On the Problem of Truth

The philosophic thought of recent decades, shot through with contradictions, has also been divided on the problem of truth. Two opposing and unreconciled views exist side by side in public life and, not infrequently, in the behavior of the same individual. According to one, cognition never has more than limited validity. This is rooted in objective fact as well as in the knower. Every thing and every relation of things changes with time, and thus every judgment as to real situations must lose its truth with time. "Every particular entity is given to us in time, occupies a definite place in time, and is perceived as lasting for a length of time and during this time developing changing activities and possibly altering its properties. Thus all our judgments on the essence, properties, activities, and relations of particular things are necessarily involved with the relationship to time, and every judgment of this sort can only be valid for a certain time."[1] Subjectively, too, truth is viewed as necessarily circumscribed. Perception is shaped not only by the object but by the individual and generic characteristics of human beings. It is particularly this subjective moment to which the modern science of mind has given its attention. Depth psychology seemed to destroy the illusion of absolutely valid truth by pointing out that the function of consciousness only made its appearance together with unconscious psychic processes, while sociology made a philosophically developed discipline out of the doctrine that every idea belongs to an intellectual pattern bound up with a social group, a "standpoint." Present-day relativism, in particular, has subjectivist characteristics, but it is by no means the sole representative of this

period's intellectual attitude toward truth. Rather, it is opposed by the impulse to blind faith, to absolute submission, which has always been necessarily linked with relativism as its opposite, and is once again characteristic of the cultural situation today. Since the metaphysical reworking of the concept of the intuition of essence, which at first had been understood in the strictest sense, a new dogmatism has developed within philosophy. This development in the history of ideas reflects the historical circumstance that the social totality to which the liberal, democratic, and progressive tendencies of the dominant culture belonged also contained from its beginning their opposite compulsion, chance and the rule of primal nature. By the system's own dynamic, this eventually threatens to wipe out all its positive characteristics. The role of human autonomy in the preservation and renewal of social life is completely subordinated to the effort to hold together mechanically a dissolving order. The public mind is increasingly dominated by some rigid judgments and a few postulated concepts.

The appearance of this contradiction in our time repeats in distorted form a discord which has always permeated the philosophy of the bourgeois era. Its prototype in the history of philosophy is the linkage of Descartes's universal methodical doubt with his devout Catholicism. It extends to the details of his system. It reveals itself not only in the unreconciled juxtaposition of faith and contradictory knowledge, but in the theory of cognition itself. The doctrine of a solid *res cogitans,* a self-contained ego independent of the body, which serves as an absolute resolution of the attempt at doubt and is preserved immutable in the metaphysics of Descartes and his idealistic successors, reveals itself as an illusion corresponding to the situation of the bourgeois individual and present before the inquiry rather than based on it. The independent existence of individual souls, the principle which for Descartes makes the world philosophically intelligible, is no easier to reconcile with the criteria and the whole spirit of the analytic geometry which he himself invented than is his proclamation of empty space as the sole physical substance with the theological dogma of transubstantiation. Complete doubt as to the reality of material truth, the constant emphasis on the uncertainty, conditional character, and finiteness of all definite knowledge, immediately next to ostensible

insights into eternal truths and the fetishization of individual categories and modes of being—this duality permeates the Cartesian philosophy.

It finds its classic expression in Kant. The critical method was supposed to perform the task of differentiating the purely conditional and empirical from "pure" knowledge and reached the conclusion that pure knowledge was possible only in regard to the conditions of the conditional. The system of the necessary subjective conditions of human knowledge is the exclusive goal of transcendental philosophy. To Hume's skepticism, Kant opposes nothing but the sensory and conceptual forms of knowledge and what can be deduced therefrom. But what comes into existence on the basis of these conditions, the theory of our actual world and not a merely possible one, knowledge of actual nature and existing human society, lacks for Kant the criteria of genuine truth and is only relative. Everything that we know of reality, of conditions in space and time, relates according to him only to appearances, and of these he claims to have shown "that they are not things (but only a form of representation), and that they are not qualities inherently belonging to the things in themselves."[2] In regard to knowledge of the world, he is no less a skeptical relativist than the "mystical" and "dreaming" idealists whom he combats. In the latest phase of transcendental philosophy, this subjective relativism is clearly formulated: "In the last analysis, all being is relative (as opposed to the false ideal of an absolute Being and its absolute truth), and is nevertheless *relative in some customary sense to the transcendental subjectivity.* But this subjectivity alone is 'in and for itself.' "[3] Along with the careful and differentiated theoretical philosophy, which did indeed keep thought rooted in the ahistorical sphere of transcendental subjectivity, there are in Kant the postulates of practical reason and—linked to them by conclusions which are in part extremely questionable—the transformation into absolutes of the existing property relations under prevalent public and private law. In the *Critique of Practical Reason,* which fetishizes the concept of duty, he did not in any way overcome the need for an immovable intellectual foundation but merely met it in a way more fitting to the time than that of the rationalist ontology of the period. The theoretical philosophy itself assumes that there is absolute knowledge, independent of any sensory experience,

and indeed that this alone deserves the name of truth. Even the *Critique of Pure Reason* depends on the assumption that pure concepts and judgments exist "a priori" in the consciousness, and that metaphysics not only has always existed but will of right exist for all eternity. Kant's work embraces in itself the contradiction between the German and English schools of philosophy. The resolution of the contradictions it produces, the mediation between critique and dogmatic system, between a mechanistic concept of science and the doctrine of intelligible freedom, between belief in an eternal order and a theory isolated from practice, increasingly and vainly occupied his own thought till the last years of his life: this is the mark of his greatness. Analysis carried through to the end and skeptical distrust of all theory on the one hand and readiness to believe naively in detached fixed principles on the other, these are characteristic of the bourgeois mind. It appears in its most highly developed form in Kant's philosophy.

This dual relationship to truth is again mirrored in the failure of the progressive methods of the scholar to influence his attitude toward the most important problems of the time, the combination of notable knowledge in the natural sciences with childlike faith in the Bible. The association of that particularly strict tendency in modern philosophy, positivism, with the crudest superstition has already been noted in this journal.[4] Auguste Comte not merely laid the groundwork for a whimsical cult, but prided himself on his understanding of the various theories of the beyond. William James turned to mysticism and even mediumism.[5] The brain appears to him not so much to promote as to obstruct the enlightening intuitions which exist "ready-made in the transcendental world" and come through as telepathic experiences as soon as the brain's activity is "abnormally" reduced. "The word 'influx' used in Swedenborgian circles" describes the phenomenon very well.[6] The pragmatist F. C. S. Schiller, whom James quotes, declares on this point, "Matter is not that which produces consciousness but that which limits it," and he conceives of the body as "a mechanism for inhibiting consciousness."[7] This inclination to spiritualism can be followed through the later history of positivism. In Germany, it seems to have reached its culmination in the philosophy of Hans Driesch, in which a scientism carried to extremes goes together with unconcealed occultism in all questions of this world and the beyond. In this, the occultist dilemma finds a grotesque expression in his logic

and theory of knowledge through intentional formalism and rigidity and through the monomaniacal reference of all the problems of the world to some few biological experiments. On the other side, the misconception of a self-sufficient science independent of history appears through the pseudoscientific dress of his barbarous errors in religion and practice.

Only in the decline of the contemporary epoch has it become the typical behavior of scholars to develop high critical faculties in a specific branch of science while remaining on the level of backward groups regarding questions of social life and echoing the most ignorant phrases. In the beginning of the bourgeois order, the turn to specific juristic and scientific studies without regard to social and religious demands immediately produced a moment of liberation from the theological tutelage of thought. But as a result of the alteration of the social structure, this sort of production without regard to the rational relation to the whole has become regressive and obstructive in all fields—in science just as in industry and agriculture. This abstractness and ostensible independence of the bourgeois science industry shows itself in the mass of isolated individual empirical studies, not related to any sort of theory and practice by clear terminology and subject matter. It is likewise visible in the efforts of scientists, without any significant reason, to divest their concepts of all empirical material, and especially in the inordinate mathematization of many intellectual disciplines. The conventional attitude of the scholar to the dominant questions of the period and the confinement of his critical attention to his professional specialty were formerly factors in the improvement of the general situation. Thinkers ceased to be concerned exclusively with the welfare of their immortal souls, or to make concern for it their guide in all theoretical matters. But subsequently this attitude has taken on another meaning: instead of being a sign of necessary courage and independence, the withdrawal of intellectual energies from general cultural and social questions, the placing of actual historical interests and struggles in a parenthesis, is more a sign of anxiety and incapacity for rational activity than of an inclination to the true tasks of science. The substance underlying intellectual phenomena changes with the social totality.

It is not the intention here to go into detail in regard to the historical causes of this dual relationship to truth. The competition within

the bourgeois economy, in the context of which the forces of this society unfolded, produced a critical spirit which not only was able to liberate itself from the bureaucracies of church and absolutism but, driven by the dynamic of the economic apparatus, can to a fantastic degree place nature at its service. But this power only seems to be its own. The methods for the production of social wealth are available, the conditions for the production of useful natural effects are largely known, and the human will can bring them about. But this spirit and will themselves exist in false and distorted form. The concept of having power over something includes deciding for oneself and making use of it for one's own purposes. But domination over nature is not exercised according to a unified plan and purpose, but merely serves as an instrument for individuals, groups, and nations which use it in their struggle against one another and, as they develop it, at the same time reciprocally circumscribe it and bend it to destructive ends. Thus, the bearers of this spirit, with their critical capacity and their developed thinking, do not really become masters but are driven by the changing constellations of the general struggle which, even though summoned up by men themselves, face them as incalculable forces of destiny. This seemingly necessary dependence, which increasingly bears fruit in disruptive tensions and crises, general misery and decline, becomes for the greatest part of humanity an incomprehensible fate. But to the extent that the alteration of basic relationships is excluded in practice, a need arises for an interpretation based purely on faith. The conviction that a constricting and painful constellation is essentially unalterable prods the mind to give it a profound interpretation so as to be able to come to terms with it without despairing. Death as the inevitable end was always the basis of the religious and metaphysical illusion. The metaphysical need which permeates the history of this period stems from the fact that the inner mechanism of this society, which produces insecurity and continuous pressure, does not emerge into clear consciousness and is put up with as something necessary and eternal, rather than as an object of effective change. The firm faith which was part of the mortar of the medieval social structure has disappeared. The great systems of European philosophy were always intended only for an educated upper crust and fail completely in the face of the psychic needs of the impoverished and socially continually sinking sections of the citizenry and peasantry, who are

nevertheless completely tied to this form of society by upbringing, work, and hope and cannot believe it to be transitory. This is why the intellectual situation has for decades been dominated by the craving to bring an eternal meaning into a life which offers no way out, by philosophical practices such as the direct intellectual or intuitive apprehension of truth, and finally by blind submission to a personality, be it an anthroposophic prophet, a poet, or a politician. To the extent to which individual activity is circumscribed and the capacity for it eventually stunted, there exists the readiness to find security in the protective shelter of a faith or person taken as the vessel and incarnation of the truth. In particular periods of the rise of contemporary society, the expectation of steady progress within its own framework reduced the need for an interpretation that would transfigure reality, and the rational and critical faculties achieved greater influence in private and public thought. But as this form of social organization becomes increasingly crisis-prone and insecure, all those who regard its characteristics as eternal are sacrificed to the institutions which are intended as substitutes for the lost religion.

This is, to be sure, only one aspect of the social situation out of which the shaky relationship to truth in modern times arises. A fundamental analysis of the fallacious bourgeois self-perception, which preserves the ideology of complete inner freedom in the face of the dependence and insecurity of its bearers, could show that the liberal validation of alien ideas (the mark of relativism) has a common root with the fear of making one's own decisions, which leads to belief in a rigid absolute truth: the abstract, reified concept of the individual which inescapably dominates thought in this economic system. But here the question is less one of the derivation of the phenomenon than of its practical significance. Is there really only the choice between acceptance of a final truth, as proclaimed in religions and idealistic schools of philosophy, and the view that every thesis and every theory is always merely "subjective," i.e., true and valid for a person or a group or a time or human beings as a species, but lacking objective validity? In developing the dialectical method, bourgeois thought itself has made the most ambitious attempt to transcend this antinomy. Here the goal of philosophy no longer appears, as in Kant, to be merely the system of the subjective factors of cognition; perceived truth is no longer so empty that in practice one must take refuge in the solidity of faith.

While the concrete content is perceived as conditional and dependent and every "final" truth is just as decisively "negated" as in Kant, it does not for Hegel simply fall through the sieve in the sifting out of pure knowledge. Recognition of the conditional character of every isolated view and rejection of its absolute claim to truth does not destroy this conditional knowledge; rather, it is incorporated into the system of truth at any given time as a conditional, one-sided, and isolated view. Through nothing but this continuous delimitation and correction of partial truths, the process itself evolves its proper content as knowledge of limited insights in their limits and connection.

To skepticism, Hegel opposes the concept of determinate negation. The progressive recognition of partial truths, the advance from one isolated definition to another, certainly does not mean for him a mere lining up of attributes but a description which follows the actual subject matter in all particulars. This critique of every concept and every complex of concepts by progressive incorporation into the more complete picture of the whole does not eliminate the individual aspects, nor does it leave them undisturbed in subsequent thought, but every negated insight is preserved as a moment of truth in the progress of cognition, forms a determining factor in it, and is further defined and transformed with every new step. Precisely because of this, the methodological form of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis is not to be applied as a "lifeless schema."[8] If at any given time the antithesis expresses the critical and relativizing impetus in opposition to the assimilation and establishment of a pattern of thought, thesis and antithesis together immediately form a new insight, a synthesis, because the negation has not simply rejected the original insight but has deepened and defined it. Hegel does not end up with the bare assurance that all definite knowledge is transitory and unreal, that what we know is only appearance in contrast to an unknowable thing in itself or an intuitively perceived essence. If for Hegel the true is the whole, the whole is not something distinct from the parts in its determinate structure, but is the entire pattern of thought which at a given time embraces in itself all limited conceptions in the consciousness of their limitation.

Since the dialectical method does not rest with showing that a thing is conditioned but takes the conditioned thing seriously, it escapes the relativistic formalism of the Kantian philosophy. Hegel therefore does

not need to make a fetish out of an isolated concept like that of duty. He recognizes the vain effort of all idealistic philosophy before him to make the whole content of the world disappear in some conceptual generalization and declare all specific differences unreal as opposed to such attributes as the infinite, will, experience, absolute indifference, consciousness, etc. The second-rate thought to which the world always appears as a mysterious presentation in which only the initiate knows what goes on behind the scenes, which sets philosophy to solving an ostensible riddle in order to know once and for all or even to despair that such a key is not to be found—this sort of dogmatism does not exist in Hegel. Rather, the dialectical method quickly led him to become aware of the stupidity of such philosophical work and to see in development and flux what presents itself as absolute and eternal.

But insofar as this method, in Hegel, still belongs to an idealistic system, he has not freed his thought from the old contradiction. His philosophy shares relativism's indifference to particular perceptions, ideas, and goals. It is also marked by its hypostatization of conceptual structures and by the inability to take theoretical and practical account of the dogmatism and historical genesis of his own thought. Its dogmatic side has been especially often attacked in the critique of cognition since the middle of the nineteenth century. In place of those doctrines that made an abstract concept into substance, that is, that made this limited aspect identical with Being by dirempting it from history and that thus degenerate into naive faith, Hegel puts the hypostatization of his own system. In his polemic against skepticism and relativism, he himself says, "But the *goal* is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion. Hence the progress towards this goal is also unhalting, and short of it no satisfaction is to be found at any of the stations on the way."[9] Hegel believes that he guarantees this satisfaction through the whole of his thought. For him, philosophy has the same absolute content as religion, the complete unity of subject and object, a final and eternally valid knowledge.

What mankind, pressed on all sides by the boundaries of his purely terrestrial life, in fact requires is that region of more essential reality, in which every opposition and contradiction is overcome, and freedom can finally claim to

be wholly at peace with itself. And this is, of course, nothing other than absolute Truth itself, no merely relative truth. In the Truth, according to its highest notion, all must be brought home to one unity. In it there can be no more opposition between freedom and necessity, Spirit and Nature, knowledge and the object of knowledge, law and impulse, between whatever form, in fact, the opposition of these contradictory phenomena of human experience may assume. . . . Our ordinary conscious life fails to overcome this contradiction, and either plunges desperately into the same, or thrusts it on one side and makes its escape from it in some other way. Philosophy will, however, so address itself to the two determinating factors of the contradiction as to show that they are apprehended as isolate from each other in abstraction, not according to their concrete notion; and by the grasp of this latter it will demonstrate the one-sidedness in its relative character, placing these opposing aspects in the fuller union and harmony which is truth. It is the function of philosophy to grasp and formulate this notion of truth. . . . Philosophy has no other object than God. In its substance it is in fact rational theology, and in its service of the truth a continual service of God.[10]

According to Hegel himself, the doctrine of an absolute self-contained truth has the purpose of harmonizing in a higher spiritual region the "oppositions and contradictions" not resolved in the world. Especially in his later lectures and writings, he stresses that "the sphere of truth, freedom, and . . . satisfaction"[11] is to be found not in the mechanism of reality but in the spiritual spheres of art, religion, and philosophy. He opposes this peace and satisfaction in thought not only to skeptical despair but to the active attitude which tries to overcome the incompleteness of existing conditions "in some other way."

This dogmatic narrow-mindedness is not some sort of an accidental defect of his doctrine which one can strip off without changing anything essential. Rather, it is inextricably bound up with the idealistic character of his thought and enters into all the details of his application of the dialectic. Hegel cannot be reproached for the role in his thought played by external observation, which as Trendelenburg points out in his criticism[12] gives rise to the basic concept of the dialectic: movement. He himself emphasized the importance of experience for philosophy. Rather, in contemplating his own system, Hegel forgets one very definite side of the empirical situation. The belief that this system is the completion of truth hides from him the significance of the temporally conditioned interest which plays a role in the details of the dialectical presentation through the direction of thought, the choice of material content, and the use of names and words, and

diverts attention from the fact that his conscious and unconscious partisanship in regard to the problems of life must necessarily have its effect as a constituent element of his philosophy. Thus, his conceptions of nation and freedom, which form the backbone of many parts of his work, are not perceived in terms of their temporal presuppositions and their transitory character; on the contrary, as conceptual realities and forces, they are made the basis of the historical developments from which they are abstracted. Because Hegel does not recognize and consistently embrace the specific historical tendencies which find expression in his own work, but presents himself as absolute Spirit through his philosophizing and accordingly preserves on ostensible distance and impartiality, many parts of his work lack clarity and, in spite of the revolutionary sharpness and flexibility of the method, take on the arbitrary and pedantic character that was so closely bound up with the political conditions of his time. In the idealistic thought to which it owes its existence, dialectic is beset by dogmatism. Since the abstractions at which the method arrives are supposed to be moments in a system in which thought "no longer needs to go beyond itself," the relationships comprehended by it are also regarded as unalterable and eternal. If a great deal may happen in history yet to come, even if other peoples, e.g., the Slavs,[13] should take over leadership from those nations which have in the past been decisive, nevertheless no new principle of social organization will become dominant and no decisive change will take place in the organization of humanity. No historical change which brought about a new form of human association could leave the concepts of society, freedom, right, etc., unaltered. The interconnection of all categories, even the most abstract, would be affected thereby. Hence, Hegel's belief that his thought comprehended the essential characteristics of all being—the unity of which remained as it appeared in the system, a complete hierarchy and totality undisturbed by the becoming and passing of individuals—represented the conceptual eternalization of the earthly relationships on which it was based. Dialectic takes on a transfiguring function. The laws of life, in which according to Hegel domination and servitude as well as poverty and misery have their eternal place, are sanctioned by the fact that the conceptual interconnection in which they are included is regarded as something higher, divine and absolute. Just as religion and the deification of a race or state or the worship of

nature offer the suffering individual an immortal and eternal essence, so Hegel believes he has revealed an eternal meaning in the contemplation of which the individual should feel sheltered from all personal misery. This is the dogmatic, metaphysical, naive aspect of his theory.

Its relativism is directly bound up with this. The dogmatic assertion that all the particular views which have ever entered the lists against one another in real historical combat, all the creeds of particular groups, all attempts at reform are now transcended and canceled out, the notion of the all-embracing thought which is to apportion its partial rightness and final limitation to every point of view without consciously taking sides with any one against the others and deciding between them—this is the very soul of bourgeois relativism. The attempt to afford justification to every idea and every historical person and to assign the heroes of past revolutions their place in the pantheon of history next to the victorious generals of the counterrevolution, this ostensibly free-floating objectivity conditioned by the bourgeoisie's stand on two fronts against absolutist restoration and against the proletariat, has acquired validity in the Hegelian system along with the idealistic pathos of absolute knowledge. It is self-evident that tolerance toward all views that belong to the past and are recognized as conditioned is no less relativistic than negativist skepticism. The more the age demands unsparing outspokenness and defense of particular truths and rights, the more unequivocally such tolerance reveals its inherent inhumanity. If, in spite of the lack of a conscious relationship between his philosophy and any particular practical principle, Hegel was guided in detail not simply by the conservative Prussian spirit but also by progressive interests, his dogmatism nevertheless prevented his recognizing and defending these tendencies that found expression in his science as his own purposes and progressive interests. He seems to speak of himself when he describes how "consciousness drops like a discarded cloak its idea of a good that exists [only] in principle, but has as yet no actual existence."[14] In Hegel, as in Goethe, the progressive impulses enter secretly into the viewpoint which ostensibly comprehends and harmonizes everything real impartially. Later relativism, in contrast, directs its demonstration of limiting conditionality mainly against the progressive ideas themselves, which it thereby seeks to flatten, that is, to equate with everything already past. In its conceptual

projections, the new as well as the old easily appear as simple rationalizing and ideology. Since the recognition of the truth of particular ideas disappears behind the display of conditions, the coordination with historical unities, this impartial relativism reveals itself as the friend of what exists at any given time. The dogmatism concealed within it is the affirmation of the existing power, what is coming into being needs conscious decision in its struggle, while the limitation to mere understanding and contemplation serves what is already in existence. That impartial partisanship and indiscriminate objectivity represent a subjective viewpoint is a dialectical proposition that indeed takes relativism beyond itself.

In materialism, dialectic is not regarded as a closed system. Understanding that the prevalent circumstances are conditioned and transitory is not here immediately equated with transcending them and canceling them out. Hegel declares: "No one knows, or even feels, that anything is a limit or defect, until he is at the same time above and beyond it. . . . A very little consideration might show that to call a thing finite or limited proves by implication the very presence of the infinite and unlimited, and that our knowledge of a limit can only be when the unlimited is *on this side* in consciousness."[15] This view has as its presupposition the basic postulate of idealism that concept and being are in truth the same, and therefore that all fulfillment can take place in the pure medium of the spirit. Inner renewal and exaltation, reformation and spiritual elevation were always the solution to which he pointed. Insofar as dealing with and changing the external world was regarded as at all fundamental, it appeared as a mere consequence of this. Materialism, on the other hand, insists that objective reality is not identical with man's thought and can never be merged into it. As much as thought in its own element seeks to copy the life of the object and adapt itself to it, thought is never simultaneously the object thought about, unless in self-observation and reflection—and not even there. To conceptualize a defect is therefore not to transcend it; concepts and theories constitute one moment of its rectification, a prerequisite to the proper procedure, which as it progresses is constantly redefined, adapted, and improved.

An isolated and conclusive theory of reality is completely unthinkable. If one takes seriously the formal definition of truth which runs through the whole history of logic as the correspondence of cognition

with its object,[16] there follows from it the contradiction to the dogmatic interpretation of thought. This correspondence is neither a simple datum, an immediate fact, as it appears in the doctrine of intuitive, immediate certainty and in mysticism, nor does it take place in the pure sphere of spiritual immanence, as it seems to in Hegel's metaphysical legend. Rather, it is always established by real events and human activity. Already in the investigation and determination of facts, and even more in the verification of theories, a role is played by the direction of attention, the refinement of methods, the categorical structure of the subject matter—in short, by human activity corresponding to the given social period. (The discussion here will not deal with the question of how far all connection with such activity is avoided by Husserl's "formal ontology" which refers "to any possible world in empty generality"[17] or by formal apophantic, which likewise relates to all possible statements in empty generality, or by other parts of pure logic and mathematics, nor with how far they possess real cognitive value without regard to such a connection.)

If certain philosophical interpretations of mathematics correctly stress its a priori character, that is, the independence of mathematical constructions from all empirical observation, the mathematical models of theoretical physics in which the cognitive value of mathematics finally shows itself are, in any case, structured with reference to the events that can be brought about and verified on the basis of the current level of development of the technical apparatus. As little as mathematics needs to trouble itself about this relationship in its deductions, its form at any given time is nevertheless as much conditioned by the increase in the technical capacity of humanity as the latter is by the development of mathematics. The verification and corroboration [*Bewährung*][18] of ideas relating to humanity and society, however, consist not merely in laboratory experiments or the examination of documents, but in historical struggles in which conviction itself plays an essential role. The false view that the present social order is essentially harmonious serves as an impetus to the renewal of disharmony and decline and becomes a factor in its own practical refutation. The correct theory of the prevalent conditions, the doctrine of the deepening of crises and the approach of catastrophes, does, to be sure, find continuous confirmation [*bestätigt*] in all particulars. But the picture of a better world that is intrinsic to this theory and guides the assertion of

the badness of the present, the idea of men and their capabilities immanent in it, finds its definition, correction, and confirmation in the course of historical struggles. Hence, activity is not to be regarded as an appendix, as merely what comes after thought, but enters into theory at every point and is inseparable from it. Just for this reason pure thought does not here give the satisfaction of having sure and certain grasp of the question and being at one with it. It is certainly impossible to speak too highly of the conquests of the human spirit as a factor in the liberation from the domination of nature and in improving the pattern of relationships. Social groups and possessors of power who fought against it, all propagandists of every sort of obscurantism, had their shady reasons and always led men into misery and servitude. But if in particular historical situations knowledge can, by its mere presence, obstruct evil and become power, the effort to make it in isolation the highest purpose and means of salvation rests on a philosophical misunderstanding. It cannot be said in general and a priori what meaning and value some particular knowledge has. That depends on social conditions as a whole at the particular time, on the concrete situation to which it belongs. Thoughts which, taken in isolation, are identical in content can at one time be unripe and fantastical and at another outdated and unimportant, yet in a particular historical moment can form factors of a force that changes the world.

There is no eternal riddle of the world, no world secret whose penetration once and for all is the mission of thought. This narrow-minded view, which ignores the constant alteration in knowing human beings along with the objects of their knowledge as well as the insurmountable tension between concept and objective reality, corresponds today to the narrow horizon of groups and individuals who, from their felt inability to change the world through rational work, grasp at and compulsively hold to universal recipes which they memorize and monotonously repeat. When dialectic is freed of its connection with the exaggerated concept of isolated thought, self-determining and complete in itself, the theory defined by it necessarily loses the metaphysical character of final validity, the sanctity of a revelation, and becomes an element, itself transitory, intertwined in the fate of human beings.

But by ceasing to be a closed system, dialectic does not lose the stamp of truth. In fact, the disclosure of conditional and one-sided aspects of others' thought and of one's own constitutes an important

part of the intellectual process. Hegel and his materialist followers were correct in always stressing that this critical and relativizing characteristic is a necessary part of cognition. But being certain of one's own conviction and acting upon it do not require the assertion that concept and object are now one, and thought can rest. To the degree that the knowledge gained from perception and inference, methodical inquiry and historical events, daily work and political struggle, meets the test of the available means of cognition, it is the truth. The abstract proposition that once a critique is justified from its own standpoint it will show itself open to correction expresses itself for the materialists not in liberality toward opposing views or skeptical indecision, but in alertness to their own errors and flexibility of thought. They are no less "objective" than pure logic when it teaches that the relativistic "talk of a subjective truth which is this for one and the opposite for another must rate as nonsense."[19] Since that extrahistorical and hence exaggerated concept of truth is impossible which stems from the idea of a pure infinite mind and thus in the last analysis from the concept of God, it no longer makes any sense to orient the knowledge that we have to this impossibility and in this sense call it relative. The theory which we regard as correct may disappear because the practical and scientific interests which played a role in the formation of its concepts, and above all the facts and circumstances to which it referred, have disappeared. Then this truth is in fact irrecoverably gone, since there is no superhuman essence to preserve the present-day relationship between the content of ideas and their objects in its all-embracing spirit when the actual human beings have changed or even when humanity has died out. Only when measured against an extraterrestrial, unchanging existence does human truth appear to be of an inferior quality. At the same time as it nevertheless necessarily remains inconclusive and to that extent "relative," it is also absolute, since later correction does not mean that a former truth was formerly untrue. In the progress of knowledge, to be sure, much incorrectly regarded as true will prove wrong. Nevertheless, the overturning of categories stems from the fact that the relationship of concept and reality is affected and altered as a whole and in all its parts by the historical changes in forces and tasks. To a large extent the direction and outcome of the historical struggle depends on the decisiveness with which people draw the consequences of what they know, their

readiness to test their theories against reality and refine them, in short by the uncompromising application of the insight recognized as true. The correction and further definition of the truth is not taken care of by History, so that all the cognizant subject has to do is passively observe, conscious that even his particular truth, which contains the others negated in it, is not the whole. Rather, the truth is advanced because the human beings who possess it stand by it unbendingly, apply it and carry it through, act according to it, and bring it to power against the resistance of reactionary, narrow, one-sided points of view. The process of cognition includes real historical will and action just as much as it does learning from experience and intellectual comprehension. The latter cannot progress without the former.

Freed from idealistic illusion, dialectic overcomes the contradiction between relativism and dogmatism. As it does not imagine the progress of criticism and definition to have ended with its own point of view and consequently does not hypostatize the latter, it by no means abandons the conviction that, in the whole context to which its judgments and concepts refer, its insights are valid not only for particular individuals and groups but in general—that is, that the opposing theory is wrong. Dialectical logic includes the principle of contradiction, but in materialism it has completely stripped off its metaphysical character, because here a static system of propositions about reality, indeed any relation of concept and object not historically mediated, no longer appears meaningful as an idea. Dialectical logic in no way invalidates the rules of understanding. While it has as its subject the forms of movement of the advancing cognitive process, the breaking up and restructuring of fixed systems and categories also belongs within its scope along with the coordination of all intellectual forces as an impetus to human practice in general. In an era which in its hopelessness tries to make everything into a fetish, even the abstract business of understanding, and would like thereby to replace the lost divine support, so that its philosophers rejoice in ostensibly atemporal relations between isolated concepts and propositions as the timeless truth, dialectical logic points out both the questionable character of the interest in such "rigor" and the existence of a truth apart from it that it in no way denies. If it is true that a person has tuberculosis, this concept may indeed be transformed in the development of medicine or lose its meaning entirely. But whoever makes a contrary diagnosis

today with the same concept, not in terms of a higher insight which includes identifying this man's tuberculosis but simply denying the finding from the same medical standpoint, is wrong. The truth is also valid for whomever contradicts it, ignores it, or declares it unimportant. Truth is decided not by individuals' beliefs and opinions, not by the subject in itself, but by the relation of the propositions to reality, and when someone imagines himself the messenger of God or the rescuer of a people, the matter is not decided by him or even by the majority of his fellows, but by the relation of his assertions and acts to the objective facts of the rescue. The conditions to which those opinions point must really occur and be present in the course of events. There are at present various opposed views of society. According to one, the present wretched physical and psychological state of the masses and the critical condition of society as a whole, in the face of the developed state of the productive apparatus and technology, necessarily follow from the continued existence of an obsolete principle of social organization. According to the others, the problem is not the principle but interference with it or carrying it too far or a matter of spiritual, religious, or purely biological factors. They are not all true, only that theory is true which can grasp the historical process so deeply that it is possible to develop from it the closest approximation to the structure and tendency of social life in the various spheres of culture. It too is no exception to the rule that it is conditioned like every thought and every intellectual content, but the circumstance that it corresponds to a specific social class and is tied up with the horizon and the interests of certain groups does not in any way change the fact that it is also valid for the others who deny and suppress its truth and must nevertheless eventually experience it for themselves.

This is the place to define the concept of corroboration which dominates the logic of many otherwise opposed tendencies. Epicurus says: "Just as we desire the knowledge of the physician not for the sake of its technical perfection itself but for the sake of good health, and the skill of the helmsman possesses its value not for its own perfection but because it masters the methods of correct navigation, so wisdom, which must be perceived in skill in life, would not be sought after if it did not accomplish something."[20] The motif of accomplishment and corroboration as a criterion of science and truth has never disappeared in the subsequent history of philosophy. Goethe's line "What

is fruitful is alone true" and the sentence "I have noticed that I regard as true that idea which is fruitful for me, fits in with the rest of my thought, and at the same time benefits me"[21] appear to imply a pragmatic theory of cognition. Many phrases of Nietzsche suggest a similar interpretation. "The criterion of truth lies in the enhancement of the feeling of power. . . . *What is truth? that* hypothesis which brings satisfaction, the smallest expense of intellectual strength, etc."[22] "True means 'useful for the existence of human beings.' But since we know the conditions for the existence of human beings only very imprecisely, the decision as to true and untrue can, strictly speaking, only be based on success."[23]

With Goethe and Nietzsche, such views, to which contradictions exist in their own writing, must be placed in the context of their entire thought in order to comprehend their meaning properly. But a special school of professional philosophy has grown up since the middle of the nineteenth century which places the pragmatic concept of truth in the center of its system. It has developed principally in America, where pragmatism has become the distinctive philosophical tendency through William James and subsequently John Dewey. According to this view, the truth of theories is decided by what one accomplishes with them. Their power to produce desired effects for the spiritual and physical existence of human beings is also their criterion. The furtherance of life is the meaning and measure of every science. "Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural, of processes of leading realized *in rebus*, and having only this quality in common, that they pay."[24] If two theories are equally well fitted to produce a particular desired effect, it is at most still necessary to ask whether more intellectual energy is required with one than with the other. The corroboration of thoughts in practice is identical with their truth, and indeed pragmatism, especially in its most recent development, places the principal emphasis not so much on the mere confirmation of a judgment by the occurrence of the predicted factual situation, as on the promotion of human activity, liberation from all sorts of internal restraints, and the growth of personality and social life.

If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in

accomplishing this work. If they succeed in their office, they are reliable, sound, valid, good, true. If they fail to clear up confusion, to eliminate defects, if they increase confusion, uncertainty and evil when they are acted upon, then are they false. Confirmation, corroboration, verification lie in works, consequences. . . . That which guides us truly is true—demonstrated capacity for such guidance is precisely what is meant by truth.[25]

This view is closely related to positivism in France. If Bergson had not taken over the pragmatically restricted concept of science from Comte, it would be impossible to understand the need for a separate, supplementary, vitalistic metaphysics. The isolated intuition is the wishful dream of objective truth to which the acceptance of the pragmatic theory of cognition must give rise in a contemplative existence. The pragmatic concept of truth in its exclusive form, without any contradictory metaphysics to supplement it, corresponds to limitless trust in the existing world. If the goodness of every idea is given time and opportunity to come to light, if the success of the truth—even if after struggle and resistance—is in the long run certain, if the idea of a dangerous, explosive truth cannot come into the field of vision, then the present social structure is consecrated and—to the extent that it warns of harm—capable of unlimited development. In pragmatism there lies embedded the belief in the existence and advantages of free competition. Where in regard to the present it is shaken by a feeling of the dominant injustice, as in the far-reaching pragmatic philosophy of Ernst Mach, the problem of necessary change forms a personal commitment, a utopian supplement with a merely external connection to the other part, rather than a principle for the development of theory. It is therefore easy to separate that ideal from the empirico-critical way of thinking without doing it violence.

There are various elements contained in the concept of corroboration that are not always differentiated from one another in pragmatist literature. An opinion can be completely validated because the objective relationships whose existence it asserts are confirmed on the basis of experience and observation with unobjectionable instruments and logical conclusions, and it can moreover be of practical use to its holder or other people. Even with the first of these relationships, a need arises for intellectual organization and orientation. In this connection, James speaks of a "function of guidance, which repays the effort."[26]

He sees that this theoretical corroboration, the agreement between idea and reality, delineation, often means nothing more than "that nothing contradictory from the quarter of that reality comes to interfere with the way in which our ideas guide us elsewhere."[27] If the difference between this theoretical verification of truth and its practical meaning, the "furtherance of life," is nevertheless often eliminated in a given moment of history, there comes into existence that idea of a strictly parallel progress of science and humanity which was philosophically established by positivism and has become a general illusion in liberalism. But the more a given social order moves from the promotion of the creative cultural forces to their restriction, the greater the conflict between the verifiable truth and the interests bound up with this form, bringing the advocates of truth into contradiction with the existing reality. Insofar as it affects the general public rather than their own existence, individuals have reason, despite the fact that proclaiming the truth can endanger them, to sharpen it and carry it forward, because the result of their struggle and the realization of better principles of society is decisively dependent on theoretical clarity. Pragmatism overlooks the fact that the same theory can be an annihilating force for other interests in the degree to which it heightens the activity of the progressive forces and makes it more effective. The epistemological doctrine that the truth promotes life, or rather that all thought that "pays" must also be true, contains a harmonistic illusion if this theory of cognition does not belong to a whole in which the tendencies working toward a better, life-promoting situation really find expression. Separated from a particular theory of society as a whole, every theory of cognition remains formalistic and abstract. Not only expressions like *life* and *promotion* but also terms seemingly specific to cognitive theory such as *verification, confirmation, corroboration,* etc. remain vague and indefinite, despite the most scrupulous definition and transference to a language of mathematical formulae, if they do not stand in relation to real history and receive their definition by being part of a comprehensive theoretical unity. The dialectical proposition is valid here too that every concept possesses real validity only as a part of the theoretical whole and arrives at its real significance only when, by its interconnection with other concepts, a theoretical unity has been reached and its role in this is known. What is the life promoted by the ideas to which the predicate of truth is to be

attributed? In what does promotion consist in the present period? Is the idea to be considered valid when the individual who has comprehended it goes down while the society, the class, the public interest for which he fights strides forward? What does confirmation mean? Is the power of the slanderers and scoundrels to serve as confirmation of the assertions with whose help they attained it? Cannot the crudest superstition, the most miserable perversion of the truth about world, society, justice, religion, and history grip whole peoples and prove most excellent for its author and his clique? In contrast, does the defeat of the forces of freedom signify the disproof of their theory?

The concept of corroboration also plays a role in the materialistic way of thinking. Above all, it is a weapon against every form of mysticism because of its significance in the criticism of the acceptance of a transcendent and superhuman truth which is reserved for revelation and the insight of the elect, instead of being basically accessible to experience and practice. Yet as much as theory and practice are linked to history, there is no preestablished harmony between them. What is seen as theoretically correct is not therefore simultaneously realized. Human activity is no unambiguous function of insight, but rather a process which at every moment is likewise determined by other factors and resistances. This clearly follows from the present state of the theory of history. A number of social tendencies in their reciprocal action are described there theoretically: the agglomeration of great amounts of capital as against the declining share of the average individual in relation to the wealth of society as a whole, the increase of unemployment interrupted by ever shorter periods of a relative prosperity, the growing discrepancy between the apportionment of social labor to the various types of goods and the general needs, the diversion of productivity from constructive to destructive purposes, the sharpening of contradictions within states and among them. All these processes were shown by Marx to be necessary at a time when they could only be studied in a few advanced countries and in embryo, and the prospect of a liberal organization of the world still seemed excellent. But from the beginning, this view of history, now in fact confirmed, understood these developments in a particular way, that is, as tendencies which could be prevented from leading to a relapse into barbarism by the effort of people guided by this theory. This theory, confirmed by the course of history, was thought of not

only as theory but as a moment of a liberating practice, bound up with the whole impatience of threatened humanity. The corroboration of the unswerving faith involved in this struggle is closely connected with the confirmation of the predicted tendencies that has already taken place, but the two aspects of the verification are not immediately identical; rather, they are mediated by the actual struggle, the solution of concrete historical problems based on theory substantiated by experience. Continuously in this process partial views may prove incorrect, timetables be disproved, corrections become necessary; historical factors which were overlooked reveal themselves; many a vigorously defended and cherished thesis proves to be an error. Yet the connection with the theory as a whole is in no way lost in this application. Adherence to its confirmed doctrines and to the interests and goals shaping and permeating it is the prerequisite for effective correction of errors. Unswerving loyalty to what is recognized as true is as much a moment of theoretical progress as openness to new tasks and situations and the corresponding refocusing of ideas.

The possibility must be considered of whether, in such a process of corroboration, the individuals and groups struggling for more rational conditions might succumb completely and human society develop retrogressively, a conceivable possibility which any view of history that has not degenerated into fatalism must formally take into account. This would refute the trust in the future which is not merely an external supplement to the theory but belongs to it as a force shaping its concepts. But the frivolous comments of well-meaning critics who use every premature claim, every incorrect analysis of a momentary situation by the adherents of the cause of freedom as evidence against their theory as a whole, indeed against theory in general, are nevertheless unjustified. The defeats of a great cause, which run counter to the hope for its early victory, are mainly due to mistakes which do not damage the theoretical content of the conception as a whole, however far-reaching the consequences they have. The direction and content of activity, along with its success, are more closely related to their theory for the historically progressive groups than is the case with the representatives of naked power. The talk of the latter is related to their rise only as a mechanical aid, and their speech merely supplements open and secret force with craft and treachery, even when the sound of the words resembles truth. But the knowledge of the falling

fighter, insofar as it reflects the structure of the present epoch and the basic possibility of a better one, is not dishonored because humanity succumbs to bombs and poison gases. The concept of corroboration as the criterion of truth must not be interpreted so simply. The truth is a moment of correct practice. But whoever identifies it directly with success passes over history and makes himself an apologist for the reality dominant at any given time. Misunderstanding the irremovable difference between concept and reality, he reverts to idealism, spiritualism, and mysticism.

One can find in Marxist literature formulations close to pragmatist doctrine. Max Adler writes: "Theory turns directly into practice because, as Marxism has taught us to understand, nothing can be right which does not work in practice; the social theory is nevertheless only the recapitulation of the practice itself."[28] In regard to the identity of theory and practice, however, their difference is not to be forgotten. While it is the duty of everyone who acts responsibly to learn from setbacks in practice, these can nevertheless not destroy the confirmed basic structure of the theory, in terms of which they are to be understood only as setbacks. According to pragmatism, the corroboration of ideas and their truth merge. According to materialism, corroboration, the demonstration that ideas and objective reality correspond, is itself a historical occurrence that can be obstructed and interrupted. This viewpoint has no place for a basically closed and unknowable truth or for the existence of ideas not requiring any reality, but neither does it conceptually equate a conviction with untruth because a given constellation of the world cuts it off from corroboration and success. This also holds true for historical conflicts. The possibility of a more rational form of human association has been sufficiently demonstrated to be obvious. Its full demonstration requires universal success; this depends on historical developments. The fact that meanwhile misery continues and terror spreads—the terrible force which suppresses that general demonstration—has no probative force for the contrary.

The contradictions appear plainly in Max Scheler's extensive refutation of pragmatism in postwar Germany. Scheler did not fail to recognize the relative truths of pragmatism: "So-called 'knowledge for knowledge's sake' . . . exists nowhere and cannot and also 'should' not

exist, and has never existed anywhere in the world. When pragmatism attributes to the positive, exact sciences a primary purpose of control, it is certainly not wrong. Rather, it is vain foolishness to consider positive science too 'good' or too 'grand' to give men freedom and power, to guide and lead the world."[29] He also understood that the criteria for practical work in this doctrine were modeled exclusively on the inorganic natural sciences and then mechanically transferred unchanged to knowledge as a whole. Had he analyzed the concept of practice itself, it would have been evident that this is by no means as clear and simple as it seems in pragmatism, where it reduces and impoverishes truth. The meaning of the criterion is indeed not developed in experiments in natural science. Its essence consists in neatly isolating assertion, object, and verification. The undefined and questionable aspect of the situation lies in the unarticulated relationship between the specific scientific activity and the life of the individuals involved and people in general, in the ostensible natural and self-evident character of the theoretical act. The unresolved and problematical aspect of its relationship to the concrete historical life with which it is obviously interwoven appears as soon as one more closely investigates the controlling categories and the choice of objects and methods. Practice as corroboration itself leads to a critique of positivist philosophy's hypostatization of natural science and its basic concepts. The help of metaphysics is not required. However much the problems of natural science are soluble within its boundaries and with its specific means, independent of anything else, technical knowledge is in itself abstract and acquires its full truth only in the theory which comprehends natural science in this particular historical situation as an aspect of society's development as a whole. If, in addition, practice is understood as the criterion not merely in the special case of physical science and the technique based on it but in the theory of history, then it becomes clear without further ado that it embraces the whole situation of society at any given moment. It takes more than attention to isolated events or groups of events, or reference to general concepts such as that of progress, to apply the criterion of practice in deciding such questions as whether one or another judgment of the contemporary authoritarian states is correct; whether they can develop only in politically backward countries with strong remnants

of a landed aristocracy or whether they should be regarded as an adequate state form for the present economic phase, hence necessarily to be expected in other areas; whether this or that theory of colonial expansion applies; whether, to come to more abstract problems, the progressive technical sealing off and mathematization of logic and economics is more suited to their present situation than sticking to the development of concepts reflecting the historical situation. For this one needs a definite theory of society as a whole, which is itself only to be thought of in terms of particular interests and tasks with one's own point of view and activity.

Scheler does not pursue this conceptual movement in which it becomes clear that practice as an abstract criterion of truth changes into the concrete theory of society and casts off the formalism lent to it by the undialectical thought of the pragmatic school as such. He does not push this category to consequences that contradict the system of bourgeois thought in which it is firmly frozen. Instead, he opposes to the knowledge which can be verified and criticized through practice other forms of knowledge which according to him exist along with it and unconnected to it. He fails to recognize, in the elevation of mechanical natural science to a philosophical absolute, the ideological reflection of bourgeois society which was able greatly to increase reason and thereby human "power and freedom" in the technology of material production, and yet must block the ever more urgently necessary reorganization of human relations in production in accordance with its own principle. Thus it negates and destroys the same criteria of reason, power, and freedom which in cognitive theory it recognizes in isolated areas. Nor does he relate the bourgeois reality and science which he combats to their own ideas and standards, thus showing both society and ideas in their one-sidedness and abstraction and contributing to their supersession. Instead, like Bergson and other philosophers of this period, he goes on to proclaim his own special higher forms of cognition. In the face of the deepening contradictions between use in science and use for humanity, between use for privileged groups and for society as a whole, use for facilitating production and for easing life, the criterion of utility has become a dubious principle. Scheler does not further pursue the dialectic sketched out in his work, but rather places useful science at the very bottom in his ranking of knowledge. Turning back to earlier stages of human development, he

advocates in opposition to "mastery or production knowledge" the two types of "cultural knowledge" and "redemption knowledge." He declares himself in complete agreement with the "new sub-bourgeois class" in the pragmatist interpretation of "the pretentious rationalist metaphysics of the bourgeois entrepreneurs,"[30] attacking most sharply classic German idealism and the historical materialism which issued from it. For him it is nonsense "that the human spirit and the ideal factors could ever control the real factors according to a positive plan. What J. G. Fichte, Hegel ('Age of Reason') and—following them, only postponed to a future point in time—Karl Marx, with his doctrine of the 'leap into freedom,' have dreamed will remain a mere dream for all time."[31] In contrast to this freedom, in which science would in fact have an important role to play, Scheler prophesied that the world should and could expect the rise of noble and spiritually elevated groups. If bourgeoisie and proletariat are "completely uncreative of all cultural knowledge and redemptive knowledge,"[32] this will be remedied from now on by the fact "that growing and advancing capitalism will gradually again be able to produce a whole class of purely cognitive people, and likewise of such people who have broken with the authoritative class doctrines, with bourgeois and proletarian metaphysics—that is, with the absolute mechanistic view and philosophical pragmatism. In this elite and its hands alone rests the future development of human knowledge. . . . But the future will have a new independent rise of the genuine philosophical and metaphysical spirit."[33] In connection with the passage previously cited, Epicurus defines the goal of knowledge and wisdom as the happiness and good fortune of humanity. Scheler's view and the present heralded by him are in irreconcilable opposition to this materialistic pragmatism.

In the analysis of the concept of corroboration and its role in open-ended, dialectical thought, it is shown that the decision on particular truths depends on still uncompleted historical processes. Progress in theory and practice is conditioned by the fact that, in contrast to relativistic neutrality, a definite theory corresponding to the highest available level of knowledge is adhered to and applied. This application reacts on the form of the theory and the meaning of its concepts. This is not merely a question of the correction of errors. Categories such as history, society, progress, science, and so on experience a change of function in the course of time. They are not independent essences

but aspects of the whole body of knowledge at a given time, which is developed by human beings in interaction with one another and with nature and is never identical with reality. This also applies to dialectic itself. It is the sum total of the methods and laws which thought adheres to in order to copy reality as exactly as possible and to correspond as far as possible with the formal principles of real events.

What are the characteristics of dialectical thought? It relativizes every many-sided but isolated definition in the consciousness of the alteration of subject and object as well as their relationship. (What results in idealism from a postulated absolute takes place in materialism on the basis of developing experience.)[34] Instead of ranging attributes alongside one another, it seeks to show, by analysis of each general characteristic in respect to the particular object, that this generalization taken by itself simultaneously contradicts the object, and that in order to be properly comprehended it must be related to the contrary property and finally to the whole system of knowledge. From this follows the principle that every insight is to be regarded as true only in connection with the whole body of theory, and hence is so to be understood conceptually that in its formulation the connection with the structural principles and practical tendencies governing the theory is preserved. Bound up with this is the rule that, while maintaining unswerving fidelity to the key ideas and goals and the historical tasks of the epoch, the style of presentation should be characterized more by "as well as" than by "either-or." A basic principle is the inseparability of the regressive and progressive moments, the preserving and decomposing, the good and bad sides of particular situations in nature and human history. Instead of accepting the legitimate analyses and abstractions of professional science but turning to metaphysics and religion for an understanding of concrete reality, it tries to place the analytically achieved concepts in relation to one another and reconstruct reality through them. These and all the other characteristics of dialectical reason correspond to the form of a complicated reality, constantly changing in all its details.

Such very general intellectual laws of motion, which are abstracted from previous history and which form the content of dialectical logic in general, seem relatively constant and also extremely empty. But the special dialectical forms of description of a particular subject matter correspond to its characteristics and lose their validity as forms of the

theory when their bases change. The critique of political economy comprehends the present form of society. In a purely intellectual construction, the concept of value is derived from the basic concept of the commodity. From this concept of value Marx develops the categories of money and capital in a closed system. All the historical tendencies of this form of economy—the concentration of capital, the falling rate of profit, unemployment and crises—are placed in relation to this concept and deduced in strict succession. At least in terms of the theoretical intention, a close intellectual relationship should exist between the first and most general concept, whose abstractness is further transcended with every theoretical step, and the unique historical event, in which every thesis necessarily follows from the first postulate, the concept of free exchange of commodities. According to the theoretical intention, whose success will not be examined here, knowledge of all social processes in the economic, political, and all other cultural fields will be mediated by that initial cognition. This attempt to carry the theory through to the end in the closed form of an inherently necessary succession of ideas has an objective significance. The theoretical necessity mirrors the real compulsiveness with which the production and reproduction of human life goes on in this epoch, the autonomy which the economic forces have acquired in respect to humanity, the dependence of all social groups on the self-regulation of the economic apparatus. That men cannot shape their labor according to their common will but, under a principle which sets them against one another individually and in groups, produce with their labor not security and freedom but general insecurity and dependence, that they fall into misery, war, and destruction instead of using the immeasurably increased social wealth for their happiness, and are the slaves instead of the masters of their fate—this finds expression in the form of logical necessity, proper to the true theory of contemporary society. It would therefore be wrong to think that events in a future society could be deduced according to the same principles and with the same necessity as the lines of development of the present one.

The meaning of the categories will change along with the structure of the society from which they are drawn and in whose description they play a role. The concept of historical tendency loses the compulsive character that it had in the present historical period while

preserving a relation to the category of natural necessity, which may indeed be narrowed but can never be transcended completely. The concept of the individual will lose the character of an isolated monad and simultaneously the unconditionally central place it has held in the system of thought and feeling in recent centuries at the moment when individual and general goals really coincide and are supported in the whole society, when each person no longer merely imagines himself or herself to embody absolute self-determination but is in reality a member of a freely self-determining society. With the ending of the situation in which the contradiction between particular and general purposes necessarily follows from the economic structure, and in which the idea that the individualistic principle has been fully transcended rests partly on conscious deception and partly on impotent dreaming, the concept of the I loses its function of controlling the entire relation to the world and acquires another meaning. As long as the life of society flows not from cooperative work but from the destructive competition of individuals whose relationship is essentially conducted through the exchange of commodities, the I, possession, the mine and not-mine play a fundamental role in experience, in speech and thought, in all cultural expressions, characterizing and dominating all particulars in a decisive way. In this period, the world disintegrates into I and not-I as in Fichte's transcendental philosophy, and one's own death means absolute annihilation insofar as this relationship is not alleviated by metaphysical or religious faith. Like the categories of tendency and the individual, all other social concepts will be affected by the alteration of reality. The more formal categories such as the lawful nature of society, causality, necessity, science, etc., as well as the more material ones such as value, price, profit, class, family, and nation, acquire a different look in the theoretical structures which correspond to a new situation.

In traditional logic, this alteration of concepts is interpreted in such a way that the original divisions in the system of classification of a field of knowledge are made more specific by subdivisions. The general concept of tendency then includes the historical tendencies of the present society as well as the possible tendencies of a different sort in a future society. In spite of all historical changes, Aristotle's definition of the polis—composed of individuals and groups and differing not only quantitatively but qualitatively from its elements—can be

absorbed into a supreme formal category of society, valid for all forms of society, and thus preserved in its general validity. For Aristotle himself slavery belonged to this highest category, while in later conceptual systems it is only one of the subcategories of society, contrasted to other definite types. The conceptual realism which dominates Platonic and in part medieval philosophy, and whose remnants have by no means yet been surmounted in modern logic (for instance, in modern phenomenology), has the character of discursive logic. It interprets all changes as mere additions of new subtypes under the universal types, made absolute and subsumed under the metaphysical view that all change is to be understood as the incarnation or emanation of permanent ideas and essences in ever-new particulars and exemplars. Thus, the essential would always remain in the old, there would be an eternal realm of unalterable ideas, and all change would affect only the lower levels of being. Indeed, it would not be genuinely real and would only exist for the dull senses of men. Since the Hegelian system hypostatizes the categories dealt with within its framework, it still preserves something of this realism and falls into the dualism of essence and appearance which it opposed so vigorously. The given fate of historically determined individuals and the changing circumstances of present and future history become null and void in comparison with the ideas which are supposed to underlie the past. The discursive logic of "understanding" is only limited inside Hegel's system; in the sense of a metaphysical legend, it retains its reifying power over his philosophy as a whole. The logic of the Understanding abstracts from the fact that in the face of the changed content of concepts, lumping them indiscriminately with those which formerly went under the same headings can become distortion, and a new definition, a new ordering and hierarchy of concepts can become necessary. Perhaps the category of tendency later becomes so restructured as to revolutionize its relation to the concept of systematic purpose on the one hand and that of the power of nature on the other. The concept of the state alters its relation to the categories of will, domination, force, society, etc. Such definite perspectives do not flow from observation of today's valid system of classification of social phenomena, but from the theory of historical development itself, of which the former is only an ordered, abstract inventory. The connection between the concrete movement of thought, as it develops in constant

interrelation with the life of society, and the systems organized by the Understanding is not examined in detail by traditional logic, which relegates it to a separate discipline as the subject of the history of science or culture. It itself deals with the relations of unchanging concepts: how one passes from one to another judiciously and conclusively and how one develops from each what it contains. Traditional logic is "a science of the necessary laws of thought, without which no employment of understanding and the reason takes place, which consequently are the conditions under which alone the understanding can and should be consistent with itself—the necessary laws and conditions of its right use."[35] Their function is "*to make clear concepts distinct.*"[36] This proceeds analytically, drawing out of the concept what is in it. The concept itself "remains the same; only the form is changed. . . . Just as by mere illumination of a map nothing is added to it, so by the mere clearing up of a given concept by analysis of its attributes this concept itself is not in the least degree enlarged."[37]

Traditional logic has nothing to do with the alteration of the "map" and the construction of new systems of classification. But if concepts are used without being strictly tied in to the existing system of reference, in which all previous discoveries of the branch concerned have been arranged, if they are used without that correct reading of the "map" which is required by the laws of logic, every intellectual outline remains blurred, or rather meaningless. The accurate description of the object results from the methodical collaboration of all cognitive forces in the theoretical construction. Aside from the "table of contents" for this content, which it does not itself produce, "the understanding in its pigeon-holing process" also gives conceptual material.[38] From time to time "the empirical sciences," investigation and analysis, "are able to meet" dialectical description "with materials prepared for it, in the shape of general uniformities, i.e. laws, and classifications of the phenomena."[39] The real significance of this work, the cognitive value of understanding, rests on the fact that reality knows not only constant change but also relatively static structures. Because development proceeds not gradually but in leaps, there are between these junctures, leaps, and revolutions periods in which the tensions and contradictions trying to break through appear as elements of a relatively closed and fixed totality, until the particular form of being turns into another. This determinate and organized state is therefore a

necessary condition of truth but not its real form, movement, and progress.

Thus, traditional logic is inadequate for, and comprehends only individual aspects of, the historically conditioned alteration of the fundamental categories and every thought process about the subject matter. Since a concept plays a determinate role in the dialectical construction of an event, it becomes a nonautonomous aspect of a conceptual whole which has other qualities than the sum of all the concepts included in it. This whole, the construction of the particular object, can indeed only come into existence in a way appropriate to the existing knowledge if the concepts are interpreted in the sense that belongs to them in the systems of the individual sciences, in the systematic inventory of scientifically based definitions, insofar as it is a question of concepts for which special branches of science exist. In *Capital,* Marx introduces the basic concepts of classical English political economy—value, price, labor time, etc.—in accordance with their precise definitions. All the most progressive definitions drawn from scientific practice at that time are employed. Nevertheless, these categories acquire new functions in the course of the presentation. They contribute to a theoretical whole, the character of which contradicts the static views in connection with which they came into being, in particular their uncritical use in isolation. Materialist economics as a whole is placed in opposition to the classical system, yet individual concepts are taken over. The dialectical forms of the movement of thought show themselves to be the same as those of reality. A hydrogen atom observed in isolation has its specific characteristics, acquires new ones in molecular combination with other elements, and displays the old ones again as soon as it is freed from the combination. Concepts behave in the same way; considered individually, they preserve their definitions, while in combination they become aspects of new units of meaning.[40] The movement of reality is mirrored in the "fluidity" of concepts.

The open-ended materialistic dialectic does not regard the "rational" as completed at any point in history and does not expect to bring about the resolution of contradictions and tensions, the end of the historic dynamic, by the full development of mere ideas and their simple consequences. It lacks the aspect of the idealistic dialectic which Hegel described as "speculative" and at the same time as "mystical," namely, the idea of knowing the ostensibly unconditioned and thereby

being oneself unconditioned.[41] It does not hypostatize any such universal system of categories. To attain the "positively rational," it does not suffice to resolve and transcend contradictions in thought. It requires the historical struggle whose guiding ideas and theoretical prerequisites are indeed given in the consciousness of the combatants. But the outcome cannot be predicted on a purely theoretical basis. It will be determined not by any firmly outlined unity such as the "course of history," the principles of which could be established indivisibly for all time, but by human beings interacting with one another and with nature, who enter into new relationships and structures and thereby change themselves. The resolution of contradictions in subjective thought and the overcoming of objective antagonisms can be closely intertwined, but they are in no way identical. In a particular historical period, a free society in the sense of the free development of the individual and in the sense of free enterprise on the basis of inequality will be conceptually and actually full of contradictions. The resolution in terms of ideas occurs through the concept of a differentiated higher form of freedom. It has a decisive voice in the real overcoming, but in no way coincides with it and predicts the future only abstractly and inexactly. Since the logic of the open-ended dialectic allows for the possibility that change will affect the entire present content of the categories, without therefore considering the theory formed from it as any less true, it corresponds exactly to the Hegelian conception of the difference between dialectic and understanding without overlaying it with a new dogmatism. "The Understanding stops short at concepts in their fixed determinateness and difference from one another; dialectic exhibits them in their transition and dissolution."[42] To be sure, the first is immanent in the second; without the definition and organization of concepts, without understanding, there is no thought and also no dialectic. But the understanding becomes metaphysical as soon as it absolutizes its function of preserving and expanding existing knowledge, of confirming, organizing, and drawing conclusions from it, or the results of that function as the existence and progress of truth. The revolutionizing, disintegration, and restructuring of knowledge, its changing relation to reality, its changes of function resulting from its intertwinement with history, fall outside the thought processes which traditional logic, whose theme is understanding, comprehends. Taken by itself, it leads to the erroneous concept of a

detached thought with fixed, eternal, and autonomous results. Nietzsche said that a great truth "wants to be criticized, not worshiped."[43] This is valid for truth in general. He might have added that criticism includes not only the negative and skeptical moment but also the inner independence that does not let the truth fall but remains firm in its application even if it may sometime pass away. In the individual, the process of cognition includes not only intelligence but also character; for a group, not merely adaptation to changing reality but the strength to declare and put into practice its own views and ideas.

The division in the bourgeois spirit with regard to truth, in contrast to dialectical thought, finds especially clear expression in the attitude toward religion. In the face of the primitive materialism which dominates economic life, religion has become more and more internalized. The practice of general competition which characterizes contemporary reality was pitiless from the beginning, and with the exception of a few periods has become increasingly inhuman. Its means and consequences, which at particular historical moments have led to domination by small economic groups, the abandonment of power to the most culturally backward elements of society, and the extermination of minorities, notoriously contradict the basic teachings of Christianity. In a period in which, despite great resistance, reading and writing had to become common skills for economic reasons, and the contents of the Bible could not remain a permanent secret from the masses, it had long been inevitable that the opposing principle of Christianity would be openly sacrificed to reality, and the vulgar positivism of bare facts along with the worship of success, immanent in this lifestyle, would be propagated as the exclusive and highest truth. But the gross contradiction that existed was really understood within the bourgeoisie only by religious outsiders such as Kierkegaard and Tolstoy. The monistic propaganda of Strauss and Haeckel, who proclaimed it on the basis of scientific research, saw only the difference which it implied between natural science by itself and revelation and misunderstood both the spirit of the Gospels and historical reality. These materialists on the basis of natural science had to remain sectarians, for religion was indispensable for the social groups to which they belonged. The predominant intellectual attitude in recent centuries was not that of exposing the split. Instead, religion was so robbed of any clear and definite content, formalized, adapted, spiritualized,

relegated to the innermost subjectivity, that it was compatible with every activity and every public practice that existed in this atheistic reality.

Since individuals began to think more independently, that is, since the rise of the new economic order, philosophy in all fields has ever more clearly fulfilled the function of erasing the contradiction between the dominant way of life and Christian or Christian-oriented theoretical and practical doctrines and ideas. The reason for this coincides with the root of bourgeois dogmatism in general. The isolated individual, who is simultaneously regarded as free and responsible, is in the present epoch necessarily dominated by anxiety and uncertainty. In addition to this inner need, which is directly grounded in the atomistic principles of the existing order, the external concern for social peace has led to great efforts to gloss over the irreconcilability of modern science and the way people conduct their lives with the religious views on the origin and structure of the world as well as the ideas of love for one's neighbor, justice, and the goodness of God. Troeltsch, a typical philosopher of religion in prewar Germany, openly states what he fears:

> To anyone even moderately acquainted with human beings, it will be inconceivable that divine authority could ever disappear without damage to the moral law, that the generally coarse-thinking average person could do without this supplement to the motivation of morality. The abstraction of a self-validating law will be forever unrealizable for him; in connection with law, he will always have to think of the lawgiver and watcher. He may think of this a bit coarsely, but not so irrationally. . . . Where atheistic morality has undone divine authority among the masses, experience shows that there is little sense of that law left. A fierce hatred of all authority and an unbounded unchaining of selfishness as the most obvious thing in the world has been, with few exceptions, the easily comprehensible logical consequence.[44]

A social situation in which there would be no "watcher," either in the form of a transcendent being or "a self-validating law," to hold the "unbounded" selfishness of the masses in check is something Troeltsch cannot conceive of. Dogmatic adherence to the inherited conceptual world seems to him a self-evident proposition, a *thema probandum.* Nevertheless, he also sees

> that the Protestant confessional axiom must be self-revised and more freely interpreted; that its accomplishments must find a broader, more general basis

and make themselves far more independent of immediate clerical reality; that its style must leave room for detailed historical research and the definitive results of natural science, and be constantly prepared for new revisions on the basis of this work. Indeed, the possibility exists that eventually Christianity itself will cease to be axiomatic.[45]

The axioms to which earlier liberal theology could reach back have meanwhile been overturned. "Kant and Schleiermacher, Goethe and Hegel still lived under the influence of an axiomatic validation which no longer exists."[46] He therefore recommends resorting to Kant's critical philosophy "which undertakes to discover the ultimate presuppositions in the organization of consciousness instead of metaphysics."[47] He seeks refuge in a "critique of religious consciousness"[48] and hopes

to find a firm footing through a general theory of religion and its historical development. But this theory itself would have to be rooted in a transcendental theory of consciousness and to answer, from this ultimate basis of all scientific thinking, this ultimate and correct presupposition, two questions: the question of the justification of religion in general, and that of the difference in value between its historical forms. Theology is thereby referred to the philosophy of religion. On this basis only will it be able so to construe the essence and validity of Christianity as to satisfy the modern spirit of taking nothing for granted. The ultimate presuppositions lie in the philosophy of transcendentalism.[49]

According to this, the "justification of religion in general" and even the advantages of Christianity are still the question, and the whole uncertainty, the relativistic readiness for concessions not to the selfishness of the masses but to ostensibly nonaxiomatic science, becomes clear. Only one thing is preserved at any cost: "In all change there must be a permanent truth. This is a requirement of that ideal faith, to renounce which would be to renounce the meaning of the world."[50] If this so necessary faith only remains attached to an eternal meaning, one can come to terms with idealistic philosophy, Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, Brahmin and Buddhist ideas of salvation.[51]

This ambiguous relationship to religion characterizes the whole period, and only finds a particularly clear ideological expression in phenomena like Troeltsch. It is one aspect of the objective dishonesty which, despite the good conscience of the participants, dominated the spiritual atmosphere. If one looks closely at previous history, the fact

that in many areas of public discussion the crude and obvious lie is now treated with honor represents no incomprehensible change. The situation of the bourgeoisie has resulted in the setting aside of intellectual development in moral and religious questions and the keeping in twilight of central areas, as if by tacit agreement. The religious philosophy of the Middle Ages outlines the spiritual horizon which corresponded to society at the time. Its most important results therefore form historical evidence of obvious greatness. Since the irreligion immanent in modern natural science and technology, these specifically bourgeois achievements, has found no corresponding place in the general consciousness, and the conflicts that this involves have not been arbitrated, official spirituality is characterized by hypocrisy and indulgence toward particular forms of error and injustice, and this has eventually spread over the cultural life of entire peoples. The only great spirit who, in the face of the gross thickening of this fog which has taken place since the middle of the last century, has achieved the freedom from illusion and the comprehensive view which are possible from the standpoint of the haute bourgeoisie, is Nietzsche. It must indeed have escaped him that the intellectual honesty with which he was concerned did not fit in with this social standpoint. The reason for the foulness against which he fought lies neither in individual nor national character but in the structure of society as a whole, which includes both. Since as a true bourgeois philosopher he made psychology, even if the most profound that exists today, the fundamental science of history, he misunderstood the origin of spiritual decay and the way out, and the fate which befell his own work was therefore inevitable. ("Who among my friends would have seen more in it than an impermissible presumption, completely indifferent to happiness?")[52]

The philosophically mediated dishonesty in questions of religion cannot be eliminated by psychological or other explanations. Whereas Nietzsche makes the religious question and Christian morality negatively central and thereby makes an ideologue of himself, this aspect of the existing situation also can only be eliminated by transcending it through higher forms of society. In dialectical thought, religious phenomena too are related to knowledge as a whole and judged at any given time in connection with the analysis of the whole historical situation. As important as it is to see the incompatibility of the religious

content with advanced knowledge, the present shows that making religious questions central to the whole cultural problem can be foolish. One can find more penetrating analysis of bourgeois society in the literature of the Catholic counterrevolution in France, in Bonald and de Maistre and the writings of the Catholic royalist Balzac, than in the critics of religion in Germany at the same period. The devout Victor Hugo and Tolstoy have more nobly depicted and more vigorously fought the horrors of existing conditions than the enlightened Gutzkow and Friedrich Theodor Vischer. In the practical questions of daily life, efforts guided by dialectical thought can lead to temporary collaboration with religiously motivated groups and tendencies and radical opposition to antireligious ones. The complex of historical tasks which is decisive for an illusion-free and progressive attitude today does not divide people primarily on the basis of their religious preference. Groups and individuals may be characterized more quickly today on the basis of their particular interest (theoretically explicable, to be sure) or lack of interest in just conditions which promote the free development of human beings, in the abolition of conditions of oppression which are dangerous to and unworthy of humanity, than by their relation to religion. It follows from the differing cultural levels of social groups, the miserable state of education on social problems, and other factors, that religion can mean altogether different things for different classes and different ways of life. It requires not merely experience and theoretical education but a particular fate in society to avoid either inflating thought into the creation of idols or devaluing it as the sum total of mere illusions, making it an absolute lawgiver and unambiguous guide for action or separating it from the practical goals and tasks with which it interacts. It is a utopian illusion to expect that the strength to live with the sober truth will become general until the causes of untruth are removed.