Materialism and Morality

Autonomously attempting to decide whether one's actions are good or evil is plainly a late historical phenomenon. A highly developed European individual is not only able to bring important decisions into the light of clear consciousness and morally evaluate them—such individuals also have this capacity in regard to most of the primarily instinctual and habitual reactions that make up the bulk of their lives. But human actions appear more compulsive the earlier the historical formation to which their subjects belong. 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, whose convulsions mark the starting point of modern moral inquiry, is an expression of a later phase of this process. Given that the unbroken religious faith which preceded the dominance of this principle was an already tremendously complicated mediation between naive experience and instinctual reaction, the medieval criterion of the tradition sanctioned by the church (whose exclusive validity surely still carried a strongly compulsive character) already indicates a moral conflict. When Augustine declares: "Ego vero evangelio non crederum nisi me catholicae ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas,"[1] this affirmation already presupposes—as Dilthey[2] recognized—a doubting of faith. The social life process of the modern period has presently so advanced human powers that in the most developed countries, at least the members of certain strata are capable, in a relatively wide range of their existence, not merely of 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 deliberations about the technique and the means applied to a given end 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—which is to say, in conformity with a definite scheme of motives which are characteristic of their social group. Only in nonessential, private affairs are people occasionally given to examine their motives conscientiously and to apply their intellectual powers to the determination of aims. Nonetheless, the question regarding the proper goals has been put energetically within contemporary society, especially among younger people. 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 that 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 which they had earlier been absolved of by authority. At the same time, a rationally grounded morality became all the more necessary to dominate the masses in the state when a mode of action diverging from the their life interests was demanded of them.

The idealist philosophers of the modern period did what they could to meet this need through the construction of axioms. In accordance with the conditions which, since the Renaissance, forced individuals back upon themselves, 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 the Enlightenment may be, they all bear the marks of an effort to use the eternal constitution of the world and of the individual as the basis for establishing some determinate manner of conduct as being appropriate for all time. They therefore make a claim to unconditional validity. Those standards characterized as correct are admittedly quite general for the most part and, with the exception of several materialist and militant theories of the French Enlightenment, offer little in the way of

specific instruction. For the past few centuries, life has demanded of both religion and morality such capacity for conforming that substantively elaborated precepts cannot possibly retain even the mere semblance 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, "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."[3] Idealist moral philosophy purchases the belief in its own unconditionality by making no reference whatsoever to any historical moment. It does not take sides. As much as its views may be in harmony 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."[4] 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."[5] Morality is understood in this connection as an eternal category. Just as the judgment of propositions according to their truth or falsity, or of fashioned objects according to their beauty or ugliness, both belong to the essence of being human, so too, the argument goes, should it be possible to judge whether any given character or action is good or evil. Despite the most vigorous discussions concerning the possibility or impossibility of an eternal morality, modern philosophers are in accord as to its concept. Both the mutability of content and the connateness of certain propositions are variously asserted and contested, but the capacity for moral value judgments is generally taken as an essential characteristic of human nature of at least equal rank with that of theoretical knowledge. 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 moral virtue and these phenomena, the modern problem of morality in its essentials has its roots in the bourgeois order. To be sure, just as certain economic elements of the bourgeois order are to be found in earlier forms of society, aspects of this problem of morality appear in these earlier forms as well; it 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 found 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."[6] According to Kant, actions which conform to this principle and which are done solely for its sake are distinguished from all others through the quality of morality. Kant further proposed that "the specific mark"[7] distinguishing this imperative from all other rules of action lay in the "renunciation of all interest." Even if reason itself takes a pure and unmediated interest in moral actions,[8] this still does not mean that they are done out of any interest in the object or out of need. Acting out of duty is contrasted with acting out of interest. But virtue does not amount to acting contrary to one's individual purposes; rather, it consists in acting independently of them. Individuals are supposed to liberate themselves from their interests.

As is well known, Kant's view here was contested from the most various directions; his critics included, among others, Schiller and Schleiermacher. Interest-free action was even declared to be impossible. "What 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.[9] Certainly Kant did not want to have moral action understood as action without a motive, even if he viewed acting out of interest as the natural law of human beings. On the contrary, the moral impulsion[10] lies in respect for the moral law. But Schopenhauer's critique, which he transformed positively through the construction of his own ethics, hits one thing on the mark: to the moral agent in the Kantian sense, the actual reasons for action remain obscure. The agent knows neither why the universal should stand above the particular, nor how to correctly reconcile the two in

any given instance. The imperative, which "of itself finds entrance into the mind and yet gains reluctant reverence (though not always obedience),"[11] leaves the individual with a certain uneasiness and unclarity. Within the soul, a struggle is played out between personal interest and a vague conception of the general interest, between individual and universal objectives. Yet it remains obscure how a rational decision based upon criteria is possible between the two. There arise an endless reflection and constant turmoil which are fundamentally impossible to overcome. Since this problematic tension playing itself out in the inner lives of human beings necessarily derives from their role in the social life process, Kant's philosophy, being a faithful reflection of this tension, is a consummate expression of its age.

The basis of the spiritual situation in question 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 individuals concern themselves with profit and with the conservation and multiplication of their own property. Each is left to care for himself as best as he can. But because each individual must produce things that others need in the process, the needs of the community as a whole end up being addressed through activities that are apparently independent of one another and seem only to serve the individual's own welfare. The circumstance that production and maintenance in this order coincide with the subjects' striving after possessions is a fact that has left its impression upon the psychic apparatus of its members. Throughout history, people 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. This life-dominating principle inescapably leaves its mark on the individual's feelings, consciousness, form of happiness, and conception of God. Even in the most refined and seemingly remote impulses of the individual, the function he performs in society still makes itself felt. In this era, economic advantage is the natural law under which individual life proceeds. The categorical imperative holds up "universal natural law," the law [*Lebensgesetz*] of human society, as a standard of comparison to this natural law of individuals. This would be meaningless if particular interests and the needs of the general public intersected not just haphazardly but of

necessity. 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 what mediates and the existence of the entire society as what is mediated. The process takes place not under the control of a conscious will but as a natural occurrence. The life of the general public arises blindly, accidentally, and defectively out of the chaotic activity of individuals, industries, and states. This irrationality expresses itself in the suffering of the majority of human beings. The individual, completely absorbed in the concern for himself and "his own," does not only promote the life of the whole without clear consciousness; rather, he effects through his labor both the welfare and the misery of others—and it can never become entirely evident 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 consciousness of itself as an independent being. This self-consciousness, however, is abstract: the manner in which each individual contributes to the workings of the entire society through his labor, and in which he is in turn influenced by it, remains completely obscure. Everyone cooperates in the good or bad development of the entire society, yet it appears as a natural occurrence. One's role in this whole, without which the essence of the individual cannot be determined, remains unseen. 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. Due to the lack of rational organization of the social whole which 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 much and in what manner his egoistic activity actually affects it. The whole thus appears as an admonition and demand which troubles precisely the progressive individuals at their labor, both in the call of conscience and in moral deliberation.[12]

Materialism attempts to delineate—and not simply with the broad strokes just suggested, but with a specific focus on the distinct periods and social classes involved—the actual relationships from which the moral problem derives and which are reflected, if only in 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, set up an opposition between the interest of the individual and feelings or, worse, set such interest over against the return to blind obedience. Neither interest nor reason is maligned. Instead, reason recognizes that it need not exclusively serve the natural law and the advantage of the individual once it has absorbed the natural law of the whole into its will. To be sure, the individual cannot fulfill the demand to rationally shape the whole. Mastery of the overall process of society by human beings can only be achieved when society has overcome its anarchic form and constituted itself as a real subject—that is, through historical action. Such action 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 people follow the law which is natural to them in this society, they attend immediately only to the interests of the subject [*Angelegenheiten des Interessensubjekts*] that bears their own name. Insofar as 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 rather at the same time 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 that Kant's commandment formulates stirs within him. As Kant consistently detailed,[13] the interest of another is to be understood in this connection as equally contingent as one's own, for the relation of the strivings of Y to the life of the general public is for X, as a rule, no more transparent than his own. Whoever is in the economic situation of the bourgeois and is incapable of experiencing this whole conflict has not kept pace developmentally, and lacks a type of reaction belonging to individuals of this period.

Morality, therefore, is by no means simply dismissed by materialism as mere ideology in the sense of false consciousness. Rather, it must be understood as a human phenomenon that cannot possibly be overcome for the duration of the bourgeois epoch. Its philosophical expression, however, is distorted in many respects. Above all, the solution of the problem does not lie in the observance of rigidly formulated commandments. In the attempt to actually apply the Kantian imperative, it immediately becomes clear that the general interest the moral will is concerned about would not be helped in the least. Even if everyone were to comply with the imperative, even if everyone were to lead a virtuous life in its sense, the same confusion would continue to reign. Nothing essential would be changed.

The four examples of moral action which Kant himself adduces 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. The dubiousness of his decision is so obvious, 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,"[14] not at the same time be able to will that the maxim of this action become a universal law? Is not this world rather in such a condition that the rational actor must take solace in the possibility of that way out? Hume's essay on suicide, in which this philosopher proves himself a true Enlightenment figure, admittedly was published before the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* and was written long before it; nonetheless, it makes the impression of being 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 humor with the world."[15] Kant's deliberations, which take no notice of the contradictions in society, seem quite lame by comparison.

In the second example, a person decides against procuring 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 have knowledge of the purpose to which the money was to be put and the nature of the relationship between the two contracting parties. There are cases in which Kant is incapable of defending the solution he takes to be the moral one without resorting to the same kind of artificiality that characterizes his entire discussion of the reasons for lying.[16] In the third example, the disregard for reality proves more ominous than in the first. A rich man discovers that he has a certain talent, but is too indolent to develop it. Kant says that the man 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 idea of the will of the gifted man stirring all his competitors (if there were any to begin with) into action would undoubtedly dissuade him from devoting any effort whatsoever to this enterprise. In the context of this competitive society, should he decide to plunge into the rat race, he must wish precisely that his will does *not* become a universal rule.

The fourth example deals with charity. Kant's attempt to make an argument for charity is based less on respect for the moral law than on the not very persuasive observation that the rich person may himself someday require charity. If this example is supposed to concern not just the paltry take of a beggar but a really tempting amount, the rich person will quite justifiably prefer the secure present to the questionable future. But should this problem be considered morally in the Kantian sense—that is, with a view to universality—rather than egoistically, 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. Once the focus shifts to weightier matters, such as social burdens or wages, there will be as many beliefs about what befits universal law as there are social groups.

Were everyone to act on the basis of conscience, this would prevent neither the chaos nor the misery engendered thereby. The formal directive to be true to oneself and to have a will without contradiction

fails to provide a guiding rule 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? What is decisive for the happiness of humanity is not whether the individuals consider their action to be reconcilable with the natural law of the general welfare [*Naturgesetz der Allgemeinheit*], but rather the extent to which it is actually reconcilable with it. Both the belief that a good will—as important an impulse as this may be—is the sole Good, and the evaluation of an action merely according to its intent and not also according to its real significance at a particular historical moment, amount to idealist delusions. From this ideological side of the Kantian conception of morality, a direct path leads to the modern mysticism of sacrifice and obedience, a mysticism which can only unjustly lay any further claim to the authority of Kant. If the development and happy employment of the powers present in society at large is to be the highest aim, it in no way suffices to set great store by a virtuous inner life or mere spirit—suppressing the instinct for acquisition through discipline. Rather, it is necessary to ensure that the external arrangements which can effect that happiness actually come to pass. What people do is at least as important as how they do it: it is precisely when the chips are down that the motives of those who pursue a goal matter less than the achievement of the goal. To be sure, the inner life of the acting individual is necessary for the very determination of both object and situation, for the internal and the external are every bit as much moments of manifold dialectical processes in all of history as they are in the life of the individual. 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. It is not consciousness of duty, enthusiasm, and sacrifice *as such,* but consciousness of duty, enthusiasm, and sacrifice *for what* which will decide the fate of humanity in the face of the prevailing peril. A will that is prepared to make sacrifices may well be a useful resource in the service of any power, including the most reactionary; insight into the relation in which the will's content stands to the development of the entire society, however, is given not by conscience but by the correct theory.

This idealist trait, according to which all would be right in the world so long as all were right in Spirit, this lack of distinction between fantasy and reality through which idealist philosophy proves itself to be

a refined form of the primitive belief in the omnipotence of thought—in other words, magic—comprises only one side of Kant's doctrine. It also has a very active relation to reality. In this society of isolated individuals, the categorical imperative, as was suggested above, runs up against the impossibility of its own meaningful realization. Consequently, it necessarily implies the transformation of this society. By extension, the very individual to whom the imperative make its appeal, and whose shaping seems to be its sole aim, would also have to disappear. Bourgeois morality presses toward the superseding of the order that first made it possible and necessary. If people want to act in such a way that their maxims are fit to become universal law, they must bring about an order in which this intention—so dubious in the cases enumerated by Kant—can really be carried out according to criteria. Society must then be constructed in a manner that establishes its own interests and those of all its members in a rational fashion: only under this condition is it meaningful for the individuals finding themselves involved in such a project, subjectively and objectively, to organize their lives around it. If modern ethics has borne witness to the elaboration of the negative side of Kant's position—namely subjectivism, which holds back change—at the expense of the development of this dynamic trait which points beyond the given set of relations, then the reason for this lies less with Kant than in subsequent history.

To be sure, the Kantian doctrine contains the impossible concept of an eternal commandment addressed to the free subject, but at the same time it includes tendencies anticipating the end of morality. This doctrine manifests the contradiction which had saddled the bourgeoisie 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 yet must necessarily view it as transitory and proclaim its supercession. 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 is impossible in the prevailing form of society, in which humanity has neither voice nor consciousness except perhaps as theory, which criticizes (as contrasted with public opinion) the various particular interests and powers that falsely pretend to universality. The idea that the precondition of morality in the bourgeois sense—the distinction

between particular and general interests—could be dissolved by a historical act is a doctrine which had achieved currency early on in the materialist anthropology of the bourgeoisie. Helvétius says 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."[17] Kant also considered the reconciliation of happiness and duty to be possible in a better society. There is for him "no conflict of practice with theory,"[18] "the pure principles of right have objective reality, i.e., they may be applied."[19] It is his conviction that the true task of politics is to "accord with the public's universal end, happiness."[20] To be sure, political maxims may by no means "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."[21] Accordingly, neither a single state nor any power group may make itself out to be 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,[22] he nonetheless rejected any contradiction between this freedom and that happiness, declaring instead that the one follows of itself from the other. Kant did not emphasize the fundamental distinction between interest and duty with respect to the perfected order itself, but instead always with respect to the human beings who aspire to it. In the society to be aimed at, the purposes of any given individual could exist together with those of all others, and although the private purposes of the individuals would be different with respect to their content, the necessity of mutual obstruction would be absent. Moral action would coincide with the natural law or would not lead to conflict with it in any case. Despite unambiguous references to the possibility of this future society, Kant may have wavered in regard to

the extent of its actualization. In the formulation in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* it was his conviction that the realization of the ideal can "pass beyond any and every specified limit."[23] 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 claim that human nature precludes the possibility of any meaningful improvement. To them, "the legal constitution in force at any time is . . . the best, but when it is amended from above, this amendment always seems best, too."[24] The philosopher does not skeptically refer to how he "knows men"; rather, he knows "Man" and knows "what can be made of him."[25] There are no valid anthropological arguments 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 in the struggle against progress. What Schopenhauer called the "setting up [of] a moral utopia"[26]—the fulfillment of morality and simultaneously its overcoming—is for Kant no illusion but the goal of politics.

Kant's philosophy certainly exhibits utopian elements: they lie not in the idea of a perfect constitution, but rather in the undialectical conception of a continuous approach to it. Kant holds that 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 eternalizes the categories[27] of the prevailing system. 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 out of the unchanged elements of the present. The harmony of the interests of all in Kant's utopia can only be understood as a prestabilized 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 is needed in order to supersede the utopian character of the Kantian conception of a perfect constitution. After all, the disparate interests of the individual are not ultimate facts; they do not have their basis in an independent psychological constitution, rather they are based on both the material relations and the real total situation of the social group to which the individual

belongs. The absolutely incommensurable disparity of interests derives from the disparity of the relations of ownership; human beings today stand against one another as functions of various economic powers, of which each reveals to the others contradictory developmental tendencies. Only after this antagonistic economic form, whose introduction once meant tremendous progress (including among other things the developmental possibility of self-reliant human beings), has come to be superseded [*abgelöst*] by a social life form in which productive property is administered in the general interest not just out of "good intentions" but with rational necessity, only then will the concordance of individual ends cease appearing to be a miracle. Moreover, individuals at that point cease to be merely the exponents of private ends. Each is no longer simply a monad, but rather, in Kant's language, a "limb" of society at large [*ein "Glied" der Allgemeinheit*].

This expression, with which he characterizes a dynamic element in the moral phenomenon that points beyond itself to a more rational society, has assumed an unhappy function in modern sociology: it is supposed to prompt people, despairing 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. But this is an interpretation of the organic phraseology that runs precisely counter to Kant. Instead of pointing toward an era in which human relations will be really governed by reason, it betokens outmoded stages 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; nothing in this suggests the faintest denial of the role of rational thought. Today, by contrast, the image of the organism characterizes a system of dependency and economic inequality, one which can no longer justify itself before the world's expanded critical understanding and which therefore requires metaphysical phrases in order to reconcile people 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 make decisions and certain others carry them out, a state of affairs which the growth of all forces has made questionable. Today, as in the time of Menenius Agrippa, suffering

human beings are supposed to rest content with the thought that their role in the whole is as innate to them as are the members in the animal body. The obdurate dependency in nature is held up as an example to the members [*Gliedern*] of society. In contradistinction to this 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, the Kantian moral theory tends toward a society in which the material arrangements are indeed precisely linked [*gegliedert*], but in which the possibilities of development and the happiness of the individuals are neither subordinated to a sequence of stages nor surrendered to fate. "That there should be no discord in the body; but that the members may have the same care one for another," as it says in the New Testament.[28] With Kant, the organism is defined precisely by the concept of ends. Organic events, according to him, always refer to the "causality of a concept,"[29] 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 alike is produced not merely as a natural effect but as the consequence of rational designs that take account of the happiness of 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, the purposive application of the immeasurable wealth of human and material powers of production emerges. According to Kant, each individual "gives universal laws while also [being] subject to these laws."[30] The individual is a "lawgiver" not merely in the juridical sense of formal democracy, but in the sense of receiving as much consideration as everyone else, given the individual's possibilities in the total social reality. In Kant's sense, no specific totality can claim the status of an absolute end, but only individuals: only they have reason. Kant developed the idea of a society worthy of human beings, one in which morality loses its basis, by his analysis of moral consciousness; it appears as the demand and consequence of the latter. Hegel made this idea the foundation of his philosophy. According to Hegel, 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.[31] To be sure, like his liberal teachers of political economy, he considered this condition already to have been realized in his time.

Morality as a human power distinct from interest played no major role in his system; with this definitive metaphysics of history, it is no longer necessary as driving force. Hegel's concept of Spirit, however, contains the same ideal that the bourgeois world as well as the Kantian philosophy impressed upon every able thinker. The theory of its realization leads from philosophy to the critique of political economy.

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 in their critique an indeterminate moral sentiment with such strivings. When Nietzsche maps out his own problem in the Foreword to *The Genealogy of Morals,* 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. To be sure, Nietzsche commended very perverse means for its liberation in a period in which the conditions for a more prosperous form of organization were already clearly 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,"[32] applies to him too, 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, 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 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. Nietzsche's ignorance of dialectics allows him to foresee the same "dearth of justice" that Kant had seen. "If it were as we would like, all morality would transform itself into self-interest."[33] 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 goal in an inverted 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."[34] He claims that morality has two aspects: a "natural" one which arises from society's accommodation to its life conditions—consisting in socially functional reactions consolidated in customs, similarly characteristic of members of both primitive tribes and civilized nations as well as of cases of brutish associations—and a truly human aspect, the "élan d'amour." This second aspect contains within itself "le sentiment d'un progrès"[35] 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 publicly esteemed sentiment and forward-pointing morality. The "tendances innées et fondamentales de l'homme actuel"[36] are aimed at family, interest formations, and nation, and necessarily include possible enmity between groups. Hate, but not in the least the solidarity of forward-pointing moral sentiment, belongs to this purposeful love. "C'est qu'entre la nation, si grande soit-elle, et

l'humanité, il y a toute la distance du fini à l'indéfini, du clos à l'ouvert."[37] As with Nietzsche, Bergson indeed loses his sharpness of vision in the face of the question of how the ideal society prescribed 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 répresente, comme eût fait l'apparition d'une nouvelle espèce, un effort d'évolution créatrice."[38] According 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 "société idéale" in the end might not exist in abundance and be found in a relation of struggle, without philosophers regarding 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 the society anticipated in morality, in the deficient connection with the forces that are driving forward, is that bit of immorality which can presently be discovered even in genuine philosophy.

Materialism sees in morality an expression of life of determinate individuals and seeks to understand it in terms of the conditions of its emergence and passing, not for the sake of truth in itself but rather in connection with determinate historical forces. It understands itself as the theoretical aspect of efforts 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 spatiotemporal world. As long as they have no effect on their author 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"[39] in a manner similar to any other field of inquiry, the modern "value research" of Scheler and Hartmann has only hit upon another method for the solution of an impossible task: the grounding of practices in mere philosophy. The proposition 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 being "in a rudimentary stage,"[40] an "Ought,"[41] which in certain cases is transformed "into the Ought-to-Do of the subject,"[42] still clings to all values which the ethicist strives to come up with. Despite the explanation that decision is constantly in the conscience of the subject, despite the universality that indeed belongs to the essence of the philosophical doctrine of morality, it is claimed that there exist differences of degree to which behavior supposedly conforms: "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."[43] Such assertions, whose content moreover is connected only very diffusely with moral sentiment due to the intensely reactionary function of philosophy since Kant, have the same kind of commandment-like character as the categorical imperative. They are the mystified expression of psychic states of affairs in which "pression sociale" and "élan d'amour" indeed enter into a connection which is difficult to analyze. There is no eternal realm of values. The needs and desires, 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 preeminence to moral conviction. All attempts to ground morality in terms of temporal prudence rather than in terms of a view to a hereafter—as the cited examples show, even Kant did not always resist this inclination—are based on harmonistic illusions. 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. On the contrary, it represents 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 determined, whether through this law or through 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.[44] Kant describes marriage as the "joining together of two people of the opposite sex for the lifelong mutual ownership of their sexual attributes"[45] 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."[46] Even insofar as modern accounts have not become completely ideological, they still contain similar definitions. According to Freud, the sexual aim of the infantile instinct, 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."[47] 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."[48] 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 neediness and powers, which point toward the future. Unless the aim of a future happy life for all, 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. To all, inasmuch as they are, after all, human beings, it wishes the free development of their creative powers. 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 than under the sign of liberation from it. Not the rod of the corporal 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. While 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, which is 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 not only extends to international relations but penetrates into even the most private of relations; it results in a diminution of cultural endeavors (including science) and a brutalization of personal and public life, such that spiritual misery is compounded with material. At no time has the poverty of humanity stood in such crying contradiction to its potential wealth as in the present, at no time have all powers been so horribly fettered as in this generation, where children go hungry as the hands of the fathers are busy churning out bombs. It appears as if the world is being driven into a catastrophe—or 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, which was caused earlier on by dearth of reason and by the bare naturalness of the production process, has risen in this present phase to become the most striking characteristic of 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."[49] We view human beings not as subjects of their fate, but rather as objects of a blind occurrence of nature, to which the response of the moral sentiment is compassion.

That Kant did not see compassion on the basis of the 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 himself 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 which was assumed on the basis of the mode of production of the bourgeois epoch. 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. Progress in the realization of the former will also strengthen our sense of the latter. Animals need human beings. 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, by no means annul the communion which they feel with animals. To be sure, the traits of human beings have a certain imprint, but 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 eternal. The materialist critique of political economy first showed 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 the sublation of its own 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, which have shown their untenability. 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, but in accordance with their meaning. The content of the ideas is not eternal, but is subject to historical change—surely not because "Spirit" of itself capriciously infringes 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. In the struggle for this, ideas have altered their content. Today, the freedom of individuals means the sublation of their economic independence in a plan. The presupposition of the ideas of Equality and Justice hitherto was the prevailing inequality of economic and human subjects; it must disappear in a unified society, whereupon these ideas will 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."[50] Hitherto, all these

concepts took their determinate content from the relations of the free market, which with time were 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 that their adequate realization is set 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 ruling and ruled groups. The suffering that is connected with the continual reproduction of the life of the masses at a particular level and especially with every advance, and which, so to speak, represents the costs expended by society, has never been distributed equitably among its members. 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, did not have the option of abandoning relations 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 social intercourse, 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, some of which appear to be blessed by fortune, some 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: his shortcomings will be intensified throughout his life, his hopeful first steps will come to nothing.

In this history of humanity, in which inequality constitutes such a fundamental trait, a certain human reaction has repeatedly become apparent, whether as inequality's other side or as its effect. The abolition of inequality has been demanded at different times and in different places. Not only the dominated classes but also renegades from the ruling classes have denounced inequality. The equality which was to be brought about (and which, in the materialist view, developed with the exchange relationship) has been understood in the most 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 his 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 a good, and becomes something that should be overcome.

To have made this principle a universal one is an achievement of recent times, during which there has certainly been no lack of defenders of inequality and of eulogists of the blindness in nature and society. Although representative philosophers of past epochs, such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, had extolled the differences in people's fate as an eternal value, 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, such recognition belonged in that epoch to the process of society's adaptation to changing life conditions. Like all living entities, society makes such adaptation both continuously and spasmodically in consequence of its own intrinsic dynamics. The idea of Equality "résulte logiquement des transformations réelles de nos sociétés."[51] The idea of Equality necessarily brings that of Freedom to the fore. If indeed no individual is initially less worthy than any other of developing and of 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 a 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 the relations of Justice, this step was additionally proclaimed as the realization of Equality in general. It had become 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 a decisive feature of all thought, indeed even 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 inequality. Freedom of public expression was a weapon in the struggle for better conditions; today it acts primarily to the advantage of conditions that 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 further 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 sublation of the distinction between the ruling and the ruled groups, 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 turned into a threat to the same. But those forces which benefit from wretched social relations presently make use of those ideas to avert the possible change of which humanity stands in need. They snatch these ideas from those who have a genuine interest in their realization. The peculiar present perplexity 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 leveled 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. The requirements of internal and external control entail that all progressive elements of bourgeois morality be stifled or deliberately eliminated in many places. There is a steady reduction in the number of countries in which those values which aspire to the increase of the happiness of individuals have not yet fallen into disrepute; it appears that the period in which the bourgeois world produced morality was too short for it to be converted into universality 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 in relief efforts after 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, as the will to rational relations which correspond to the present state of development. This part of humanity, which necessarily counts on this change due to its situation, already contains (and attracts ever more) forces to whom the realization of 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 bourgeois traits under the domination of the natural law, as delineated in an earlier edition of this journal.[52] 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 which is guided by knowledge contain so much genuine solidarity with respect to their liberation and that of humanity, so much lack of concern about their private existence, so few thoughts of possessions and property, that the sensibility of future humanity already seems to manifest itself in them. While the putative consciousness of equality in existing society generally bears the flaw of overlooking the actual inequality in the existence of human beings, and thus embraces untruth, the forces pressing for change place actual inequality in the forefront. To the authentic concept of Equality belongs the knowledge of its negativity: 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 forward-directed politics productive forces that are historically related to bourgeois morality. According to materialism, however, not only the explicit forms of command but the ideas of duty and metaphysical guilt, and above all the maligning of desire and pleasure, exercise constraining effects in 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 toward its improvement. The knowledge of tendencies that is 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 development, and not its direction, were correct (a frightful "only," since it concerns the agonies of generations), merely formally understood 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 had lasted too long. But even the sheer certainty that such an order would come to pass would not alone provide even the slightest of grounds on which to affirm or precipitate this 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 people even in the most private expressions of life. For the materialist, the presence of a historical magnitude alone, or the prospects which it has, by no means constitutes a recommendation. The materialist asks how this dimension at a given point in time relates to the values he affirms, and acts according to the concrete situation. In the prevailing social conditions, this 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 a rational relationship with each other. 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, is one that materialism shares with idealist currents of philosophy. But both the derivation and the concrete application of the principle within the sphere of knowledge are completely different. In idealist philosophy it 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.*" Nicholas of Cusa already teaches: "Without the power of judgment 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."[53] Even though, according 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 another God itself, as it were. Since Cusanus, this doctrine has been definitive in science and philosophy. According to it, the differences in 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. Max Weber's view is characteristic of the main tendencies of idealistic philosophy (with the exception of theories of objective value), which for the most part display romantic, at any rate antidemocratic tendencies. It is his view "that we are *cultural beings,* endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude toward the world and to lend it significance. . . . Undoubtedly, all evaluative ideas are 'subjective.' "[54] As a result of this doctrine, in idealist philosophy and science any value judgment is accordingly ruled out. Indeed, in recent decades it has increasingly been made a duty of the human or cultural sciences not to take up and develop its material in connection with larger social objectives, but rather to establish and to classify "theory-free" facts. The application of the earlier objectives of the

bourgeoisie—above all that of the greatest happiness of all—to the problems of those areas of inquiry would necessarily lead to conflicts in increasing measure. In the original works of the bourgeoisie these motives are absolutely decisive. Even the originators of positivism defended themselves against the neutralistic degeneration of knowledge, in contrast to many of their later disciples. "The 'dispersive specialty' 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."[55] Such voices have become very rare precisely among the progressive scholars of our day. They must be satisfied with defending their work against the increasing predominance of those who, without respect for rigor or integrity, would like to lead knowledge back behind the position it has attained by way of its subjugation to goals that have become questionable, and who would like to reduce it to the handmaiden of whatever power happens to hold sway. In seeking to protect knowledge and the interest in truth from the presently invading barbarism, those scholars are rendering a service to civilization similar to those places where today genuine bourgeois values are still held up for respect in the public mind through education.[56]

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 creator of knowledge 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 in no way traces interests and objectives that are operative on the part of the subject back to the independent creative activity of this subject and to his 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. It is also well aware of its own conditionality. Apart from personal nuances, this latter is to be sought in connection with those forces which are devoted to the realization of the aims stated above. Because materialist science never takes its eyes away from these aims, it does not assume the character of false impartiality, but is consciously biased. It is concerned not so much with originality as with the extension of the theoretical knowledge which it has already attained on this course.

In its acknowledgment of the decisive significance of theory, materialism is to be distinguished from present-day positivism, though not from concrete research, which often comes to the same findings as materialism itself. Some of its exponents have grasped well the relation of morality and praxis to theory on account of intimate acquaintance with social problems. "Loin que la pratique se déduise de la théorie, c'est la théorie qui, jusqu'à présent, est une sorte de projection abstraite de la morale pratiquée dans une société donnée, à une époque donnée."[57] Theory is a cohesive body of insights that stems from a determinate praxis and from determinate ends. 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 period to which acting and knowing individuals are subject. Praxis already organizes the material of which each individual takes cognizance; the demand to establish theory-free facts is false, if 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 this description should serve in return—as well as theory itself—these are all part of the efforts and aspirations of the human beings that create them. These may arise from private whims, from the interests of retrograde powers, or from the needs of developing humanity.