Morality is understood in this connection as an eternal category. The judgment of character and actions as good or evil should always be possible, just as judging statements true or false, or objective forms beautiful or ugly is part of the human essence. Despite the most vigorous discussions concerning the possibility or impossibility of an eternal morality, more recent philosophers understand one another's concepts. The mutability of the content, the innate quality of certain statements is asserted and contested, but the capacity for moral value judgments as a rule is held to be an essential characteristic of human nature of at least equal rank with that of theoretical knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]. A new category of virtue has entered philosophy since the Renaissance: moral virtue. It has little in common with either the ethical conceptions of the Greeks, which concerned the best path to happiness, or the religious ethics of the Middle Ages. Although connections exist between it and these phenomena, the fundamental feature of the modern problem of morality has its roots in the bourgeois order. Insofar as certain

4. Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 1, tr. Stanton Coit, London, 1932, p. 29.
5. Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 2, tr. Stanton Coit, London, 1932, p. 285.
6. *Ethics*, vol. 1, p. 30.

economic elements of that order are found in earlier societies, aspects of this problem appear in them as well; morality can itself, however, only be understood from the standpoint of the general life situation of the epoch now about to end.

The moral conception of the bourgeoisie came to its purest expression in Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative. "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[7] According to Kant, actions which conform to this principle and which occur immediately for its sake distinguish themselves from all others through the quality of morality. He himself explained wherein "the specific mark"[8] distinguishing this imperative from all other rules of action could be sought: in the "renunciation of all interest." Even if reason itself takes a pure and immediate interest in moral actions,[9] they do not occur out of an interest in the object, nor out of necessity. Acting out of duty is contrasted with acting out of interest. Virtue does not consist in acting contrary to one's individual purposes, but rather independently of them. The individual should liberate himself from his interest.

As is well known, Kant's view was contested from various directions, including Schiller and Schleiermacher. Interest-free action was even declared impossible. "[W]hat is an interest other than the working of a motive upon the Will? Therefore where a motive moves the Will, there the latter has an interest; but where the Will is affected by no motive, there in truth it can be as little active, as a stone is able to leave its place without being pushed or pulled," says Schopenhauer.[10] Certainly Kant did not want moral action understood as action without motive, even if he viewed acting out of interest as the natural law of human beings. On the contrary, the moral impulsion[11] lies in respect for the moral law [*Sittengesetz*]. But Schopenhauer's critique, which he transformed positively [*ins Positive*] through the construction of his own ethics, hits one thing on the

7. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Louis White Beck, New York, 1959, p. 39.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 67ff.

10. Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, tr. Author B. Bullock, London, 1915, p. 99.

11. [Translators' note: "moralisch Triebfeder" — in Kant's own technical language, this is actually a contradiction in terms; cf. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Ak. Aus. p. 63. "Impulsion" follows Paton's rendering in his translation of the *Grundlegung*: Beck renders this as "incentive," but also recommends "urge."]

mark: to the moral agent in the Kantian sense, the actual reasons for action remain obscure. The reason that the general should stand above the particular is unknown to him, nor is it clear how in the individual harmony is to be achieved between them. The imperative, which "of itself finds entrance into the mind and yet gains reluctant reverence (though not always obedience)"[12] leaves the individual in a certain uneasiness and unclarity. In his soul, a struggle plays itself out between personal interest and the vague conception of a general interest, between individual and general objectives. Yet it remains obscure how a rational decision according to criteria is possible between the two. There arises an endless reflection and constant turmoil which in principle is not to be overcome. Because this problematic, which plays itself out in the inner lives of human beings, necessarily derives from their role in the social life-process, the Kantian philosophy, as its faithful reflection, is a consummate expression of its age.

The foundation of this spiritual [*seelische*] situation is easily recognized upon consideration of the structure of the bourgeois order. The social whole lives through unleashing the possessive instincts of all individuals. The whole is maintained insofar as they concern themselves with profit, with the conservation and multiplication of their own property. Each is left to care for himself as best he can. But because thereby he must produce things that others need, the general needs are fulfilled through activities which are apparently independent of one another and which only seem to serve the individual's own welfare. The fact that in this order the production of total social needs coincides with the subjects' striving after possessions has stamped the psychic apparatus of its members. In all epochs, human beings have accommodated themselves in their entire being to the life-conditions of society: a consequence of this accommodation in the modern period is that human powers orient themselves to the promotion of individual advantage. Neither the feelings of the individual nor his consciousness, neither the form of his happiness nor his conception of God escape this life-dominating principle. Even in the most refined and seemingly remote impulses of the individual, the function bringing these to bear in society still makes itself felt. In this era, economic advantage is the natural law under which individual life proceeds. To this natural law of individuals, the categorical imperative holds up the "general natural law," the law [*Lebensgesetz*]

12. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*. tr. L.W. Beck, Indianapolis, 1956, p. 89.

of human society as a standard of comparison. This would be meaningless unless particular interests and the needs of the generality intersected, not highly imperfectly, but necessarily. That this does not occur, however, is the inadequacy of the bourgeois economic form: there exists no rational connection between the free competition of individuals as the mediating and the existence of the entire society as the mediated. The process takes place not under the control of a conscious will, but as a natural occurrence. The life of the generality arises blindly, accidentally, and badly out of the chaotic activity of individuals, industries, and states. This irrationality expresses itself in the suffering of the majority of all human beings. The individual, completely absorbed in the concern for himself and "his own," thus promotes the life of the whole not merely without clear consciousness; rather, through his labor he effects both the welfare and the misery of others. It never becomes apparent to what extent and for which individuals his labor means the one or the other. No unambiguous connection can be drawn between one's own labor and larger social considerations. This problem, which only society itself could rationally solve through the systematic incorporation of each member into a consciously directed labor process, manifests itself in the bourgeois epoch as a conflict in the inner life of its subjects.

To be sure, with the liberation of the individual from the overarching unities of the Middle Ages, the individual acquired the consciousness of itself as an independent being. This self-consciousness is, however, abstract: the manner in which each individual contributes to the workings of the entire society through his labor, and is at the same time influenced by it, remains completely obscure. All of them cooperate in the good or bad development of the entire society, and yet it appears as a natural occurrence. One's role in this whole, without which the essence of the individual cannot be determined, cannot be perceived. Hence each necessarily has a false consciousness about his existence, which he is able to comprehend only in psychological categories as the sum of supposedly free decisions. Given the lack of a rational organization of the social whole that his labor benefits, he cannot recognize himself in his true connection to it and knows himself only as an individual whom the whole affects somewhat, without it ever becoming clear how and how much his egoistic activity actually affects it. The whole thus appears as an admonition, as a demand, and troubles precisely the progressive indi-

viduals at their labor, in the call of conscience and in moral deliberation.[13]

Materialism reveals — and not so generally as was just suggested, but paying particular heed to the various periods and social classes — the actual relationships from which the moral problems are derived and reflected, if only in a distorted fashion, in the doctrines of moral philosophy. The idea of morality, as it was formulated by Kant, contains the truth that the mode of action informed by the natural law of economic advantage is not necessarily the rational mode. It does not, as might be supposed, oppose the interest of the individual to feelings or even to the return to blind obedience; neither interest nor reason is maligned, but instead reason recognizes that it need not exclusively serve the natural law, i.e., individual advantage, when it has absorbed the natural law of the whole into its will. The individual, of course, cannot fulfill the demand to rationally shape the whole. Mastery of the overall process of society by human beings can only be achieved when it has overcome its anarchic form and constituted itself as a real subject — that is, through historical deed. Such a deed issues not from the individual, but rather from a constellation of social groups, in the dynamics of which conscience certainly plays an important role. Moral anxiety by no means burdens the labor of individuals in the production process alone; their entire being is affected by it. Whenever human beings follow the law which is natural to them in this society, they attend immediately only to the affairs of the subject of interests which bears their name. The reason of the bourgeois individual extends beyond his particular purposes, insofar as he is not just this determinate X with his private worries and wishes, but, at the same time, one who can ask himself what concern these worries of X actually are to him even as they immediately affect his personal existence — insofar, that is, as he is not this mere X but rather a member of human society — the "autonomous" will of Kant's commandment stirs within him. As Kant consistently argued,[14] the interest of another is in this connection equally contingent as one's own, for the relation of the strivings of Y to life of the

13. The psychological theory of conscience, as developed for example by Freud in his work *The Ego and the Id*, (tr. James Strachey, New York, 1960, pp. 18ff., esp. p. 27), is thoroughly reconcilable with this explanation. Psychology provides knowledge about the mechanism by which the predisposition for morality reproduces itself and strikes firm roots in the individual. The ground of existence of this mechanism, however, lies deeper than in the individual soul.

14. Cf. e.g., *Foundations*, p. 51.

generality is for X, as a rule, no more transparent than his own. Whoever, in the economic situation of the bourgeois, is incapable of experiencing the whole conflict is retarded in his development; he lacks a type of reaction which belongs to individuals of this period.

Therefore, morality is not simply dismissed by materialism as mere ideology or false consciousness. Rather it is understood as a human phenomenon which is not to be overcome for the duration of the bourgeois epoch. Its philosophical expression, however, is in many respects distorted. Above all, the solution of the problem does not lie in the observance of rigidly formulated commandments. In attempting to apply the Kantian imperative it quickly becomes clear that the generality with which the moral will is concerned would not be helped in the least. Even if all were to observe it, even if all were to lead a virtuous life in its sense, the same confusion would reign. Nothing essential would be changed.

Kant's four examples of moral action place this helplessness and powerlessness of the good will in bold relief: in the first, a desperate man turns away from suicide in consideration of the moral law. His decision to reject suicide is so dubious, however, that the reader is astonished that Kant does not seriously pursue it. Why should a person "who, through a series of misfortunes which has grown into hopelessness, tires of this life,"[15] not at the same time be able to will that the maxim of this action become a universal law? Is not this world in such a condition that a rational actor would perceive the possibility of that escape route as a consolation? Hume's essay on suicide, in which he proves himself a true Enlightenment figure, while written and published long before the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, nonetheless serves as a response to Kant's peculiar opinion. "A man, who retires from life," he says, "does no harm to society: He only ceases to do good; which, if it is an injury, is of the lowest kind.... But suppose that it is no longer in my power to promote the interest of society; suppose that I am a burthen to it; suppose that my life hinders some person from being much more useful to society. In such cases my resignation of life must not only be innocent but laudable. And most people who lie under any temptation to abandon existence, are in some such situation; those, who have health, or power, or authority, have commonly better reason to be in humour with the world."[16] Kant's deliberations, which take no notice of the con-

15. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

16. Hume, "On Suicide," in Hume's *Ethical Writings*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre, London, 1965, pp. 304-305.

tradictions in society, seem quite lame in comparison with this voice!

In the second example, someone avoids obtaining money by the false promise of later repayment. Kant has him morally reflect that if everyone were to do this, in the end no promise would be taken seriously. In order to evaluate this example, it would be necessary to know the purpose for the money and the relationship between the two contracting parties. Sometimes Kant defends his moral solution with as much artificiality as when he discusses reasons for lying.[17] In the third example, the disregard for reality proves more ominous than in the first. A rich man finds in himself a certain talent, but is too indolent to develop it. Kant says that he could not possibly want all others to remain idle in his situation, and that he therefore must undergo the effort. But, contrary to Kant's view, the will of the gifted man would dissuade him from summoning all of the competitors (if any are present) in one arena. In the context of a competitive society, if he should decide to subject himself to the school of hard knocks, he must wish precisely that his will does not become a universal rule. The fourth example deals with charity. Kant recommends it not on the basis of respecting the moral law but with the not very persuasive argument that even a rich person may require charity someday. If this example is supposed to concern not a few measly pennies but rather a really tempting amount, the rich person would do right to prefer the secure present to the questionable future. But if this problem is considered not egoistically, but rather morally in the Kantian sense — that is, with a view to universality — then the rich person's theory regarding what is good for society at large will be quite different from that of the beggar: the former will declare with the utmost sincerity that large contributions are detrimental. If it concerns higher matters, such as taxes [*soziale Lasten*] or wages, then there will be as many beliefs about what befits universal law as social groups.

That each acts according to his conscience is not enough to put an end either to the chaos or to the resulting misery. The formal directive that one should remain pure and have a will without contradiction does not constitute a standard that could remove the basis of moral uneasiness. Is there no misdeed that has been committed at some time or other in all good conscience? It is not whether individuals consider their action reconcilable with the universal law of nature [*Naturgesetz der Allgemeinheit*], but the extent to which it is actually

17. Cf. Kant, Akademie-Ausgabe, vol. 8, pp. 425 ff. ["Über ein vermeintliches Recht, aus Menschenliebe zu lügen"].

reconcilable with it that is decisive for the happiness of humanity. The belief that a good will — as important a motive as this may be — is the highest Good, i.e., the evaluation of an action only according to its intent and not also according to what it means in the given historical moment, is an idealist illusion. From this ideological side of the Kantian conception of morality a direct path leads to the modern mysticism of sacrifice and obedience, which otherwise only unjustly lays claim to Kant's authority. If the development and happy employment of social powers is the highest aim, it is not enough to see to a virtuous soul [*Innere*] or to the mere intellect — for instance, to suppress the instinct for acquisition through discipline — but to see the achievement of the external arrangements which can bring about happiness. What is important is not just how men do things, but what they do: precisely when the chips are down, the motives of those who pursue a goal matter less than that they achieve it. Of course, the object and situation of action involve the soul of the acting individual, for the internal and the external are as much moments of the historical dialectic as they are of the life of individuals. But the prevalent tendency in bourgeois morality to lay exclusive value upon conviction proves to be a position that inhibits progress, especially in the present. Not conscious of duty, enthusiasm, and sacrifice *as such*, but conscious of duty, enthusiasm and sacrifice *for what* decides the fate of humanity in the face of the prevailing peril. A will that is prepared to sacrifice may clearly become a good tool in the service of any power, even the most reactionary; the relation of its content to the entire society, however, is not given by conscience but by the correct theory.

This idealist trait, according to which the world would be in order as long as everything were in order in Spirit, lacks a distinction between fantasy and reality. Idealist philosophy proves itself to be a refined form of the primitive belief in the omnipotence of thought — that is, magic — but it comprises only one side of Kant's teaching. Kantianism has a very active relation to reality. As we have shown above, the categorical imperative cannot be meaningfully realized in a society of isolated individuals. Its necessary implication is thus the transformation of this society. The individual to whom the imperative appeals and whose shaping is its sole aim, would also have to disappear. Bourgeois morality points beyond the order upon which it first becomes possible and necessary. If people want to act in such a way that their maxim is fit to become universal law, they must bring about an order in which this consideration does not remain as

dubious as in the cases enumerated by Kant, but rather in which it can really be carried out according to criteria. Society must then be constructed so that it establishes its own interests and those of all its members in a rational fashion: only under this condition is it meaningful for the individual, who finds himself involved in such a project subjectively and objectively, to organize his life on this basis. If in modern ethics the negative characteristics of Kant's view — namely the transformation-hindering subjectivism — is developed instead of this dynamic trait which points beyond the given relations, then the reason for this lies less with Kant than in subsequent history.

The Kantian doctrine does contain the impossible concept of an eternal commandment addressed to free subjects, but it also anticipates the end of morality. Therein is expressed the contradiction with which the bourgeoisie had been saddled throughout its entire epoch: it created and clung to an order which is in tension with its own concept of reason. Kant asserts the absoluteness of morality and must necessarily proclaim its transcendence, must view it as transitory. Morality rests upon the distinction between interest and duty. The task of reconciling both was put to bourgeois society by its protagonists, but the philosophical exponents of "enlightened self-interest" (Bentham) hardly dared to declare it fulfilled. This fulfillment is impossible in the prevailing form of society, for in it humanity has neither voice nor consciousness, except perhaps in theory which, in contradiction to public opinion, criticizes particular interests that pretend to be universal. The doctrine that the precondition of morality in the bourgeois sense, the distinction between particular and general interests, could be dissolved by historical action had been a part of early bourgeois materialist anthropology. Helvetius held that[18] one can "only make men happy if one reconciles their personal interest with the general. Under the condition of this principle it is apparent that morality is only a vain science if it is not fused with politics and legislation, from which I conclude that the philosophers must consider matters from the same standpoint as the legislator if they want to prove useful. Without, of course, being animated by the same spirit. The concern of the moralist is to fashion the laws; the legislator secures their execution by impressing upon them the seal of his power." Kant also considered the reconciliation of happiness and duty to be possible in a better society. There is for him "no con-

18. "De L'Esprit," *Oeuvres complètes*, Part I (London, 1780) p. 206.

flict of practice with theory,"[19] "the pure principles of right have objective reality, i.e., they may be applied."[20] It is his conviction that the true task of politics is to "accord with the public's universal end, happiness,"[21] even though political maxims may not "be derived from the welfare or happiness which a single state expects from obedience to them, and thus not from the end which one of them proposes for itself."[22] Accordingly, neither a single state nor any power group may make itself the universal. In the last analysis, according to Kant, genuine politics is concerned not with the reconciliation of individual interests with those of such particularities, but rather with the achievement of the end whose principle is given through pure reason. If he preferred to define this end not as the condition of the greatest possible happiness, but as the constitution of the greatest human freedom according to laws,[23] he did not allow any contradiction between freedom and happiness but declared that one follows from the other. Kant always emphasized the fundamental distinction between interest and duty not with respect to the perfected order itself, but rather with respect to the human beings which aspire to it. In society, viewed as an end, the purposes of any given individual could exist together with those of all the others; in it, the private purposes of the individuals might be different with respect to their content, but there need be no necessary mutual obstruction. Moral action would coincide with the natural law, or in any case would not lead to conflict with it. Despite clear phrases about the possibility of this future society, Kant wavered regarding the extent of its realization [*Verwirklichung*]; in the formulation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* it was his conviction that the realization [*Durchführung*] of the ideal can "pass beyond any and every specified limit."[24] He had harsh words for so-called "politic" men, who pride themselves on their praxis but who in reality only fawn on the powers that be, because they claimed that human nature precludes the possibility of improvement in the Idea. To them, "the legal constitution in force at any time is...the best, but when it is amended from above, this

19. Kant, "Perpetual Peace," in *On History*, ed. Louis White Beck, New York, 1963, p. 117.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

23. Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965, p. 312.

24. *Ibid.*

amendment always seems best, too."[25] The philosopher does not skeptically refer to how he "knows men," but rather knows "Man" and knows "what can be made of him."[26] There is no valid objection of anthropology against the overcoming of bad social relations. Kant's arguments against the psychological defense of absolutism are valid for every epoch in which the human sciences (among other sciences) are exploited for the struggle against progress. What Schopenhauer called the "setting up [of] a moral utopia"[27] — the fulfillment of morality and simultaneously its overcoming — is for Kant no illusion, but the goal of politics.

Kant's philosophy reveals utopian elements: they lie not in the idea of a perfect constitution, but rather in his undialectical conception of a continuous approach to it. According to his conviction, all determinations of bourgeois society return to themselves as identical in that final state; only they are better reconciled with each other than in the present. Even Kant regards the categories[28] of the prevailing system as eternal. The order he postulates as a goal would be composed of autonomously acting individuals whose individual decisions smoothly yield the welfare of the whole. This ideal is indeed a utopia; as in every utopia, the yearning thought forms a beautiful vision from the unchanged elements of the present. The harmony of the interests of all in Kant's utopia can only be understood as a preestablished harmony, as a charitable miracle. In contrast, science takes account of the fact that historical transformation also changes the elements of the earlier condition at the same time.

The materialist theory of society overcomes the utopian character of Kant's conception of a perfect constitution. After all, the disparate interests of individuals are not ultimate facts; they have their basis not in an independent psychological constitution, but in the material relations and total social situation of the individual. The absolutely incommensurable disparity of interests derives from the disparity of ownership; human beings today stand against one another as functions of various economic powers, of which each reveals to the other contradictory developmental tendencies. Only when this antagonistic economic form, the introduction of which once meant tremen-

25. "Perpetual Peace," p. 121. [Translators' note: in the original, Horkheimer cites p. 370 of the Ak. Aus.; in fact, the passage is to be found on p. 373 of the same.]

26. *Ibid.*

27. Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

28. [Translators' note: reading the "*Kategorie*" of the original as "*Kategorien.*"]

dous progress (including among others things the developmental possibility of self-conscious human beings), has been replaced by a society in which productive property is administered in the general interest, not just from "good intentions" but with rational necessity, will the concordance of individual ends stop appearing miraculous. Individuals will then cease to be merely the exponents of private ends. Each is no longer simply a monad, but rather, in Kant's language, a "joint" or "limb" of society at large [*ein "Glied" der Allgemeinheit*].

This expression, which characterizes a dynamic element in the moral phenomenon pointing beyond itself to a more rational society, has an unhappy function in modern sociology. It is supposed to prompt human beings, who despair of this mechanism run amok that is contemporary society, to give themselves over blindly to the particular "whole" into whose realm they have fallen by birth or by fate, regardless of the role it happens to play in human history. The organological expression in this connection is understood in a way that runs precisely counter to Kant. Instead of referring to an era in which human relations will really be governed by reason, it points toward outmoded levels of society in which all processes were mediated simply by instinct, tradition, and obedience. Kant employs the image of the organism in order to indicate the frictionless functioning of the future society, but does not thereby deny the role of rational thought. Today, by contrast, the image of the organism characterizes a system of dependency and economic inequality that can no longer justify itself before the mature critical understanding of human beings and which thus requires metaphysical phrases in order to reconcile them to it. The organism is drawn into the matter in order to rationalize — as an eternal relationship based on blind nature — the fact that certain people decide and others execute their decision, a state of affairs made questionable by the growth of all forces. Suffering human beings are supposed to be satisfied today, as in the time of Menenius Agrippa, with the thought that their role in the whole is as innate to them as are the joints in the animal body. Obdurate natural dependency is held up as an example to the members [*Gliedern*] of society. In contradistinction to idealist sociology, which believes that it puts an end to injustice insofar as it strives to remove from people's heads the mounting consciousness of that injustice, Kantian moral theory tends toward a society in which the material arrangements are indeed linked together [*gegliedert*], but in which the development and happiness of individuals is neither subordinated to

a sequence of stages nor surrendered up to fate. "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another," as it says in the New Testament.[29] With Kant, the organism is defined precisely by the concept of ends. Organic operation, according to him, always refers to the "causality of a concept,"[30] that is, to purpose and planning.

In the future society toward which the moral consciousness aspires, the life of the whole and of the individuals is produced not merely as a natural effect, but as the consequence of rational designs that take account of the happiness of the individuals in equal measure. In place of the blind mechanism of economic struggles which presently condition happiness and — for the greater part of humanity — unhappiness emerges the purposive application of the wealth of human and material powers of production. According to Kant, each individual "gives universal laws while also [being] subject to these laws."[31] The individual is "legislating" not merely in the juridical sense of formal democracy, but so that it itself, with its possibilities in the total social reality, might find just as much respect as all others. In Kant's sense, no specific totality [*Ganzheit*] has the status of an absolute end, only individuals: only they have reason. Kant demonstrated the idea of this dignified [*menschenwürdigen*] society, in which morality loses its basis, through his analysis of moral consciousness; this dignified society appears as its demand and consequence. Hegel made this society the foundation of his philosophy. According to him, rationality consists concretely in the unity of objective and subjective freedom; that is, in the unity of the general will and the individuals who carry out its ends.[32] Naturally Hegel considered this condition — like his liberalistic teachers of political economy [*Nationalökonomie*] — as already realized in his time. Morality as a human power distinct from interest played no major role in his system. With Hegel's definitive metaphysics of history as the driving force, it was no longer necessary. Hegel's concept of Spirit, however, contains the same ideal expressed in the bourgeois world and Kant's philosophy. The theory of its realization leads from philosophy to the critique of political economy.

29. 1 Corinthians, Ch. 12, Verse 25.

30. Cf. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, tr. James C. Meredith, London, 1952, section 10, p. 61 (First Part) and section 64, pp. 16ff. (Second Part).

31. Kant, *Foundations, op. cit.*, p. 52.

32. Cf. e.g., *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, tr. T. M. Knox, London, Oxford, and New York, 1952, Sec. 258, pp. 155ff.

With the recognition that the will and the appeal to it have their roots in the contemporary mode of production and, like other forms of life, will change with it, morality is simultaneously comprehended and made mortal. In an epoch in which the domination of the possessive instincts is the natural law of humanity, and in which by Kant's definition each individual sees the other above all as a means to his own ends, morality represents the concern for the development and happiness of life as a whole. Even the opponents of traditional morality presuppose such an indeterminate moral sentiment. In the Foreword to *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche reveals that the materialist question, "Under what conditions did man deem those value judgments good and evil?" is followed immediately by the moral one: "And what value have they themselves? Have they so far inhibited or advanced human development? Are they a sign of need, impoverishment, of deformation of life? Or, on the other hand, do they betray the fullness, the power, the will of life, its courage, its optimism, its future?" As a standard, the universal conception of humanity is as operative here as it is in Kant. Nietzsche, however, commended very perverse means for human liberation in a period when conditions for a more prosperous form of organization were already visible; his challenge to humanity in his time, that it must "set its goal above itself — not in a false world, however, but in one which would be a continuation of humanity"[33] applies to himself, for his practical suggestions all rest upon a false extrapolation. From his psychological investigation of the individuals that act under the natural law of their personal interest he concluded that the universal fulfillment of that for which they strove — namely security and happiness — would have to produce a society of philistines [Spiessbürger], the world of the "last" men. He failed to recognize that the characteristics of the present which he so detested derive precisely from the dearth of propitious conditions for society at large. With the spread of reason that he feared, with its application to all of the relations of society, those negative characteristics — which in truth rest upon the concentration of all the instincts on private advantage — must be transformed, as must ideas and indeed the drives themselves. Through his ignorance of dialectics Nietzsche foresaw the same "dearth of justice" that Kant had seen. "If it were as we would

33. "Explanatory Notes to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*," tr. Anthony M. Ludovici, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 16, ed. Oscar Levy, New York, 1964 (reissue), p. 269.

like, all morality would transform itself into self-interest."[34] But in reality, self-interest would transform itself into morality, or rather the two would merge in a new form of human interest that would accord with the more rational condition. Nietzsche's theory of history misses the mark; he places the end [*Ziel*] in a perverse world, if not quite in another one, because he misunderstands the movement of the contemporary world due to his ignorance of economic laws. His own moral philosophy, however, contains the same elements as that which he struggles against. He fumes against himself.

Bergson claims as well that moral philosophy contains the notion of the progress of humanity. "*...de la société réelle dont nous sommes nous nous transportons par la pensée à la société idéale, vers elle montre notre hommage quand nous nous inclinons devant la dignité humaine en nous, quand nous déclarons agir par respect de nous-mêmes.*"[35] He claims that morality has two aspects: a "natural" one which arises from society's accommodation to its life-conditions — consisting in socially functional [*zweckmässigen*] reactions consolidated in customs, characteristic of primitive tribes, civilized nations, and brutish associations — and a truly human aspect, the "*élan d'amour.*" This second aspect contains within itself "*le sentiment d'un progrès*"[36] and is no longer oriented to the preservation and security of the particular association to which the individual happens to belong, but is oriented rather to humanity. The difference between the two aspects, one of which appears as the "*pression sociale*" and the other as the "*marche en avant*," is none other than Kant's distinction between natural law and respect for humanity. Even today Bergson's vision extends deep enough to hit upon the distinction between publically esteemed sentiment and forward-pointing morality. The "*tendances innées et fonda mentales de l'homme actuel*"[37] are aimed at family, interest formations, and nation, and necessarily include possible emnity between groups. Hate, but not in the least the solidarity of forward-pointing moral sentiment, belongs to this purposeful [*zweckvoller*] love. "*C'est qu'entre la nation, si grande soit-elle, et l'humanité, il y a toute la distance du fini à l'indefini, du clos a l'ouvert.*"[38] As with Nietzsche, Bergson indeed loses his sharpness of vision in the face of the question of how the ideal society prescribed

34. Kant, "*Reflexionen zur Metaphysik*," in *Handschriftlicher Nachlass*, Akademie Edition, vol. 18, p. 454.

35. *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*. Paris, 1932, p. 66.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

38. *Loc. cit.*

by genuine morality is to be realized, which of the present forces work against it, who promulgates it, and who sides with it. Here he repeats the theory of the heroes, "*dont chacun représente, comme eût fait l'apparition d'une nouvelle espéce, un effort d'évolution créatrice.*"[39] Acording to old superstition they are to arise only in isolation and at the beginning of long periods of time. Indeed, Bergson is so certain of their rarity that he forgets to ask whether today these heroes of the "*societe idéale*" might not ultimately exist in abundance and in struggles, unless philosophers were to regard them in a manner other than that which is peculiar to the "closed soul." In this forgetting, in the indifference to the mortal struggles for that society which is anticipated in morality, in the deficient connection with the forces which are driving forward, is that bit of immorality which can presently be discovered even in genuine philosophy.

Materialism sees morality as the life expression of determinate individuals and seeks to understand it in terms of the conditions for its emergence and passing away, not for the sake of truth in itself, but in connection with determinate historical forces. Materialism understands itself as the effort to abolish existing misery. The features it discerns in the historical phenomenon of morality figure into its consideration only on the condition of a determinate practical interest. Materialism presumes no transhistorical authority behind morality. The fear which moral precepts — be they ever so spiritualized — still carry from their origin in religious authority is foreign to materialism. The consequences of all human actions work themselves out exclusively in the spatio-temporal world. As long as they have no effect on their author [*Urheber*] in this world, he has nothing to fear from them. Even the splendor in which philosophers — as well as public opinion in general — cloak "ethical" conduct, all arguments by which they recommend it, cannot withstand the test of reason. With the notion that one could investigate the "field of distinctive values"[40] in a manner similar to other inquiries, the "value research" of Scheler and Hartmann has only hit upon another method of the solution of an impossible task; the grounding of practices in mere philosophy. The very idea of a science of "the structure and order of the realm of values" necessarily entails such a promulgation of commandments. For even if this knowledge is characterized as "in a rud-

39. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

40. Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 1, p. 86.

imentary stage,"[41] an "Ought[42]," which in certain cases is transformed "into the Ought-to-Do of the subject,"[43] still clings to all values the ethicist strives to discover. Despite the explanation that decision is constantly in the conscience of the subject, and despite the universality that indeed belongs to the essence of the philosophical doctrine of morality, it is claimed that there exist differences of degree in behavior conformity: "Thus, for example, brotherly love is evidently higher in value than justice, love for the remotest higher than brotherly love, and personal love (as it appears) higher than either. Likewise bravery stands higher than self-control, faith and fidelity higher than bravery, radiant virtue and personality again higher than these."[44] But such assertions, whose content moreover is only diffusely connected with moral sentiment due to the reactionary character of philosophy since Kant, have the same commandment-like character of the categorical imperative. They are the mystified expression of spiritual [*seelische*] states of affairs in which "*pression social*" and "*élan d'amour*" indeed enter into a connection which is difficult to analyze. There is no eternal realm of values. The needs and wishes, the interests and passions of human beings change in relation to the historical process. Psychology and other auxiliary sciences of history must join together to explain the accepted values and their change at any given time.

Binding moral laws do not exist. Materialism finds no transcendent authority over human beings which would distinguish between goodwill and the lust for profit, kindness and cruelty, avarice and self-sacrifice. Logic likewise remains silent and grants no pre-eminence to moral conviction. All attempts to ground morality in terms of temporal prudence rather than the hereafter — as the cited examples show, even Kant didn't resist this inclination — are based on an illusion of harmony. First of all, in most cases morality and prudence diverge. Morality does not admit of any grounding — neither by means of intuition nor of argument. But it does involve a psychic constitution. To describe the latter, to make its personal conditions and its mechanisms of transmission intelligible, is the business of psychology. Characteristic of moral sentiment is an interest which diverges from "natural law" and which has nothing to do with private acquisition and possession. At present all human impulses are

41. *Ethics*, vol. 2, p. 23.
42. *Ethics*, vol. 1, p. 247.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
44. *Ethics*, vol. 2, p. 387.

determined, whether through such law or mere convention. It follows from the definitions of the bourgeois thinkers that in this period even love falls under the category of property. "*Videmus ... quod ille, qui amat necessario conatur rem, quam amat, praesentum habere et conservare*," says Spinoza.[45] Kant describes marriage as the "joining together of two people of the opposite sex for the lifelong mutual ownership of their sexual attributes"[46] and speaks of the "equality of possessions" of the married couple not merely in terms of material goods, but also in terms of "two people who mutually own each other."[47] Modern accounts, if not completely ideological, still contain similar definitions. According to Freud, the sexual aim of the infantile instinct [*Trieb*], in which according to his teachings the essential features of the instinctual life of the adult are also to be discovered, consists in "obtaining satisfaction by means of an appropriate stimulation of the [selected] erotogenic zone ..."[48] Accordingly, the loved person appears mainly as the means to fulfill said stimulation. On this point, one is struck by the way in which Freud's theory is an elaboration of Kant's definition of marriage.

Moral sentiment is to be distinguished from this kind of love, and Kant is right to distinguish the former not only from egoism, but from any such "inclination." He indicates the psychic state of affairs by his doctrine that in morality (as opposed to that which is the rule in the bourgeois world), a person is to be not simply a means, but always at the same time an end. Moral sentiment has something to do with love, for "love, reverence, yearning for perfection, longing, all these things are inherent in an end."[49] However, this love has nothing to do with the person as economic subject or as an item in the property of the one who loves, but rather as a potential member of a happy humanity. It is not directed at the role and standing of a particular individual in civil life, but at its needs and powers, which point towards the future. Unless the aim of a future happy life for all men, which admittedly arises not on the basis of a revelation but out of the privation of the present, is included in the description of this love, it proves impossible to define. Love wishes the free develop-

45. Spinoza, *Ethica*, Pars III, Propos. XIII, Schol.

46. *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre*, Sec. 24, Akademie-Ausgabe, vol. 6, p. 277.

47. *Ibid.*, sec. 26, p. 278.

48. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, tr. James Strachey, New York, 1962, p. 50.

49. Nietzsche, *loc. cit.*, modified translation.

ment of the creative powers of all human beings as such. To love it appears as if all living beings have a claim to happiness, for which it would not in the least ask any justification or grounds. It stands in primordial contradiction to stringency, even though there may be psychic processes which sustain both moments in themselves. In bourgeois society, training in strict morality more often stood in service to natural law rather than under the badge of liberation from it. Not the rod of punishment, but the climax of the Ninth Symphony is the expression of moral sentiment.

This sentiment is active today in a twofold manner. First, as compassion. In Kant's period social production mediated by private acquisition was progressive; today it signifies the senseless crippling of powers and their misuse for purposes of destruction. The struggle of great economic power groups, played out on a world scale, is conducted amid the atrophy of kind human inclinations, the proclamation of overt and covert lies, and the development of an immeasurable hatred. Humanity has become so rich in the bourgeois period, and has at its disposal such great natural and human auxiliary powers, that it could exist united by worthy objectives. The need to veil this state of affairs, which is transparent in every respect, gives rise to a sphere of hypocrisy which extends not only to international relations, but which penetrates into even the most private relations; it results in a diminution of cultural endeavors (including science) and a brutalization of personal and public life, such that spiritual and material misery are compounded. At no time has the poverty of humanity stood in such crying contradiction to its potential wealth, at no time have all powers been so horribly fettered as in this generation, where children go hungry and the hands of the fathers are busy turning out bombs. It appears as if the world is being driven into a catastrophe — rather, as if it already finds itself in one — which can only be compared, within known history, to the fall of antiquity. The futility of the fate of the individual, already caused by the irrationality and barren naturalness of the production process, has risen to the most striking characteristic of contemporary existence. Whoever is fortunate could, as regards their inner worth, just as easily take the place of the most unfortunate, and vice-versa. Everyone is given up to blind chance. The course of one's existence has no relation to one's inner possibilities; one's role in the present society has for the most part no relation to that which could be achieved in a rational society. Accordingly, the behavior of the moral agent is not capable of being oriented to one's dignity; the extent to which dispositions

and deeds are really meritorious does not come to light in the chaotic present, "the real morality of actions, their merit or guilt, even that of our own conduct, ... remains entirely hidden from us."[50] We view human beings not as subjects of their fate, but rather as objects of a blind occurence of nature, to which the response of a moral sentiment is compassion.

That Kant did not see compassion as based on a moral sentiment can be explained in terms of the historical situation. He could expect from the uninterrupted progress of free competition an increase in general happiness, for he beheld the coming of a world dominated by this principle. All the same, even in his time compassion could not be separated from morality. As long as the individual and the whole have not really become one, as long as it is not the case that the easy death of the individual freed from fear is looked upon by the individual itself as something external, because he rightly knows his essential purposes to be looked after by society at large — as long, therefore, as morality still has a reason for existence — compassion will have its place in it. Indeed, compassion may outlast it; for morality belongs to that determinate form of human relations based on the bourgeois mode of production. With the transformation of these relations through their rational arrangement, morality will, at the very least, step into the background. Human beings may then struggle in concert against their own pains and maladies — what medicine will achieve, once it is freed from its present social fetters, is not to be foreseen — although suffering and death will continue to hold sway in nature. The solidarity of human beings, however, is a part of the solidarity of life in general. The progress in the realization of the one will also strengthen the inclination toward the other. Animals need human beings [*Die Tiere bedürfen des Menschen*]. It is the accomplishment of Schopenhauer's philosophy to have wholly illuminated the unity between us and them. The greater gifts of human beings, above all reason, do not annul [*aufheben*] the communion which they feel with animals. While the traits of human beings have a certain impact, the relationship of their happiness and misery with the life of animals is manifest.

The other form in which morality today finds appropriate expression is politics. The happiness of the general public is consistently characterized as its proper aim by the great moral philosophers. To be sure, Kant had to deceive himself about the structure of future society, since he considered the form of the contemporary one to be

50. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 475 (note).

eternal. The materialist critique of political economy was the first to show that the realization of the ideal, in terms of which the present society was established — namely the union of general and particular interest — can take place only by transforming its conditions. Today it is claimed that the bourgeois ideals of Freedom, Equality, and Justice have proven themselves to be poor ones; however, it is not the ideals of the bourgeoisie but conditions which do not correspond to them that are untenable. The battle-cries of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution are valid now more than ever. The dialectical critique of the world, which is borne along by them, consists precisely in the demonstration that they have retained their actuality rather than lost it on the basis of reality. These ideas and values are nothing but the isolated traits of the rational society, as they are anticipated in morality as a necessary goal. Politics in accord with this goal therefore must not abandon these demands, but realize them — not, however, by clinging in a utopian manner to definitions which are historically conditioned [*zeitbedingt*] — but in conformity with their meaning. The content of the ideas is not eternal, but is subject to historical change — not, as one might suppose, because "Spirit" of itself capriciously infringed upon the principle of identity — but because the human impulses which demand something better take different forms according to the historical material with which they have to work. The unity of such concepts results less from the invariability of their elements than from the historical development of the circumstances under which their realization is necessary.

In materialist theory, the main point is not to maintain concepts unchanged, but to improve the lot of humanity [*Allgemeinheit*]. In the struggle to achieve this, ideas have altered their content. Today, the freedom of the individual demands submitting their economic independence to a plan. The presupposition of the ideas of Equality and Justice hitherto was the prevailing inequality of economic and human subjects; these presuppositions disappear in a unified society, for therein these ideas lose their meaning. "Equality exists only in contrast to inequality, justice to injustice; they are therefore still burdened with the contrast to the old, previous history, hence with the old society itself."[51] Hitherto, these concepts took their determinate content from the relations of the free market, which with time were

51. Engels, Vorarbeiten zum "Anti-Dühring," Marx-Engels-Archiv, vol. 2, Frankfurt a.M., 1927, p. 408.

supposed to function to the benefit of all. Today they have transformed themselves into the concrete image of a better society, which will be born out of the present one, if humanity does not first sink into barbarism.

The concept of Justice, which played a decisive role as a battle-cry in the struggle for a rational organization of society, is older than morality. It is as old as class society, i.e., as old as known European history itself. As a universal principle to be realized in this world, Justice, in connection with Freedom and Equality, first found recognition in bourgeois philosophy; though only today have the resources of humanity become great enough for their adequate realization as an immediate historical task. The intense struggle for their fulfillment marks our epoch of transition.

In previous history, every task of culture was possible only on the basis of a division between ruler and ruled. The suffering that is connected with the continual reproduction of the masses at a particular level and especially with every advance, which, so to speak, represents the social costs, has never been distributed equitably. The reason for this is not to be found, as the high-minded philosophers of the eighteenth century thought, in the avarice and depravity of the rulers, but in the disproportion between the powers and needs of human beings. Right up till the present, the general level of development of the whole of society (including the upper class) conditioned, in view of the available tools, the subordination of the masses at work and thus in life generally. Their coarseness corresponded to the inability of the rulers to raise them to a higher stage of development, and both moments were constantly reproduced along with the harshness of social life, which changes only slowly. Historical humanity, in danger of sinking into chaos, had no choice but to abandon the relation of domination. The emergence and dissemination of cultural values cannot be separated from this division. Leaving aside the material goods which result from a production process based on the division of labor, the products of art and science, the refined forms of intercourse among men, their sense of an intellectual life, all point to their origin in a society which distributes burdens and pleasures unequally.

It has often been asserted that class division, which has left its imprint on all previous history, is a continuation of the inequality in nature. The genera of animals may be divided up into predators and prey, such that some genera are both at the same time, whereas others are principally only one of the two. Even within genera there are

spatially separated groups, which appear to be in part blessed by fortune, in part pursued by a series of inconceivable blows of fate. In turn, the pain and death of the individuals within the groups and genera are unequally distributed, and depend on circumstances which lack any meaningful connection to the life of the those so affected. The inequality which is constantly determined by the life-process of society is related to that inequality which pertains to the whole of nature. Both of these permeate the life of humanity, in that the natural diversity of external form and abilities, not to mention diseases and further circumstances of death, further complicate social inequality. Of course, the degree to which these natural differences are operative in society depends on historical development; they have different consequences at the various levels of different social structures: the appearance of the same disease can mean quite different things for members of different social circles. Attention, pedagogical artifice, and a range of gratifications afford the poorly gifted wealthy child the opportunity to develop the aptitudes which still remain, whereas the slow child of poor people struggling for existence will go to ruin mentally as well as physically: this child's shortcomings will be intensified throughout its life, its hopeful first steps will come to nothing.

In this history of humanity, in which inequality constitutes such a fundamental trait, a certain human reaction repeatedly became apparent, whether as its other side or as its effect. The abolition of inequality has been demanded at different times and in different places by not only the dominated classes, but renegades from the ruling classes who pronounced inequality evil. The equality which was to be brought about (and which, in the materialist view, developed with the exchange relationship) has been understood in various ways. From the basic demand that everyone should receive an equal share of the consumer goods produced by society (e.g., in early Christendom) to the proposition that to each should be allotted that share which corresponds to their labor (e.g., Proudhon), to the thought that the most sensitive should be the least burdened (Nietzsche), there is an exceedingly wide range of ideas about the correct state of affairs. All of them make reference to the point that happiness, insofar as it is possible for each person in comparison with others on the basis of their lot in society, is not to be determined by fortuitous, capricious factors which are external to the individual — in other words: that the degree of inequality of the life-conditions of individuals at least be no greater than that dictated by the maintenance of

the total social supply of goods at the given level. That is the universal content of the concept of Justice; according to this concept, the social inequality prevailing at any given time requires a rational foundation. It ceases to be considered as Good, and becomes something that should be overcome.

It is an achievement of recent times to have made this principle universal. Yet in this same period there has certainly been no lack of defenders of inequality and eulogists for the blindness in nature and society. But if philosophers representative of past epochs, such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, had extolled the differences in people's fate as an eternal value, then the Enlightenment (in connection with old humanistic doctrines, to be sure) described inequality as an evil to be abolished. In the French Revolution, Equality was raised to a principle of the constitution. Recognition of this principle was not mere inspiration or, in Bergson's terms, an incursion of open morality into the sphere of closed morality. Rather its recognition belonged in that epoch to the process whereby the entire society conformed to the changing life-conditions. The latter puts this recognition into effect on the strength of the dynamic residing in it, as with every living being, both continuously as well as by leaps and bounds. The idea of Equality *"résulte logiquement des transformations réelle de nos sociétés."*[52] The idea of Equality necessarily brings that of Freedom to the fore. If indeed no individual is initially less worthy than another of developing and finding satisfaction in reality, it follows that the utilization of coercion by one group against the other must be acknowledged as evil. The concept of Justice is as inseparable from that of Freedom as it is from that of Equality.

From the beginning, the proclamation of Equality as a constitutional principle was not only an advance for thought, but a danger as well. As the sublation of determinate inequalities (which were no longer necessary, which were indeed hindrances in the context of the expanded powers of human beings) in fact came to pass in the new constellation of legal relations, this step was proclaimed withal as the realization of Equality in general. It became unclear whether the social equality of human beings was still a demand to be met or a description of reality. The French Revolution had not only helped the universal concept of Justice to gain theoretical recognition, but had to a great extent realized it at that time as well. This concept came to dominate the ideas of the nineteenth century and turned into the de-

52. Bouglé, *Les idées égalitaires*, Paris, 1925, p. 248.

cisive feature of all thought, indeed even into the feeling of the European and American world. But the institutions which at the time aptly embodied the principle have grown old, as has the overall constitution of bourgeois society. At the time, equality before the law had signified a step forward in the direction of Justice, inequality of property notwithstanding; today it has become inadequate because of this economic inequality. Freedom of public expression was a weapon in the struggle for better conditions; today it acts primarily to the advantage of conditions which have become obsolete. Sanctity of property was a protection of bourgeois labor against the clutches of the authorities; today it brings in its wake monopolization, the expropriation of additional bourgeois strata and the tying up of social resources.

The alliance struck between the ruling power and the ideas of the bourgeoisie since the victory of the French Revolution confounds thought for this reason: these propelling ideas are alienated from and set against their logical proponents, the progressive forces of society. But it is precisely in the present, as humanity confronts the danger of ruin, that humanity is charged with their realization. The abolition of economic inequality, which would soon have to lead to a far-reaching abolition of the distinction between the rulers and ruled, signifies for the first time today not an abandonment of cultural values, but on the contrary their redemption. While the unequal distribution of power was among the prerequisites of culture in earlier epochs, today it has become a threat to the same. Forces which benefit from wretched social relations presently make use of those ideas to avert the possible change needed by humanity. They snatch these ideas from those who have a genuine interest in their realization. The present confusion in the ideological [*weltanschaulichem*] domain is a consequence of this. The provisions of justice, which today find expression in the institutions of a merely formal democracy and in the ideas of those raised in its spirit, have lost any clear connection to their origin. Otherwise, they would now be levelled at the ruling powers which fetter the development of humanity, just as they were during the time when the latter understood the bourgeoisie itself in a productive sense — except that today the change would signify a much more decisive step. However, although the powerful themselves have for centuries proclaimed the principles of a good order to be holy, they are willing to twist them around or betray them the instant that their meaningful application no longer serves their interest, but runs against it. Indeed, they are

ready to throw overboard and pull from the curriculum all the ideals which the fathers of the bourgeois revolution championed, worked for, and fought for, as soon as people are developed and desperate enough to no longer apply them mechanically to the preservation of institutions, but to apply them dialectically to the realization of a better order. In many places, the requirements of internal and external control entail that all progressive elements of bourgeois morality be stifled or deliberately eliminated. There is a steady increase in the number of countries where those values that aim at the happiness of individuals have fallen into disrepute; it appears that the period in which the bourgeois world produced morality was too short to be maintained at the level of generality in flesh and blood. It is not only secular morality which rests on such shaky ground; the same can be said of whatever elements of kindness and charity made their way into the soul as a result of Christianity (the civilizing influence which preceded secular morality), such that in a few decades even these forces could atrophy. The moral sentiment in governments, peoples, and spokesmen of the civilized [*gebildeten*] world is so weak that, although it is indeed expressed at gatherings on the occasions of earthquakes and mine disasters, it is nevertheless easily silenced and forgotten in the face of the monstrous injustice which takes place for the sake of pure property interests, i.e., in the enforcement of the "natural law" and amidst the mockery of all bourgeois values.

The appeal to morality is more powerless than ever, but it is not even needed. In contrast to the idealistic belief in the cry of conscience as a decisive force in history, this hope is foreign to materialist thinking. Yet because materialism itself belongs to the efforts to attain a better society, it well knows where the elements of morality that are pushing forward are active today. They are produced time and again, under the immense pressure which weighs heavily upon a large segment of society, in the will to create rational relations which correspond to the present state of development. The part of humanity which necessarily counts on this change, due to its situation, already contains (and attracts ever more) forces for whom realizing a better society is a matter of great importance. It is also psychologically prepared for it, since its role in the production process forces it to rely less on the unlikely increase of property than on the employment of its labor power. These conditions facilitate the generation of personalities in which the acquisitive instincts are not of prime importance. If the inheritance of morality thus passes on to new classes, there are nevertheless many proletarians who exhibit

those bourgeois traits under the domination of the natural law.[53] The works of later bourgeois writers such as Zola, Maupassant, Ibsen, and Tolstoy constitute testimonials to moral goodness. But in any case, the common efforts of that part of humanity guided by knowledge contain so much genuine solidarity with respect to their liberation, and that of all of humanity, so little concern about their private existence, so few thoughts of possessions and property, that they already seem to manifest the sensibility [*Lebensgefühl*] of a future humanity. In existing society, the putative consciousness of equality generally overlooks the actual inequality in human beings, and thus embraces untruth, whereas the forces pressing for change place actual inequality in the forefront. The authentic concept of Equality contains knowledge of its negative: contemporary human beings differ not only in terms of economic fortunes, but also in terms of their intellectual and moral qualities. A Bavarian farmer differs radically from a factory worker in Berlin. But the certainty that the differences are based on transient conditions — and above all that inequalities of power and happiness, as they have become entrenched today through the structure of society, no longer correspond to the developed forces of production — engenders a respect for the inner possibilities of the individual and for that "which can be made out of him" (Kant), a feeling of independence and goodwill, which politics must positively connect with if it is concerned to build a free society.

There is no obligation to this politics, any more than there is an obligation to compassion. Obligations refer back to commands and contracts, which do not exist in this case. Nonetheless, materialism recognizes in compassion, as well as in progressive politics, productive forces historically related to bourgeois morality. According to materialism, however, not just the explicit forms of command, but the ideas of duty and metaphysical obligation [*Schuld*], and above all the maligning of desire and pleasure constrain the present social dynamic. Materialist theory certainly does not afford to the political actor the solace that he will necessarily achieve his objective; it is not a metaphysics of history, but rather a changing image of the world, evolving in relation to the practical efforts towards its improvement. The knowledge of tendencies contained in this image offers no clear prognosis of historical development. Even if those who maintain that the theory could be misleading "only" in regard to the pace of devel-

53. "*Die psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialpsychologie*" [The Psychoanalytic Theory of the Personality and its Significance for Social Psychology], *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1932, p. 268ff., esp. p. 274.

opment and not its direction, were correct (a frightful "only," since it concerns the agonies of generations), merely formal time could, after all, turn around and affect the quality of the content, i.e., humanity could be thrown back to earlier stages of development simply because the struggle lasted too long. But even the sheer certainty that such a new order would come to pass would not alone provide even the slightest of grounds on which to affirm or precipitate this new order. That something in the world gains power is no reason to revere it. The ancient myth of the rulers, that that which has power must also be good, passed into occidental philosophy by way of Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of reality and perfection. Protestantism reaffirmed this myth in its belief in God as the lord of history and the regulator of the world. It dominates the whole of life in present-day Europe and America. The blind worship of success determines men even in the most private expressions of life. For the materialist, the mere presence of a historical force, or its prospects, does not constitute its recommendation. The materialist asks how this historical force, at a given moment, relates to materialist values and acts according to the concrete situation. In the prevailing social conditions, such action is burdened by the unhappy situation that compassion and politics, the two forms in which moral sentiment finds expression today can only rarely be brought into rational relationship. Regard for those close at hand and those far away, support for the individual and for humanity are contradictory in most cases. Even the best harden some place in their hearts.

The insight that morality cannot be proven, that not a single value admits of a purely theoretical grounding, separates materialism from the idealist currents of philosophy. But both the derivation and the concrete application of the principle within the sphere of knowledge [*Wissenschaft*] are completely different. In idealist philosophy this principle is necessarily connected with the doctrine of the absolutely free subject. Just as the subject (at least according to later exponents) supposedly produces knowledge of itself, so too is the positing of value thought to be subjective. Without any foundation at all, it issues from autonomous Spirit, from "the intellectus." Nikolaus Cusanus already teaches: "But for the power of judgement and of comparison there ceases to be any evaluation, and with it value must fall as well. Herefrom springs the wonder of the mind since without it everything created would have been without value."[54] Even though, according

54. De ludo globi II, 236f., cited in Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Berlin, 1927, p. 46.

to Cusanus, the autonomous subject does not of itself produce the *essence* of value, it nonetheless freely decides how much of that essence is accorded to each object. In this creative activity, it is supposed to be similar to God, even, as it were, another God itself. Since Cusanus, this doctrine has been definitive in science and philosophy. Thus, the differences in the value of things are by no means material; the object in itself is indifferent to value. Science can indeed describe the human acts which posit value, but cannot itself decide among them. In modern methodology this principle is formulated as the demand for value-neutrality [*Wertfreiheit*]. Max Weber's view is characteristic of the main tendencies of idealistic philosophy (with the exception of theories of objective value), which display mostly romantic, or in any case anti-democratic tendencies. It is his view "that we are *cultural* beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it signficance...Undoubtedly, all evaluative ideas are 'subjective.'"[55] As a result of this doctrine, idealist philosophy and science rule out any value judgement. Indeed, in recent decades it has increasingly been made a duty of the human or cultural sciences not to develop a connection with larger social objectives, but establish and classify "theory-free" facts. The application of earlier bourgeois objectives — above all the greatest happiness of all — to those areas of inquiry [*Wissenschaften*] would necessarily lead to increasing conflicts. In the original works of the bourgeoisie these motives are absolutely decisive. Even the originators of positivism defended themselves against the neutral degeneration of knowledge [*Wissenschaft*], in contrast to many of their later disciples. "The 'dispersive speciality' of the present race of scientific men," writes John Stuart Mill in his work on Auguste Comte, "who, unlike their predecessors, have a positive aversion to enlarged views, and seldom either know or care for any of the interests of mankind beyond the narrow limits of their pursuit, is dwelt on by M. Comte as one of the great and growing evils of the time, and the one which most retards moral and intellectual regeneration. To contend against it is one of the main purposes towards which he thinks the forces of society should be directed."[56] Such voices are rare among today's progressive scholars. They must be satisfied with defending their work against the increasing predomi-

55. Max Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, New York, 1949, pp. 81, 83.

56. John Stuart Mill, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, Boston, 1866, p. 88.

nance of those who, without respect for rigor or integrity, would like knowledge to return to its subjugation under questionable goals, and would reduce it to the hand-maiden of whatever power happens to hold sway. In seeking to protect knowledge and the interest in truth from the present invading barbarism, those scholars render a service to civilization similar to where, through education, genuine bourgeois values still have respect in the public mind. [57]

Materialism recognizes the unconditional respect for truth as a necessary if not sufficient condition of science. It knows that interests stemming from social and personal circumstances also condition research, whether the researcher [*der Urheber der Wissenschaft*] at any given time knows it or not. On both a small and a large scale, historical factors are operative not only in the choice of objects, but in the direction of attention and abstraction as well. In each case, the result has its origin in a determinate interrelation between investigators and objects. But in contrast to idealist philosophy, materialism does not trace the interests and objectives that are operative on the part of the subject back to the independent creative activity of this subject, to free will. On the contrary, they are themselves seen as a result of a development in which both subjective and objective moments have a part. Even exchange value in the economy is not based on free valuation, but rather ensues from the life-process of society, in which use-values are determining factors. The undialectical concept of the free subject is foreign to materialism. Materialism is also well aware of itself as conditioned. Apart from personal nuances, this latter is to be sought in connection with those forces devoted to the realization of the aims stated above. Because materialist science never takes its eyes from these aims, it does not assume the character of false impartiality, but is consciously biased [*akzentuiert*]. It is concerned not so much with originality as with the extension of the theoretical knowledge already attained on this course.

Materialism breaks from present-day positivism in its acknowledgment of the decisive significance of theory, as contrasted with the mere compiling of facts. Certainly no such division pertains between materialiam and concrete research, which often arrive at the same findings [*Erkenntnisse*]. Some positivists have grasped the relation of morality and praxis to theory through an intimate acquaintance with social problems. "*Loin que la pratique se déduise de la théorie, c'est la théorie*

57. Cf., e.g., the discussion led by Ed. Claparède at the meeting of the Societé francaise de Philosophie on March 12, 1932 (vid. the Bulletin of this society, July/September 1932, published by Armand Colin in Paris).

qui, jusqu'à présent, est une sorte de projection abstraite do la morale pratiquée dans une société donnée, à une époque donnée."[58] Theory is a cohesive body of insights [*Zusammenhang von Erkenntnissen*] stemming from a determinate praxis and out of determinate objectives. The world reveals a consistent image to whomever looks at it from a consistent point of view — an image which changes, to be sure, with the historicity of acting and knowing individuals. Praxis already organizes the material of individual knowing. The demand to establish theory-free facts is false, it this is to mean that subjective factors are not already operative in the given objective facts. Understood productively, it can only mean that the description is veracious [*wahrhaftig*]. The whole cognitive structure from which every description gets its meaning, and which description should serve in return, even theory itself ranks among the strivings of the human beings that create it. These may arise from private whims, from reactionary interests, or from the needs of a developing humanity.

58. Lévy-Bruhl, *La morale et la science des moeurs*, ninth impression, Paris, 1927, p. 98.