The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy

In the historiography of modern philosophy, rationalism is understood as that orientation which began with Descartes. One of its main doctrines consists in the division of the world into two independent realms, that of mental or spiritual substance and that of corporeal or extended substance. If, in Descartes's thought itself, this fundamental notion seems to be transgressed for theological reasons by the occasional assertion of a connection of the two separated parts at a certain point in the human brain, subsequent developments have eliminated this inconsistency: from now on, mental substance is to be regarded as completely independent of bodily reality.

Cartesian rationalism, which has dominated philosophical discussion since the seventeenth century, acquired its uniqueness from this fundamental division. According to it, the mind—which is separated from matter and is only externally coupled with it in the human being—is capable of producing valid knowledge out of itself. Its true activity consists in pure thought. In consequence of the fundamental separation of mind and matter, the experiences of the senses can in no way be considered as effects of, and thus as testimony to, the external world; they amount to murky, mutable, confused foundations of the life of the mind, not to sources of knowledge. The isolated ego discovers the eternally valid truths about God and the world through its application of mind to itself, through reflection on its own essence. In this exclusive recognition of pure thought, a static structure of the world is predetermined: its outlines must be absorbed in firm conceptual frameworks. As with all of idealist philosophy, rationalism thus

presupposes a constant relationship between concept and reality, independent of human praxis.

The philosophical opponents of rationalism have not attacked its foundations. The well-known objections of the English empiricists to Continental rationalism were almost all directed toward its underestimation of the facts of experience in favor of conceptual construction. The questions of the justification and the reach of conceptual thought in general stood in the forefront of the rationalistic systems of the seventeenth century. But the increasing development of the bourgeois mode of production made necessary an orientation to this new world by means of experience. The general problem of shaping and dominating nature and society, which pervades Continental ontology and philosophy of law, developed on English soil into the concern of individuals to orient themselves quickly. The intellectual achievement that must have seemed increasingly important to the leading social groups was that of drawing conclusions from the observation of human beings and things in commercial life. From Locke to John Stuart Mill, English philosophy is largely characterized by the theory of thought processes of this type, though of course such problems did not necessarily constitute the conscious motivation of the individual philosophers. In the process, significant epistemological discoveries emerged, but the aforementioned assumptions of Cartesian philosophy remained untouched. Even among those French and German heirs of Descartes who denied one of the two halves of the world—namely, the material—the consequences of the division were retained to the extent that they continued to consider the part they did recognize as pure, isolated mind, as monad. Among them, however, this detached ego is preoccupied not with the self-actuated production of thought, but rather above all with the establishment and connection of sensuous impressions. Just like the Cartesians, the English empiricists view human existence as comprised of individual processes of consciousness, of *cogitationes*.

In both philosophical approaches, truth consists in judgments whose concepts are related to individual sense data as the general is to the particular. According to the empiricists, these concepts arise from the sensuous material and are derived by a process of progressive omission of substantive differences—that is, through abstraction. According to the rationalists, in contrast, they are fundamental unities inherent

in reason. As the Cartesians assert, the truths concerning the processes of reality exist a priori in each individual; each individual cognition must in principle be developed by deduction from the highest judgments given to every rational being.

Similarly, empiricism asserts that each monad is capable of knowing reality on the basis of pure processes of consciousness. Knowledge is independent of forces external to or fundamentally different from consciousness. Its relation to the object, its task, the limits of its capacity, indeed its most important contents may be determined or at least classified once and for all. A firm world view can be outlined, however skeptical it may be, because one can be certain of that which is essential for all future time. The emphasis on our ignorance, as it is to be found in positivist writings since Hume—the assurance that "the essence of the mind [is] equally unknown to us with that of external bodies"[1]—is every bit as much a dogmatic metaphysics as the eternal truths of Cartesianism. From its analysis of consciousness positivism arrives at an agnostic world view, Cartesian rationalism at a substantively more determinate one. Both hold that we must subject ourselves to the business of metaphysics, "in order to live at ease ever after."[2] Hume wishes to relax contentedly when "we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason,"[3] and establishes this limit on the basis of the self-reflection of consciousness. Kant unites the notion of innate concepts with Hume's more modest belief in the limits of our knowledge, and then likewise promulgates the outcome of the reflection of consciousness upon itself as the content of an immutable, universal theory. In these controversies of modern philosophy, the closed individual consciousness is set on a par with human existence. According to the rationalist tendency, all problems were resolved when the individual had gained a clear and concrete concept of itself; according to the empiricist, the matter depends more on bringing order to the panoply of given experiences. In both cases, truth is supposed to emerge from the introspection of the rational individual. Action is judged essentially in terms of the degree to which it is the correct consequence of this truth. Once the intellectual tasks that all individuals are capable of conducting in their own consciousness are carried out on the basis of competent clarification of the matter at hand, practical execution appears to take care of itself; it is regarded as a mere consequence of reflection. The well-being of each individual—or

at least the fulfillment of each individual's destiny—depends therefore upon the adequate functioning of his or her intellectual apparatus.

Early on, however, not just Cartesianism but the whole of modern philosophy came to be associated with the term *rationalism*. The role ascribed to thought by both Cartesianism and empiricism was an expression of the attitude of enlightened bourgeois strata which hoped to put all questions of life under their own control. Still, attacks on the Cartesian-empiricist philosophy of consciousness have gained ground in certain periods among those social groups that opposed the further diffusion of bourgeois dominance, and which indeed had serious apprehensions concerning its consequences for the bourgeoisie itself. Here we refer not so much to such phenomena as the opposition among German academic youth to a rationalism grown increasingly pedantic (especially in theology) during the first half of the nineteenth century. Rationalism appeared here more in its original connection with the first phase of the bourgeois era, the absolutist regime, and came into conflict with the second, liberal phase. In particular, the disinclination to abolish traditional, "historically developed"—but in reality obsolescent—institutions in favor of more functional forms had an antirationalist character. Since the French Revolution, this opposition blithely counterposed the "historical" and "organic" conception to the "rationalistic" passion for renewal, especially in Germany. The rationalism they wished to oppose consisted essentially in the resolve to judge views and relations not according to their venerability, but instead in terms of their adequacy to the needs of human society. This interpretation of the term in Germany from the era of Metternich acquired such common usage so early that even Helmholtz spoke occasionally of the "tendency of the French to throw overboard everything of historical development to suit some rationalistic theory."[4] Hegel made himself into a defender of this besieged rationalism when he wrote:

> Age has nothing to do with what "old rights" and "constitution" mean or with whether they are good or bad. Even the abolition of human sacrifice, slavery, feudal despotism, and countless [other] infamies was in every case the cancellation of something that was an "old right." It has often been repeated that rights cannot be lost, that a century cannot make wrong into right, but we should add: "even if this century-old wrong has been called right all the time,"

and further that an actual positive right a hundred years old rightly perishes if the basis conditioning its existence disappears.[5]

Moreover, the modern struggle against rationalism carried on since 1900 in philosophy and other cultural realms is hardly directed exclusively at Cartesianism. To be sure, antirationalism criticizes theories that have precise meaning only in terms of the latter; for instance, it rejects "pure" thought, itself a variation on the concept of autonomous reason that was attacked with equal fervor by the empiricists. Today, however, there is a facile tendency to ascribe these traits to the entire philosophy of consciousness without paying too much attention to nuances. In the most varied academic disciplines and realms of life, rationalism is viewed as a posture that must be eliminated. Just as the meaning connected with the term has grown vague and has come to include the most diverse contents, the most disparate motives and aims are at work in this antirationalist movement. The rejection of rationalism that has steadily risen in the last decades—and that seems already to have passed its zenith—reflects the history of the transition from the liberal to the monopoly capitalist period of the bourgeois order. The development from what was at first a relatively progressive antirationalism into a universalistic version closely associated with a totalitarian theory of the state shares numerous similarities with the course of romanticism during the "restoration period," as Troeltsch has characterized it.[6]

The turn against rationalism in impressionist literature and painting, as well as the philosophy of Nietzsche and Bergson, already offered insight into the insecurity of the bourgeoisie in its humanistic tradition; at the same time, however, this tendency expresses a protest against the fettering of individual life by the increasing concentration of capital. In contrast, the contemporary versions of irrationalism have completely broken with those traditions. In them, too, the suffering of individuals is reflected in an order which has become irrational, but this reflection is distorted, so to speak, for this irrationality and the individual suffering that flows from it are accepted as necessity and transformed in thought into a positive good. The lives of the masses of the petite bourgeoisie in town and country, excluded from any part in economic power, are reduced to pawns in the inner and outer aims of the dominant groups, to being a mere means. Adaptation to this

situation occurs, as always, by way of ideological mystification. The sign that a social stratum has accepted its lot is the consciousness of its members of the metaphysical meaning of this form of existence. The glorification of the duty-conscious but simultaneously autonomous person, as it appears in rationalistic philosophy from Leibniz to Fichte, becomes (with Max Scheler, for instance) the song of praise for the meaning of suffering. Self-abnegation and the readiness to sacrifice, which in the end must be recognized as the virtues of obedience and the denial of one's own interests, become a general sentiment and reveal the adjustment of a large part of society to its contemporary circumstances. The human being no longer constitutes an end in itself, but only a means. "Autonomous individuality no longer exists."[7] Life and "service" coincide. "Every attitude which has a true relationship to power can be identified by the fact that it conceives the human being not as an end but as a means, as the bearer of power as well as freedom. The human being develops its highest power, develops domination wherever it serves."[8]

The point here is not to indicate the extremely varied motifs and arguments that come together in the contemporary rejection of rationalism, along with their social roots. Rather, it is exclusively to discuss the relation of materialist philosophy to certain elements of the controversy over rationalism. Describing this relation may facilitate a substantive clarification of the problems to the extent that the commonalities—as well as the differences—between rationalism and irrationalism must be discussed. For both tendencies are in many respects to be contrasted with materialism: both the philosophy of consciousness—Cartesian rationalism and English empiricism—and the modern irrationalist world view bear an idealist character. The spiritual [*seelische*] forces to which the various irrationalist doctrines refer are supposed to offer human beings insight into the permanent essence or the foundation of the world, just as the rationalistic systems expect this result from conceptual efforts. Powers of the soul or of the mind are supposed to reveal an eternal truth. The contemporary debate concerning rationalist and antirationalist thought leaves untouched the idealist notion that human beings can gain access to the primordial ground of being in the world—and can thus derive the norm of their actions—through internal capacities. Indeed, the de-

bate plays itself out on the basis of this conviction, and stands to that extent over against materialism.

This proposition has also been criticized in idealist philosophy; because it belongs to the essence of idealism, however, this must lead to the denial either of the very possibility of philosophy or at least of its idealist foundations. The former was the case with Hume's skepticism and in modern historicism; they rejected theoretical truth. The second alternative occurred with those philosophers who proceeded from idealist notions to a materialist mode of thought. This was the case for those among the French Enlightenment who treated universal ontological questions with complete open-mindedness while observing actual historical praxis with extreme rigor; it was especially true of Hegel's dialectical method, which explodes his starting point in identity philosophy as well as his closed system. In any case, the idealist character intrinsic to both rationalism and irrationalism as ideological [*weltanschauliche*] tendencies constitutes one of the most decisive contradictions between them and materialism.

According to materialism, neither pure thought, nor abstraction in the sense of the philosophy of consciousness, nor intuition in the sense of irrationalism, is capable of creating a connection between the individual and the permanent structure of being. The individual within itself is incapable of discovering either the deepest foundations or the highest essence; nor can it discern supposedly ultimate elements of being. Such final determinations of thought and its object, which disregard the historical situation and the theoretical tasks created by it, lie at the basis of the whole of idealist philosophy. They all contain a dogmatic concept of totality. All questions based on that concept are alien to materialism. The attitude of the latter toward the individual arguments involved in the current controversy over rationalism is not simple: it sides with neither of the contending parties. The philosophical positions within irrationalism are extremely varied; essential to it is their rapid change, and the fact that much of what yesterday was characteristic of this standpoint today appears worthy of condemnation, even to its previous adherents. In his attempt "to construct the 'hidden philosophy' of the historical school as a context of meaning,"[9] Rothacker appropriates Wilhelm Scherer's characterization of the contradiction. It reads:

In contrast to cosmopolitanism, nationality; in contrast to factitious cultivation, the power of nature; to centralization, autonomous forces; to benevolence from above, self-government; to the omnipotence of the state, individual freedom; to the constructed ideal, the supremacy of history; to the pursuit of novelty, veneration of the old; to the willfully created, pure development; to understanding and evaluation, mood and perception; to the mathematical form, the organic; to the abstract, the sensuous; to the rule, the inborn power of creation; to the mechanical, the "living."[10]

These antitheses are viewed from the perspective of irrationalism. A number of them still retain their validity; those concerning the state have been turned around in several countries. Here, only two of the main traits of the irrationalist critique are to be treated: the attack on thought itself, and that on the individualism of the liberal era.

The first objection relates to the claim that the Understanding [*der Verstand*] is not universal but applicable only to a limited realm of issues. Before many—indeed, the most important—aspects of life, the conceptual approach fails: more still, it destroys its objects. This assertion of the deadening effect of thought, whose unconstrained application constituted one of the principles of the bourgeoisie during its entire ascent, touches a fundamental attitude of the liberal era. As *Lebensphilosophie*—above all, Bergson—raised this accusation against thought, the social order developed by the bourgeoisie with the help of its science and technology had already become intolerable for a large part of that group. As *Lebensphilosophie* took up cudgels—in the name of the unfolding of life—against that thought which originally helped to liberate precisely this life from the fetters of an obsolete feudal order, it revealed in its sphere the deepening contradiction between the bourgeois order and the founding ideas of the bourgeoisie. The untrammeled application to all life's problems of a reason liberated from its medieval tutelage, the free rein of each individual's intellectual powers promised the unconstrained ascendance of society and the steady increase of the general welfare. The irrationalist restriction of thought to individual domains contained from the outset two contradictory elements: the protest against a social order gone sour, and the rejection of the possibility of transforming that order with the aid of the application of theoretical thought to the problem of society as a whole. *Lebensphilosophie* declared from the very beginning that all great human questions elude the power of

thought, and that they can only be hopelessly distorted by the Understanding.

According to this perspective, not merely the metaphysical ground of events, the creative life, and the inner conditions of the individual, but all creations of intellectual culture are closed to thought in their true essence. Neither love for the individual or the community nor a religion nor a work of art are said to be accessible to conceptual judgment. The intellectual dismemberment of these phenomena would lead to the identification of a series of abstract characteristics; it would be an illusion to believe that the original meaningful content from which they were derived analytically could be reconstructed from these pieces. Those who subject value-laden phenomena to conceptual analysis will destroy their object and, in the end, replace it with an impoverished distortion. According to them, the only possibility for understanding consists not in critical judgment but in surrendering oneself to the living content. Originally, *Lebensphilosophie* held onto the theoretical character of understanding [*Einsicht*] to the extent that the effort of intuition, which was to move one into the center of living events, was not necessarily identical with taking up a specific practical position. As early as Max Scheler's notion that philosophical knowledge is bound to certain ethical presuppositions (among which he includes love and humility),[11] the opinion gained ground that engagement, emotion, and the deepest devotion belong to the knowledge of genuine essences. In the end, subordination became the precondition of understanding. Today it seems to be taken for granted that theoretical comprehension of the dominant powers must be replaced by the inspiration of those subjected to them.

The successors to the old rationalism and empiricism have countered the growing slander of thought with penetrating arguments; indeed, certain among them have indicated some of the social functions of irrationalism. Rickert thus characterizes Scheler's "genius of war," which "serves to justify war as the zenith of the state's efficacy,"[12] as entirely consistent with the meaning of *Lebensphilosophie*. "Those who see more than mere growth in natural, vital life, those who also glimpse in this biologistic 'law' a norm for all cultural life, must, in fact, think like Scheler."[13] Despite the logical subtlety of the arguments that rationalism marshals against *Lebensphilosophie,* however, it is incapable of wounding irrationalism decisively. It is as correct in its critique of

rationalism as the latter is of it. The devaluation of conceptual thought in favor of a mere surrendering to experience is, of course, an antiintellectual and thus simply a regressive standpoint, and indeed contradicts the philosophical work of *Lebensphilosophie* itself. "Where the will to conceptual mastery has disappeared, the best that can emerge is holy passivity—and we are then near to Schlegel's laziness as the last remnant of the divine."[14] This objection to the romantic and mystical element of *Lebensphilosophie* is quite justified. At the same time, the representation of thought in the philosophy of consciousness has become manifestly untenable. According to the latter, the task of conceptual work is to let something formed or structured emerge from the world, which in itself is a mere confusion of facticities. In the rationalistic systems, it remains for the most part unclear whether thought is to be ascribed to a given individual subject or to a general, anonymous consciousness. Nonetheless, thought—as an active yet completely empty form—is supposed to bring forth "the world" from the sensuous material of knowledge. Even Rickert distinguishes himself from the older rationalism in essence only by way of the recognition of an irrational, "if one will, empirical" moment:[15] "For those engaged in theoretical pursuits who remain pure of all extrascientific evaluations, the world is, at the outset of their investigations—that is, independent of any conception whatsoever—not a 'world' at all in the sense of a cosmos or an ordered whole, but rather a chaotic confusion, the recounting of which is . . . factually impossible."[16]

This rigid juxtaposition of the two principles, out of whose combination the world is supposed to emerge, is every bit as much a mystical legend as irrationalist metaphysics itself. Despite all caution, it must lead to the nonsensical assertion of a suprahistorical dynamic, since it itself claims that history arises only from the process in which thought and empirical material play a role.

Lebensphilosophie and its related tendencies in philosophy and psychology have carried the day against this rationalistic myth. One of the most important means here was the demonstration that the structures found in the material were not brought in by the thinking and observing subject, but rather were objectively grounded. The belief that there exists originally a chaos of sensuous elements from which only the concept creates an ordered world can be refuted both by the

description of that which is intuitively given [*des anschaulich Gegebenen*] and by the study of acts of the intellect. Gestalt theory,[17] in particular, demonstrated the structured quality of the given, and uncovered through painstaking investigations the mythological character of the notion of independent intellectual factors. To be sure, *Lebensphilosophie*'s critique of rationalism goes beyond this. For it is always tempted to confuse the correct assertion of the unique structure of the given—and the corresponding rejection of the notion that all order in the world is produced by thought—with the false belief in an unmediated truth. It overlooks the fact that all knowledge is codetermined by the people who bring it about. Lacking insight into the indissoluble tension between knowledge and object, it takes on the character of an identity philosophy that remains every bit as ahistorical as the doctrine it criticizes.

Rationalism and irrationalism mutually negate each other's metaphysical claim; thought exerts upon them both its destructive effect, and something can certainly be done away with in consequence of the criticism they level at one another. For irrationalism, this would be the philosophical form as a whole: that is, irrationalism itself as well as its opponent, rationalism. Even if the controversy, here only sketched roughly, were to be related in detail, the philosophical doctrines they criticize would still remain. Contrary to the irrationalist theory, these doctrines could in principle be reconstructed by one's opponent on the basis of the relevant documents. The achievements attained in connection with both metaphysical tendencies in a number of individual fields of knowledge remain completely untouched. To the extent that it is unjustifiably raised, only the claim to truth is destroyed, not the statements through which it acquires validity. No one who considers those statements with the assistance of contemporary resources of knowledge can continue to believe in them. Yet thought by itself is incapable of achieving even this result. For every step on the road to knowledge depends upon more than purely logical considerations. The objective falsity of assertions is merely a necessary, not a sufficient condition of their rejection, especially if the false view belongs to the reigning intellectual mood. The direction of the individual steps that lead to acceptance or rejection is by no means determined only by the desire to discover the truth, but rather by the overall psychic

constitution of the personality, and this derives from the fate of the knowing subject in the social environment. Even mathematics, which as an abstract science particularly removed from social struggles was able to isolate its intellectual functions and to develop through signally autonomous processes, is hardly as free from atheoretical influences as is often assumed. The discovery of truths, furthermore, says little about whether others can assimilate them. Due to their role in the production process, a psychic constitution is produced among broad social strata that diverts them from insight into the most important questions of life, and thus also from their own true interests. In all previous history, only certain groups were driven to recognize the reigning intellectual mood as limited, and to develop new ideas by way of confrontation with the old perspectives. For the other parts of society, it was relatively insignificant whether a certain matter should be considered true given the current state of knowledge. There are large social groups for whom theoretical clarity would only constitute a hindrance for adjustment to their situation, a cause for inner conflict for the individual. The interest in the decisive truth of a given historical moment emerges under circumstances which point human beings to the transformation of the existing, and which force them to go to the root of social and thus also of metaphysical and religious questions. These preconditions exist only in certain strata and certain periods. Generally speaking, conceptual thought alone is incapable of destroying even the darkest superstition if this sort of thinking performs an important function in the dynamics of a moderately stable social structure.

There are, of course, situations in which the historical significance of thought increases. The skeptical attitude that it is necessarily powerless is just as false as the assertion of its overpowering force. The historical significance of certain ideas [*Erkenntnisse*] depends upon the social struggles of the periods involved. For instance, the theory that the earth moves, which was calmly discussed along with other questions in the High Middle Ages, assumed revolutionary force during the Renaissance. In the present, as during other critical epochs, ideas gain greater historical significance than in the centuries of stability. The ideology of progress, which facilitated the adaptation of the bourgeois middle class and the higher strata of the working class, crumbles during economic crisis, and threatens to clear the way for a

deeper understanding of the social process. The philosophical defense of the oldest prejudices and of crude superstition has moved in to check the spread of this understanding, the effects of which are unpredictable. The coarse denigration of thought as such, the admonition concerning its deadening effect, is an element in this struggle. The *Lebensphilosophie* of Bergson, Simmel, and Dilthey, which has yet to deliver the arguments for the denigration of thought, nonetheless includes progressive aspects; among other things, these find expression in the relation of their concept of intuition to the history of rationalism, and in particular to the philosophy of Spinoza. In contrast, the popular sloganeering against thought as such, according to which it is primarily a tool of destruction, has mostly been propagated by dilettantes. Their talent lies more in the grandeur of their facades than in their capacity for theoretical truth. They no longer confine themselves to the limitation of science, but instead contest thought as the manifestation of decline:

> Scientific worlds are superficial worlds, practical, soulless and purely extensive worlds. The ideas of Buddhism, of Stoicism, and of Socialism alike rest upon them. Life is no longer to be lived as something self-evident—hardly a matter of consciousness, let alone choice—or to be accepted as God-willed destiny, but is to be treated as a problem, presented as the intellect sees it, judged by "utilitarian" or "rational" criteria. This, at the back, is what all three mean. . . . Culture-men live unconsciously, Civilization-men [*Tatsachenmenschen*] consciously.[18]

As a rule, the farmer is considered to be the "culture-man"; Spengler warns us against the urban dweller, the worker. "The Cosmopolis itself, the supreme Inorganic, is there, settled in the midst of the Culture-landscape, whose men it is uprooting, drawing into itself and using up."[19] Similarly, Klages takes up arms for superstition and against science and a scientific praxis:

> The Understanding supplants plenitude with "order," extracts from the ocean of images the indissoluble rigidity of objects, replaces the innate with lifeless things for which time becomes a gnawing tooth and events the maelstrom of destruction; in short, it deprives the world of its reality and leaves behind a mere mechanism. . . . The clouds cease to be tempestuous hordes of demons once one becomes aware of the law of the expulsion of steam, which—dead though it may be—follows the regular vacillations of air pressure.[20]

Recognition is denied all experiment or practical demonstration of theory. The confirmation of science by technology, of thought by action, is considered impossible.

> Proof on the basis of hypotheses and machinism [*Machinalismus*] is a gross self-deception! The machine—itself also nature, but a nature outwitted and forced to prostitute itself—can destroy life, to be sure, but it can never create it! The "unreality" of the physical world does not inhibit mind [*Geist*] from using concepts drawn from that world to create the tool with which to kill reality.[21]

The fact—certainly true of the current social situation—that human beings increasingly use the means and methods of production they create for the purpose of conflict with one another and for their own decline, is promulgated quite naively as an eternal law. The machine can "destroy life"; that it might also contribute to maintaining, easing, and promoting it never occurs to Klages. This distinction between fantasy and correct theory seems not to matter. The more retrograde, the more primitive the consciousness, the better.

> As far as "superstition" and the "fantastic" are concerned, one should not forget that being free of them only constitutes the dubious preference of the "educated" [*der 'Gebildeten'*], whereas we have delved ever more deeply into both the further we descend to the level of folk consciousness [*Volksbewusstsein*], where alone the strands of human prehistory come together.[22]

Today, the strivings of progressive social groups toward the realization of a more rational society appear to have been brought to a standstill for some time to come. The forms of social life have largely been adapted to the requirements of the monopoly economy. This embittered successor of *Lebensphilosophie* is thus no longer characteristic of the current intellectual temperament. It is increasingly contested precisely in those countries that have progressed furthest in this adaptation. This defeatist posture stands opposed to the form of domination under which the return to domestic social stability takes place. The ideological inclusion of broad masses of workers into the "*Volksgemeinschaft*" and the compulsion, in connection with the external contradictions, to increase continuously the efficiency of the entire population and to elicit their intensive participation in national politics yields a new overall social situation that carries within it its own dialectic. Forces that were unleashed with the aim of suppressing—

indeed, of eradicating—progressive tendencies, and of forcibly preserving obsolete forms of life, now promote elements which, due to social contradictions, lead to the dissolution of the order they protect. Among these contradictions, in addition to raising great masses of the urban and rural middle class to a more up-to-date existence, are the development of their rational thought and thus their awakening from vocational and political lethargy. Despite the artificial rejuvenation of a dying form of the family that must be promoted to sustain the reproduction of the indispensable psychic constitution of the masses, a number of old customs and prejudices—including the residues of the feudal spirit of caste—are being abolished. Irrationalism is now being constrained, just as it once constrained science. Reason and technology are no longer simply laid open to vilification; now only certain matters are kept beyond the reach of conceptual thought by "banishing [them] to the sanctuary of the irrational."[23] These matters are grouped above all around the concept of sacrifice. In wide areas, however, the new attitude acclimates human beings to a rational conduct of life. Concrete thought is promoted to a greater extent than before, and technology affirmed. The ethos of work, which includes this positive relation to rational forces, is itself of course irrational. Technology is not understood as an aid to human beings and brought clearly into connection with their happiness; this would indeed contradict its role in contemporary society. Instead, technology undergoes an ethical and aesthetic mystification. Spengler celebrates it as an expression of Faustian striving; for Dacque, the construction of a machine signifies "a glimpse and a realization of an eternal idea, if we view this activity as the physical realization of a primal image through an act of the mind"; "what is [a machine] but a true homage to the ideal meaning of iron, which receives life through our spirit, so to speak, and which thus symbolically shows us its inner countenance."[24] Ernst Jünger declares "that technology itself is of cultic origins, that it disposes over peculiar symbols, and that behind its processes is hidden a struggle between forms [*Gestalten*]."[25] Rationality is affirmed—though in an irrational, distorted form—to the extent that it contributes to the competitiveness of the dominant powers in war and peace. However, thought is accused of being destructive wherever it runs counter to the glorification of power and its various ends.

In reality, reason is capable only of destroying falsehood. The claim that correct thought obliterates the object is self-contradictory. The truth or falsity of many general beliefs eludes verification in principle: to that extent, however, they lack meaning, for every assertion makes a claim to truth, and every truth has a basis in knowledge. The groundless convictions of an epoch are not destroyed by thought alone; as long as they are maintained by powerful social forces, knowledge may run riot over them, but the fetish stands while witnesses against it meet their demise. "La révélation de la verité n'est funeste qu'à celui qui la dit."[26] Thought, which uncovers the groundlessness of certain ideas, only remains victorious if the forces that sustain an ideology lose their effectiveness for other reasons as well. Theory is only *one* element in the historical process, and its significance can be determined only in connection with a circumscribed historical situation. Liberal idealism, which expects salvation from the mere unfettering of thought in every human being (just as it claims that general prosperity will emerge from the unfettering of the private pursuit of profit), overlooks historical distinctions. In the eighteenth century, the promotion of the private freedom of conscience and of entrepreneurial initiative had another meaning than under contemporary conditions, for freedom of expression essentially serves to hasten its own elimination in those places where it still exists. The power of thought in history cannot be established once and for all, any more than can its decisive categories or its structure.

In *Lebensphilosophie,* thought—which it accuses of being destructive—is understood in a particular form, namely as conceptually dissecting, comparative, explanatory, generalizing thought: in short, as analysis. To that extent, the critique has a certain justification, for a number of rationalistic systems have in fact confused this type of thought with intellectual activity *tout court.* As *Lebensphilosophie* correctly emphasizes, abstract features of the object are characterized with concepts. Regardless of whether the conceptual apparatus is developed through abstraction, in accordance with the old empiricist theory, or through "essential intuiting" [*Wesensschau*] as phenomenology recommends, concepts refer—to the extent that they are more than mere names—not to the object in its full concretion, but to individual traits that it shares with other objects. Science depends largely upon distinguishing and grasping such traits, in order then to discern

connections between them. To the extent that each of these traits can be found not just in one but in principle in an unlimited number of these objects, these connections are general and have the significance of laws. Their category is causality. Certain scientists consider as their objects of investigation individual abstract elements of reality. Physicists are concerned with the mass and movement of bodies; a concrete process that occurs at a certain place and time concerns them only to the extent that something can be learned about these general processes. Chemists investigate the changes in substances generally, physiologists the bodily processes of living things. The needs of human society have determined the development and division of the sciences in accordance with the necessary investigation of such abstract qualities. Descartes even believed that one could get along with the thorough study of one single feature, namely the spatial relations of bodies; all other features, including the entire sensuous world, were thus declared insignificant, mere appearance. In his time, however, it was less the rationalist confusion of an abstract quality with the whole of reality than trust in self-conscious human beings and their rational powers that helped win recognition for this theory, which reduced the world to calculable relations. Later, to mathematics as the only science was added a physics differentiated from it, and then the chemistry developed by the English. Ultimately, the system or the sum of a whole series of scientific disciplines came to be viewed as the very image of reality. This conception of science as the aggregate of fixed relationships of abstract elements sufficed for the needs of the nascent bourgeois world, when the socially necessary intellectual tasks consisted primarily in the progress of the arts of government, in the growth of technology, and in the diffusion of a minimum of industrially indispensable background knowledge. The equation of knowledge with a stable system of general axioms or with a plethora of individual investigations grew inadequate and regressive once the developmental tendency of the society as a whole became the decisive practical and thus also the decisive theoretical topic.

Lebensphilosophie emphasizes that the abstract elements derived from conceptual analysis cannot be added up to reconstruct the living object. The sum of the strokes in a drawing is hardly the same as the picture. The enumeration of human instinctual impulses does not represent an episode in an individual's inner life.

Psychology [writes Bergson], in fact, proceeds like all the other sciences by analysis. It resolves the self, which has been given to it at first in a simple intuition, into sensations, feelings, ideas, etc., which it studies separately. It substitutes, then, for the self a series of elements which form the facts of psychology. But are these *elements* really *parts*? . . . The very idea of reconstituting a thing by operations practised on symbolic elements alone implies such an absurdity that it would never occur to any one if they recollected that they were not dealing with fragments of the thing, but only, as it were, with fragments of its symbol.[27]

What is asserted here concerning the psychology of the individual human being is also true of history as a whole. The belief that the infinite specialized studies collected in libraries, from the most varied national and personal viewpoints, could yield a picture of the true course of events was indeed an illusion of the liberal era. It constituted part of the general conviction that the diligent activity of the individual in all realms of life must come together in a harmonious whole. *Lebensphilosophie* rejects root and branch the value of the painstaking work of analysis. The act of intuition that is supposedly only possible in certain moments is for *Lebensphilosophie* the only means of philosophical knowledge. Its methodology is radical.

The materialism schooled in Hegel's logic has always been aware that the abstract elements derived from analysis cannot be simply added up to coincide with the original phenomena. Abstraction and analysis are transformative activities. Their effect must be sublated again in the act of knowing, by taking into consideration the various peculiarities of the analysis in the process of reconstruction. Even if this precept can never be completely fulfilled, every dialectical exposition is based on the attempt to take it into account.

Cognition, it is often said, can never do more than separate the given concrete objects into their abstract elements, and then consider these elements in their isolation. It is, however, at once apparent that this turns things upside down, and that cognition, if its purpose be to take things as they are, thereby falls into contradiction with itself. Thus the chemist e.g. places a piece of flesh in his retort, tortures it in many ways, and then informs us that it consists of nitrogen, carbon, hydrogen, etc. True: but these abstract matters have ceased to be flesh. The same defect occurs in the reasoning of an empirical psychologist when he analyses an action into the various aspects which it presents, and then sticks to these aspects in their separation. The object which is subjected to analysis is treated as a sort of onion from which one coat is peeled off after another.[28]

From the circumstance that analysis distances thought from the original object, however, *Lebensphilosophie* concludes that knowledge mediated by concepts is entirely useless for the discovery of truth. It seeks to replace the effort of comprehension in the pursuit of truth by mere intuition, by immediate perception, or indeed by sympathetic inspiration [*zustimmende Begeisterung*]. In so doing, it regresses well behind the Hegelian logic.

The dialectical method is the quintessence of all intellectual tools for making fruitful the abstract elements derived from the analytic Understanding [*trennendes Verstand*] for the representation of the living object. There are no universal rules for this purpose. Even within a particular science such as individual psychology, observation of almost every individual human being demands a different form of theoretical construction. The psychologist must attempt to understand the actual psychic situation with its peculiar dynamic on the basis of the fundamental analytic concepts—developed from the observation of innumerable cases and comprising the general understanding of the typical evolution of the individual psyche—and the data obtained by the special analysis of an individual's history. The data as well as the manner of the dialectical construction are different in each case; the meaning of the general concepts that go into them are never exactly the same from one individual to another. If, for instance, the categories of resentment or of the instinct of self-preservation are taken up into a description, they receive in this whole a different meaning in each case. The function and thus also the content of the concepts applied are affected by every step in the representation of a living process. Conceptual realism—that is, the doctrine of the reality of the general concepts themselves—is just as incorrect as its nominalist opposite, according to which general concepts are mere names. Or, rather, both doctrines are correct. General concepts have real meaning, but this is only determined in the overall representation of a concrete object, which has its own principles appropriate to the object. Aristotle's axiom—that general concepts exist only to the same extent as the individual objects that fall under them—was transformed by Hegelian philosophy into the axiom that the *meaning* of concepts changes according to the individual object in which they are realized. This entails that a definite meaning be ascribed to each conceptual term. In thought, it is not permissible to use a symbol arbitrarily to mean

this now and something else later. As soon as a concept is thought out in isolation, it has a firm meaning; if, however, it goes into a complex intellectual construction, it acquires in this whole a particular function. Thus, for example, the instinct of self-preservation can be unambiguously defined to the extent that it is considered in isolation; in the total picture of a particular human being, as the instinct of self-preservation of a concrete, living person, it is affected in its content by other psychic characteristics. The fact that chemical compounds consist of certain elements and can be separated back into them does not mean that these elements retain the same characteristics in compound as they had before their inclusion in the whole. Neither is it true that the strict definability of abstract concepts precludes them from being affected by their involvement in the mental image of a concrete whole. When concepts are realized, they become elements in complete theoretical constructs, and are no longer isolated symbols.

Hegel's doctrine that true thought contains contradictions is grounded in this simple insight. Concepts derived from abstraction change their meaning as soon as they come into relation with each other in the representation of a concrete whole; at the same time, they remain identical to themselves to the extent that they retain their established definitions. The principles of traditional logic, the "logic of the Understanding"—above all the principle of identity, but the other rules of analytic thought as well—are by no means simply expunged in dialectical logic. The abstract conceptual elements and their fixed relationships, which are investigated in specialized scientific research, constitute the material for the theoretical reconstruction of living processes. *Lebensphilosophie* and the other irrationalist tendencies are thus incorrect to claim that insight into true being has nothing to do with analysis, and that thoughtless "surrender" must replace it. The product of the analysis, the abstract concepts and rules, are not, of course, identical with knowledge of events in reality. The individual disciplines yield only the elements of the theoretical construction of the historical process, and these do not remain what they were in the individual disciplines but acquire new meanings. All true thought is thus to be understood as a continuous critique of abstract determinations; it contains a critical or—as Hegel put it—a skeptical moment. The dialectical side of logic is at the same time "that of negative reason."[29] If, however, concept formation in physics, the definitions of organic

processes in biology, the general description of an instinctual impulse, the characterization of the typical mechanism of inflation or of capital accumulation, and other results of the individual sciences constitute not the representation of real events in nature living and dead but only their presuppositions, the research has abstracted these concepts and judgments from real phenomena. They are thus already distinguished from fantasy images and arbitrary constructions; they stand in a positive relationship to reality by their origin and their applicability. The faithfulness of the mental reflection of reality depends upon the precision of the results of analysis.

Analysis proceeds from the particular to the general. It suffices to the extent that thought has only to isolate from actual events that which repeats itself. Science thus fulfills its true task for those activities that depend upon the relative immutability of natural and social relations. In the liberal period, miracles were expected from the mere development of specialized research, because the foundations of the current form of society were considered static. The mechanistic approach fails, however, in the effort to understand history. Here, the issue is to understand the dominant tendencies of incomplete, unique processes. To be sure, analytic knowledge must be brought to bear, but the task demands going beyond such knowledge. The process of discovery and that of representation are here fundamentally different. In the reconstruction of the tendencies of society as a whole, quite different psychic functions play a role than in the development of the individual science; even "intuition" is included among them. "Empiricism," writes Hegel, "prepares the empirical material" for the dialectical Notion, "so that the latter can then receive it ready for its use. . . . [The] process of the origination of science is different from its process in itself when it is complete, just as is the process of the history of Philosophy and that of Philosophy itself. . . . The working out of the empirical side has really become the conditioning of the Idea, so that this last may reach its full development and determination."[30] Research "has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described" (Marx).[31]

Irrationalism understands that analysis "really transforms the concrete into an abstract."[32] It fails to grasp, however, that "that division

must take place" if comprehension is to be possible at all. This failure in the realm of the positive is characteristic not only of the attack on rationalist thought but of the contemporary struggle against liberal forms of life in all spheres. The representatives of the reigning intellectual mood are, to be sure, largely correct in their critique of an obsolete culture, but they are incapable of deriving progressive conclusions from that critique. They would prefer to return to a precapitalist form of society. To the overspecialized and ultimately empty life of the more recent era, they offer only articles of faith; blind obedience is supposed to take the place of an analytic thought which is nonetheless rich with nuance. The spirit is thus renewed regressively rather than progressively. The vacuous intellectual work in many disciplines is not abolished in favor of the application of all intellectual forces of production to the true interests of human beings; instead, thought is merely simplified. The requirements of progressive economic development lend to most contemporary political, social, and cultural tendencies a dual character of which its bearers are not necessarily aware: the violent simplification of thought goes hand in hand with its diffusion among the masses. The same holds for the other elements of the irrationalist world view. Among broad segments of the bourgeois strata, the denial of the individual in favor of a merely imagined community [*Gemeinschaft*] replaces the false consciousness of their supposed individual autonomy with incipient social considerations: the glorification of a social order which breeds poverty and the constant danger of war despite a wealth of raw materials and means of production—and the ferocious struggle against every effort to improve that order—unintentionally contain the admission that this house of humanity is actually a prison. The regression conditioned by the general hostility toward thought embodies the revision of a form of progress that had already reversed itself and turned into the opposite of progress.

Rather than denying it, materialism proceeds to the correct application of analytic thought—which, like other aids to society, is transformed under contemporary conditions from a productive force into a constraint. As a result, however, analytic thought plays a different role in materialism than elsewhere in philosophy. The materialist dialectic is also to be fundamentally distinguished from the Hegelian. With his development of dialectical principles, and even more through

his dialectical representations [*Darstellungen*], Hegel showed in detail how analytically derived concepts could be made fruitful for the intellectual reconstruction of living processes. In Hegel's thought, however, there is in truth only one great process that contains in itself all concepts as its moments, and the philosopher can grasp and represent this process—this "concrete," this "one"—once and for all. The individual stages of this representation are thus considered to be eternal relations not just in logic but in the philosophy of nature and of spirit as well. All relationships in the completed system are conceived as immutable. Thus morality—which in Hegel is determined in a particular sense by the Good and by conscience—appears together with abstract bourgeois law [*Recht*] as an eternal moment of ethical life; in that realm, the state also has a fixed meaning that comprehends and supersedes family and society in a particular fashion. The abstract categories of all parts of the system—both those of pure logic (such as quantity and quality) and those of individual realms of culture (such as art and religion)—are to be put together in an enduring image of concrete Being. Whoever wishes, at any given time, to grasp the real meaning of any category will have to construct the same image of Being, driven by the inner logic of the object. Until its completion, the entire conceptual material is in movement in the minds of those who reconstruct it, because the meaning of the individual categories is only fulfilled in the whole. As moments of the mental unity, which for Hegel is not merely a pure reflection but is itself the Absolute, they are supposed to have immutable validity, however. "Accordingly, logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind."[33] However, the logic contains *in nuce* the entire system. The complete theory itself is, in Hegel, no longer drawn into history; it yields an all-comprehending thought, the product of which is no longer abstract and transient. The dialectic is closed.

The materialist cannot have faith in such certainty. There is no conclusive image of reality, either in essence or in appearance. Even the proposition of a suprahistorical subject which alone could grasp reality is a delusion. Furthermore, the overcoming of the one-sidedness of abstract concepts through the art of dialectical construction does

not lead to absolute truth, as Hegel claims. That process always takes place in the thought of definite, historical human beings. "It is man who thinks, not the ego, not reason."[34] Materialist philosophy "therefore regards as its *epistemological principle,* as its *subject, not the ego, not the absolute*—i.e., abstract spirit, *in short, not reason for itself alone*—but the *real* and the *whole essence of man.*"[35] If this essence were immutably the same, as the early materialists including Feuerbach still believed, its mental constructions would at least have had one and the same subjective foundation. These constructions would have been theoretical projections of that essence concerning the entire world with which it was confronted. Dilthey, too, understood the intellectual culture of humanity in the same way. Dialectical materialism, however, understands the subject of thought not as itself another abstraction such as the essence "humanity," but rather as human beings of a definite historical epoch. Moreover, these human beings are not hypostatized as isolated units, closed off from one another and from the world; their entire being and thus also their consciousness depend upon their natural endowments every bit as much as upon the overall social relations that have taken shape in their time. According to materialism, therefore, the theory of the social life process is on the one hand the most comprehensive mental construction to which analytic research in all areas contributes; on the other hand, this theory is necessarily aimed at the intellectual and material situation, and the impulses deriving from it, that are characteristic for one of the various social classes. Many viewpoints, of course, are determined less by the psychic structure of a certain group in the production process than by the private peculiarities of their originators. Such opinions, however, either tend not to acquire social significance or receive a more or less unambiguous reinterpretation in the understanding of a certain class.

Since especially in the present historical period the solution of the decisive, real problems from which humanity suffers depends upon the outcome of struggles between social groups, a theory's significance is determined above all by the extent to which its principle of construction is codetermined by the tasks of such a group rather than by the private situation of its author. According to Hegel, the course of the universal dialectic is established by the immanent dynamic of the concepts; for materialism, in contrast, every dialectical construction is a product that human beings develop in their confrontation with their social and natural environment. The entire process of

developing such a construction, therefore, is guided not merely by the object but by the level of intellectual development and the conscious and unconscious strivings of the subjects as well. The formal criterion of truth does not alone decide the value of a theory. (How many investigations have been conducted during just the most recent past which fail to further knowledge one bit, but which may nonetheless claim to be true! How many writings have their *raison d'être* merely in their function of diverting attention from the decisive problems, despite the fact that they could not be accused of logical errors!) The value of a theory is decided by its connection to the tasks that have been taken in hand by the most progressive social forces in a given historical moment, and a theory is valuable not for the whole of humanity directly, but only for the group with an interest in those tasks. The fact that thought has in many cases distanced itself from the questions of a strife-ridden humanity is one of the reasons underlying mistrust toward intellectuals. The criterion for this distancing is not the unsophisticated consciousness; that criterion can only be the actual demonstration that the connection to the decisive questions has been lost. This accusation against an apparently free-floating [*unbedingte*] intelligentsia—which is linked with that against rationalism—is nonetheless correct to the extent that the disconnected character of thought does not signify freedom of judgment, but rather the insufficient control of thought with respect to its own motives. The surrender of a historically determined terminology, the constant coining of new concepts and the philosophers' starting-from-square-one, the preoccupation with neutral expressions and the search for originality are all manifestations of this tendency. The fault lies not with the intelligentsia itself, however, but with its insufficient connection to the relevant historical problems. The most abstract thought processes can have a more real meaning than an apparently concrete approach to a problem couched in the most everyday, commonplace terms. The craft and agrarian sphere are given preference here. The more the conscious connection to historical struggles is lost, the more strongly the philosophers insist that their thought stands on and is rooted in solid ground—a notion whose untenability makes that inadequacy completely clear.

Concepts, judgments, and theories are phenomena that develop in the confrontations of human beings with each other and with nature. Utility is by no means the criterion of knowledge, as the pragmatists

would have it; knowledge in the various realms of science and life can be distinguished in many ways. The claim that all knowledge is useful—that is, that it must lead directly to the satisfaction of a practical need—is false. But the theoretical need itself, the interest in truth, is determined by the situation of the knowers. If their fate, in which material and psychic factors are interwoven, leads to penetration of their intellectual labors by the needs of humanity rather than merely by private whims, those efforts can take on historical significance. A god is incapable of knowing anything because it has no needs. Thought processes are hardly guided in detail by the demands imposed directly by the material situation, but just as much by unconscious instinctual impulses which themselves ultimately comprise individuals' reactions to their situation in society. Regardless of its correctness or falsity, the need for self-affirmation that remains unsatisfied in real life can be expressed in a theory. Such irrational factors play a smaller role in the intellectual life of a group the less their situation drives them toward repressions; the intellectual task itself and the means to its resolution derive, however, from the demands placed upon specific people in a specific situation.

Even the establishment of truth according to the relevant criteria—whether through mere psychic processes (such as memory), through experiments, or through events independent of the subject—has, as a procedure in the real world, historical conditions. The correspondence between judgment and the true facts of the matter is never given directly; there is no identity between the two. The problem that thought must solve, the manner of this thinking, and the relation of judgment to object are all transient. Nonetheless, in every given case there remains a distinction between true and false. The relativistic denial of this distinction contradicts itself. It is, for instance, quite possible to decide which of the many theories of the economic crisis is correct. True and false are distinguishable characteristics of theoretical constructs; they have to do with their relationship to the object. Human beings in the process of making distinctions by no means create this relationship arbitrarily; it is, however, mediated, and without this mediation there would be no truth. Theory is thus not a fact of nature separable from human beings. One cannot reflect upon oneself or indeed upon humanity as if one were a subject freed of definite historical conditions. To be sure, individuals may choose to disregard

certain personal interests, to tune out all possible peculiarities conditioned by their own fate; nonetheless, every step of a thought process will be the reaction of a specific human being from a specific social class in a specific period. This is certainly obvious on its face, but the whole of idealist philosophy runs contrary to this manifest truth. In idealism, philosophical thought is understood—either explicitly (as in classical German idealism) or implicitly (as in Berkeley)—as something that appears to be carried out by empirical human beings, but which in reality is the timeless precondition of these empirical human beings, or at least a process independent of them. In the bourgeois age, idealist philosophy has largely replaced revelation, at least among the enlightened bourgeoisie. Comprehensive meaning, insight into the foundations of the world, is no longer promulgated from on high; instead, it is discovered or even brought forth by spiritual powers dwelling in each individual. The world view of idealism, like the affirmative content of religion, is supposed to bear not the traits of the socialized human beings who brought it about but the pure reflection of eternal orders. The irrationalist currents in idealism have nothing on the rationalists in this respect. To be sure, they replace analytic thought with intuition or other transient stimuli, such as feeling, joy, boredom, anxiety, credulousness, or fellow feeling, as the conditions of insight.[36] But the essence of which the individual becomes aware in this mood—whether it be life, existence, or communion [*Volkheit*]—is considered the standard to which one can hold unconditionally, even if this consists only in the command always to call into question one's own principles and actions, or to affirm freely the place in which given individuals find themselves as a result of their fate. The solemnity accorded to certain positions and aims by idealist philosophy necessarily goes along with the incoherent notion of a timeless subject. By uncovering this connection, materialism dethrones the deified spirit more fundamentally than irrationalism, which rejects analysis in order to deliver itself over to blind faith.

Dialectical materialism recognizes the justification in the critique of merely analytical thought. Old and new philosophical doctrines that hypostatize the results of analysis and posit the products of abstraction as the foundation or the elements of being are one-sided and limited. The reified categories of irrationalist philosophy such as life and existence—however much they may be held to be spiritually

motivated, historical, and concrete—are no less abstract than the ontological principles of tendencies attacked as rationalist, such as the ego, the absolute idea, and the sum of sense impressions. Where the process from which they are derived is forgotten or considered insignificant, all these isolated unities today fulfill the ideological functions of fundamental metaphysical concepts. In contrast to irrationalism, materialism attempts to transcend the one-sidedness of analytic thought without dismissing it altogether. Dialectical theory itself has, of course, an abstract character. For despite the efforts to reflect the object in its various forms of development, the very act of observing it—as well as every step of those developmental processes—depends upon specific historical conditions. Knowledge of the totality is a self-contradictory concept. Consciousness of one's own conditionedness, which distinguishes materialist thought, is identical in the current state of theory with an understanding of the social conditionedness of individuals. Just as the notion of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of thought is intrinsic to the concept of the closed, monadic individual, the notion that every individual is caught up in the overall social life process belongs to the materialist view of the finitude of thought. In materialism, as in Hegel, the overcoming of the errors of abstract thought takes place through the attempt to grasp the individual categories as dependent upon the process that creates them. In materialism, however, this process itself is not viewed as intellectual in nature; its result is not the self-comprehending and thus infinite Idea. Rather, according to materialism, individuals with all their categories depend upon social development; this is laid out in the economic theory of history. Subject and object never entirely coincide here; rather, they find themselves in a variable tension according to the role which theory plays in society, and to the level of domination of human beings over each other and over nonhuman nature.

While society by no means comprises the totality of the conditions determining individual fates, and though individuals' membership in a certain social group does not necessarily entail that they must have the capacities and views typical of this group, such conditioning goes much further than is commonly assumed in philosophy and psychology, which are predominantly oriented to the individual. In addition to the fact that the factors determining the action of the members of a class, despite great variation among them, tend to be much more

unitary than they appear to the superficial observer, the genuine variations should not be considered simply "natural." As we now know, character differences derive not merely from conscious educational processes but even more from childhood experiences. The inventory of these experiences and their various causes are determined for the individual by the peculiarities of the family as they have developed in various social classes in the course of history, as well as by the particular fate of each family. Each personality has its own nature, but this nature is socially determined in ways not yet comprehended scientifically.

From this materialist conception of the individual derives not just materialism's critical stance toward the hypostatization of analytic thought (indeed, toward that of dialectical thought as well). Rather, this conception also constitutes the basis for materialism's attitude toward individualism, the second major criticism directed today at rationalist approaches in philosophy. To be sure, the actions and, more importantly, the happiness of individuals have always been functions of society. Yet in some epochs, above all in the early periods of capitalist development, individuals (socially determined, to be sure) in broad social strata were in a position to improve their situation through their own particular calculations, decisions, and undertakings. Due to economic conditions, the lives of human beings even in the most highly developed countries are, with ever fewer exceptions, dominated by factors that are not at all subject to their will. All their calculations of individual advantage are ineffectual with respect to great social events, such as economic crises and the wars so closely related to them. Indeed, the temporary successes of an individual or indeed an entirely successful life—insofar as the resolute individual does not belong to the small circle of the economically powerful or their immediate servants—seems like a mistake, one of the minor inaccuracies in the apparatus that can never be completely eliminated. In earlier periods, materialism justifiably exhorted human beings to look after their individual well-being; today it clearly grasps the nearly complete hopelessness of such activity. Attention to personal fate has been widely transformed into participation in social struggles. This should not be misunderstood in a mechanistic fashion. Those who work on social tasks in the sense of materialist theory do not seek to pursue, on the basis of abstract considerations, their own well-being via social change.

This would indeed be an extremely one-sided kind of thought that would prove vain simply due to the time span of social change. The transition from individualistic thought to knowledge of the social situation is characterized less by individual subjects changing their views than by correct theory being taken up by social strata especially prepared for this by their position in the production process. In the contemporary social order, great masses repress for long periods their understanding of the hopelessness of individualistic striving, no matter how clearly this may be demonstrated to them practically and theoretically. The conditions of socialization to be found among most social groups contribute to the steady reproduction of psychic mechanisms through which this knowledge is perceived as intolerable and processed accordingly. Such knowledge, so painful from the perspective of the immediate interests of the individual, is suffered only when individualistic values are no longer felt to be the highest—either in the sense of a good personal life or of individual mobility. The type of person in whom the clear knowledge of the contemporary situation of society really gains force transforms the meaning which this knowledge had in the skeptical reflection of the disappointed bourgeois. In this type of person, knowledge constitutes a progressive force. For all those who are condemned to a hopeless existence by the maintenance of obsolete forms of social life, it points toward a goal that can only be attained through solidarity: the transformation of this society into a form adequate to the needs of the whole society. In this solidarity, self-interest is not utterly rejected, for—as insight into the hopelessness of individual striving in the world as it is—it constitutes a constant stimulus to activity. But self-interest loses the character intrinsic to it in the bourgeois era—namely, its contradiction to the interest of society at large.

The irrationalist concept of "decomposition" ["*Zersetzung*"] connects the objection that thought destroys the object with the accusation that it is also individualistic. This concept aims not only at the attitude of human beings who, incapable of surrendering to the great matters of life, conceptually pick apart the experiences others find inspiring. It also asserts that the analytic devaluation of everything significant takes place in the service of an individual preoccupied only with self-preservation and indifferent to the rest of society. Rationalist critique is attacked not only because it exposes religious, metaphysical, or other

ideological doctrines to thought and thus to the danger of a just demise, but also because it measures norms and values against individualistic ends. Cartesian rationalism was indeed individualistic to the extent that it viewed the contradiction involved in judgments against innate human reason as the criterion of the falsity of those judgments. Increasingly, the standard for norms and theories became an individual posited as absolute, and the various ends of the monadic ego were hypostatized. Contrary to the axiom of the equality of human beings, which the bourgeoisie transformed from a demand into an assertion after its ascension to power, individuals are historically determined. The socially conditioned differences are great enough. In contemporary irrationalism, these differences are mystified as "natural" and God-given just as they were during the time of slavery; in the liberal period they were dogmatically denied. An individual exclusively oriented to economic advantage appeared as the prototype of the human being. Its *ratio* became *ratio* as such; purposive activity was reduced to concurrence with its ends and, ultimately, with the ends of a social enterprise following its own dynamic. The foundation of this development lay in the principle of the free commodity economy—the same one which, after promoting the whole of social life, has today become a fetter. In it, the law of economic utility dominates the psychic reactions of human beings like a natural law. Irrationalism discards the type of thought that corresponds to this law. It opposes self-interest every bit as much as it opposes the Understanding.

The rationalist division of the individual into the two independent halves of body and mind had withdrawn all unconscious and half-conscious psychic activity from scientific theory. With a few exceptions in French psychology (especially La Rochefoucauld and Vauvenargues) and German philosophy (especially in Goethe's theoretical writings and in romanticism), the genuinely emotional part of human life received attention only in literature. Nonindividualistic impulses were thus withdrawn from the attention of rationalism; its psychology become the theory of "self-interest."[37] Modern irrationalism is to be credited for attacking this deficiency. At least initially, Freudian theory, which belongs according to its structure to the liberal period, understood the individual as the product of a conflict between conscious and unconscious, a dialectic between the ego and the id that plays itself out under the compulsions of the social environment.

Irrationalism, however, began to deify the unconscious. It dogmatically singles out individual factors that are quite vague theoretically, such as the unconscious influence of historical rootedness, race, or landscape, and puts them directly in place of individual rational thought, which it denigrates. But it is just as great a mistake to reduce the conditioned quality of thought, which is guided by the entire life situation as well as by the object, to allegedly eternal individual factors, as it is to deny this conditioned quality in the rationalist manner.

The laying bare of pure egoistic reflection, of "self-interest"—like that of analytic thought—contains a correct insight in incorrect form. Action oriented only to individual values is today futile for the great majority of humanity. The concentration of all concerns on mere survival, the greatest possible accommodation of one's own life to given circumstances, the constant measurement of all events against one's own well-being and that of one's immediate group constitutes the appropriate form of reaction of enlightened individuals in a declining economic situation. To the extent that it has exclusively this quality, thought is indeed not rational but rationalistic. But if it is true that the individual is dependent upon the whole of society, and attention to the whole has to stand today above blind devotion to individual interests, the foundation of this truth lies in the fact that society in its current form stands in contradiction to the self-interests of most people. According to materialist theory, the task is not the suppression of those interests but the overcoming of this contradiction, which can be resolved only by a definite transformation of the relations of production, the basis of the entire social order. In contrast, irrationalism denies the right to individual self-preservation and sees the whole as the meaning and aim of all human activity, as if the interest in the whole were mediated by unconditional subordination rather than by the interests of the individuals for themselves and their kind. Just as it wishes to derive the image of living processes from immediate experience rather than through intellectual reconstruction from the results of analysis, participation in social and political events is supposed to take place not with respect to the real needs of human beings but rather through the individual's unreserved surrender to the whole as it is. In both respects, irrationalism makes itself the servant of the powers that be. As demonstrated above, hostility to thought protects only

untruth—namely, the false contents of metaphysics and religion. Surrender to the whole, to the "common good," is an especially welcome principle to a bad form of rule. As long as the whole is not constantly judged against the standard of human happiness, the notion of the "common good" is just as dogmatic as that of self-interest. Without the fulfillment of the Hegelian dictum that the "end [of the state] is the universal interest as such and the conservation therein of particular interests since the universal interest is the substance of these,"[38] the demand of total surrender to the interests of the state remains mere dogmatism.

From the point of view of world history, the pressure exerted upon large backward strata in town and country to learn to repress their own narrow interests may be a treatment that would be unavoidable in other circumstances as well. Corresponding to their obsolete mode of production is an intellectual attitude which makes possible only an assimilation to the contemporary state of knowledge mediated by authority, not a rational one. The demand of a sacrifice of one's own interests, the call to discipline and heroism, and the praise of poverty are directed primarily to the progressive social groups, however, which have the universal interest much more "as their substance" than is the case with the various "totalities" in the name of which that demand is raised. As with its attack on thought, therefore, irrationalism falls well behind liberalism in its otherwise correct critique of individualism. It is a "countermovement." In criticism, in destruction—which it detests in principle—it remains successful. In "creation" ["*Aufbau*"]—which it affirms as a principle—in the conquest of new realms of life, it is capable of achieving anything only to the extent that the elements opposed to irrationalism necessarily come to effect in it: with the aid of thought and of the motor of particular interests.

The striving for mere self-preservation, the purely egoistic aim next to which other instinctual impulses pale, typifies today's miserable life. If this insight is transformed from a theoretical reflection into a principle of domination, it takes on a particular ideological function. The philosophical irrationalism of Nietzsche and Bergson had challenged the dominant strata themselves to resist their economically conditioned inner impoverishment by reminding them of their own possibilities, the possibilities of "life." When the dominant invoke the

same challenge vis-à-vis the larger society without offering a rational justification connected to individual self-interest, it becomes a convenient rationalization for demanding that these people suffer patiently the life of privation they must lead under prevailing conditions. It entails the denial of accountability. While rational thought cannot be narrowed—as extreme liberal ideology would have it—to the standard of egoistic ends, rational justification of any action can ultimately be related only to the happiness of human beings. A government that scorns any demonstration that its actions have this significance for the governed is mere despotism. Despotism need not be necessarily bad or even retrograde; the zenith is long since past of those theories of the state that treat the forms of government while ignoring their content, and that devote more attention to the representation of interests than to their fulfillment. There exists such a thing as an enlightened, indeed a revolutionary despotism. Its character is determined by its relation to the real interests of the masses subject to it. There is no unconditional standard against which to judge this relation in various periods, if for no other reason than that the harshness and injustice of despotism is to be explained not alone in terms of its rule, but also with respect to the general level of development of the subjugated masses. Nonetheless, during the whole of the modern period their social function, their progressive or reactionary significance, is determined by the extent to which their exercise of power corresponds to either general or particular social interests. Even if one were to consider the most gruesome periods of human history only teleologically—that is, with respect to their evolution, their development toward a stage in which they kept in mind "a few basic requirements of communal living"[39]—the aim of this development can only be defined in terms of specific human interests. At present, the contradiction between the life interests of human beings and the maintenance of forms of life that run counter to these interests dominates all historical events. By denying the individual interests of the masses via the demand of thoughtless obedience and blind sacrifice—instead of transforming them through reflection on the foundations of the social process and raising them above the mere pursuit of advantage—irrationalism today unconsciously serves the particular, indeed unconcealed interests of the dominant, who continue to benefit from the persistence of the given in its old form.

The logical error here lies in the undialectical usage of the concepts "whole" and "part." To be sure, in contrast to the positivist methodology of liberalism, the whole is correctly understood as not simply more than but something entirely different from the sum of its parts—or, better, the sum is a limiting case of the whole. This insight was already present in the irrationalist critique of abstract thought. In the exclusive emphasis on the independence of the whole, it expresses "only the tautology that *the whole as whole* is equal not to the parts, but to *the whole*."[40] From this perspective it appears that the relationship between whole and part is one-sided, so that the part in the whole seems to be determined by the latter alone and not at all by itself. The simplistic truth that the whole is nothing without the parts—to which the positivist theory of knowledge holds one-sidedly—plays a subordinate role in the irrationalist theory of totality. It must be understood, however, that the dynamics of every whole, each in its own way, are determined just as much by its elements as by its own peculiar structure. Indeed, in human history, the point is precisely that even the structure of the whole, the forms of social life, fall under the control of their elements, namely the human beings living in them.

In the liberal period, and certainly in that following it as well, society and its institutions, the whole of cultural life, were only apparently governed by human beings. They imagined that they made the important decisions themselves—whether in their social undertakings, in parliaments, or in the person of their political leaders—while precisely the sphere that ultimately determines the course of history, namely the economic sphere, was withdrawn from any rational control. The necessities that arose from it, the genuine questions of human survival, thus operated blindly—that is, with the unnecessary development of social deprivation, wars, and regressions to barbaric social conditions. Because the human productive process lacks any true organization or control despite all the monopolies—indeed, because, as isolated attempts at organization, modern monopolies multiply the general disorganization—the whole of social life, which in the end depends upon economic factors, is withdrawn from human will. It confronts individuals as an alien power of fate, as nature. Chance and death rule over life, however, precisely to the extent that conscious beings are determined by blind nature, and to the extent that the realm of freedom is limited by that of necessity. It is therefore

crucial that the social whole not just apparently but actually comes under the control of its parts. At the same time, these parts will continue to be dominated to a certain degree by the whole, for what they create must in turn influence them. This is obvious; it is an axiom that holds for all living processes.

The undynamic use of the concepts "whole" and "part" lies at the root of the irrationalist conception of individual and community [*Gemeinschaft*]. At present, this usage is especially prominent in the universalistic philosophy deriving from Othmar Spann. Two particular methodological errors dominate contemporary talk about the individual and the community. First, the unique character of the process being investigated, in which the totality and the elementary factors determine each other in different ways, is inadequately considered in the one-sided determination of the relationship. This error finds expression in conclusions that can hardly be surpassed in their metaphysical primitiveness, but which are therefore easily comprehensible. For example, it is said of the assertion "The whole precedes the parts"[41] that this does not refer to a causal relationship, but only to logical priority; causal reasoning has "no place in thinking about society."[42] It quickly becomes clear, however, that only terminological and not substantive significance is imputed to this position, for the assertion—meaningless in purely logical terms, to be sure—is blithely related to genetic problems of reality. Its application to social questions is entirely mechanical:

> Once the fact is recognized that spiritual community or totality [*geistige Gemeinschaft oder Ganzheit*] constitutes the foundation and essence of all social phenomena, it becomes obvious that the quintessential reality lies in "society," and that the individual emerges derivatively (as a part) from it. The individual reveals itself now not as self-generative (autarkic), but as a member; society not as an agglomeration, but as a totality that divides itself up.[43]

> Thus emerge two characteristics: (a) the whole, society, is the true reality; and (b) the whole is the primary (conceptually prior); the individual exists so to speak only as constituent part, as a member of it, and is thus derivative.[44]

Most contemporary philosophical and sociological discussions of the individual and community tend to be based on equally loose perspectives. They are in no way superior to their individualistic opponents, who maintain the reverse thesis—namely, the logical and ontological

priority of the parts over the whole. Indeed, these are nearer the truth to the extent that their doctrine is accurate for the mechanical natural sciences, at least superficially, and to the extent that, in sociology, individuals have priority at least in the sense of the pursuit of control over society as discussed above. Neither party sees that the exclusive emphasis on one side of the relation is "an empty abstraction"; they both fall into pure metaphysics.

The contemporary discussion concerning the relation between the individual and the community contains still another error, however. The problem tends to be stated not in conscious connection to the real needs of specific groups of people—that is, in terms of historical praxis—but rather as if active human beings had to orient themselves forever in the same way toward the universally valid answer to the philosophical problem of whole and part, individual and community. Philosophical conclusions are taken as eternal norms that give meaning and aims to action, instead of as a moment in the mastery of the tasks of human beings which, to be sure, has its own effect. Philosophers believe that they determine the aims of human beings and, due to a lack of clarity about the implication of thought in the real needs and struggles of those human beings, fall into blind dependence upon the powers that be. Investigation of the relation between whole and part in the abstract realm of logic, or a fundamental examination of the individual and the community, may play a minor role even in the theory involved in the struggle for an improvement of contemporary society. But rigid norms derived from such investigations can only perform extrascientific functions. Recourse to such distant problems, conceived as eternal—like the return to a supposedly original, actual, or genuine (in any case, prehistorical) essence of human being—have an ideological function insofar as they are undertaken with respect to a goal for which they are unsatisfactory in principle: namely, the attainment or justification of a certain behavior demanded of human beings consisting in passive subordination. The notion rarely arises that ontology, anthropology, folklore, or psychology are mere derivatives from the past and not models for the future. Indeed, not only the prehistory of humanity but extrahuman nature as well are supposed to serve as ideals. If a misbehaving child wanted to point to its "nature" or a petty trickster to the pursuit of power as a primal human drive, one would certainly point out to them that human beings

are supposed to outgrow such impulses. The philosophers, however, serve up the most tasteless comparisons from theories of plants, races, and evolution as justification for the miserable condition of the world today. Such considerations from distant areas of knowledge—and, even more, of ignorance—can only confuse human ends. These certainly depend in various respects upon the current state of scientific knowledge. Max Weber's radical separation of ends and science is untenable. But even an advanced science—not to mention contemporary philosophical biology[45]—is incapable of prescribing the ends, or of grounding or justifying them by itself alone. Rather, in the struggle for a better order, the refinement of theory plays an important role as a critical, corrective, forward-driving, and strengthening element. If one presses contemporary science and philosophy for an abstract demonstration that the community is always everything and the individual nothing (with the exception of a few heroes), these efforts have little to do with the progressive function of science. They belong to the history of ideological methods of domination, not to that of human knowledge.

Irrationalism does not surmount merely individualistic thought with the aid of the insight that the vast majority of humanity has a common interest in the rational organization of society. On the contrary, it demands the renunciation of individual happiness in favor of metaphysical essences. Knowledge of the causes of mass misery—which consists in the current poverty, and in the prospect of a painful demise in the wars connected with this system—would facilitate a change in humanity not just with respect to its consciousness, but indeed to its entire psychic essence. The straightforward preoccupation with personal gain, the exclusive orientation to economic advantage, and "rational" compulsions have taken on a life of their own in the course of the bourgeois era. They have reduced the human beings of those strata that still think they have a chance in the current system to automata of individual self-preservation. The impossibility of adequately satisfying the individualistic instincts denies the real individual as the meaning of life, and the given community is thus put in its place as the true self. Accordingly, these individuals divert their unfulfilled desire for upward mobility in part toward the collectivity to which they belong, and in their thoughts and feelings ascribe directly to the state those individualistic values that the liberal epoch had instilled in

them. They satisfy their own desires, as socially prescribed, through representative individuals. Individualistic thought is thereby hardly overcome but simply transferred. Correspondingly, rationalistic considerations that are supposed to be negated in the individual are viewed as highly legitimate. With respect to the state, thought can hardly be egoistic enough. In contrast, the rational concept of community rests on the recognition of common life interests. These interests bind together those dominated groups who, as a consequence of the contemporary social order (which is promoted, even eternalized by irrationalism), must injure each other in peace and destroy each other in war. The apparent but also partially real conflict of interest among human beings divided into nations—with which the world view of irrationalist philosophy may with some rational justification connect in its call for the subordination of the individual to the whole—derives from the retrograde organization and division of the world. At one time, this meant the advancement of life; its persistence today is in the interest only of a tiny portion of humanity, which must transform this conflict of interest or face its demise.

By ideologically [*weltanschaulich*] glorifying the economically determined denial of instinct, irrationalism contributes to reconciling human beings to such denial. Irrationalism facilitates the adaptation of the masses to their current situation and, through the psychic satisfaction that it offers, puts in the service of the dominant politics forces otherwise unavailable to it. The notion that the immediate gratification of the physical needs of the masses can, at least partially and temporarily, be replaced with substitute satisfactions is an important social-psychological axiom. The mental attitude that arises everywhere on the basis of the adaptation to poor conditions of existence with the aid of contemporary irrationalism is a certain kind of willingness to sacrifice. Human beings are just as fixated upon individualistic values in this ascetic attitude as they are in the most brutal egoism. Here, however, these values are transferred positively to the whole, and appear in the individual itself with reversed premises: in place of personal power stands only obedience; in place of wealth, poverty; in place of libertinism, chastity.

In a life that transcends the bourgeois forms of existence in a progressive sense, individualistic values are neither opposed nor suppressed, but recede behind the aims decisive for the entire society.

The morality of sacrifice and self-abnegation derives, in contrast, from the adaptation of egoistic beings to a situation which makes impossible the adequate satisfaction of their instincts. In this case, individuals only change the manifestation of their drives, and even with this transformation at least a portion of the egoistic drive [*Triebmasse*] remains. Next to their asceticism, therefore, a bit of wild self-interest, ambition, and striving for social power tends to live on in the hearts of those ready to sacrifice, and finds expression wherever reality allows it a little room. The fact that denial is exercised consciously for the sake of the existing community in no way entails that the capacity for love supersedes the instinct for self-preservation in the character of these human beings. In such a case, the notion of sacrifice would certainly not play so important a role in their attitudes, and their attitude toward the world would hardly have the "tragic" cast upon which contemporary literature puts so much value. Nor does the concept of community at issue here rest upon insight into the common sources of one's own impoverishment and that of others; if this were the case, it is primarily impoverishment that would be perceived as shared, and community as the mark of social life would appear not as real but rather as something that still remained to be achieved. The community to which sacrifice is related is simply posited from above as an essence to be venerated. It can be promulgated as something apparently existing because its realization is not merely distinct from the fulfillment of material demands, but has nothing to do with them. It is a symbol by means of which individualistic drives are reversed and reconciled with things as they are. Psychic forces which otherwise could have been directed toward changing that reality now operate in the service of maintaining a system that runs counter to the interests of most individuals. To the extent that this system sustains and renews the life of the society—despite the accidental character and the tremendous losses with which it does so—surrender to the existing, taking action in the interest of this bad reality, is not completely without a positive, rational foundation. At the same time, the struggle for its transformation must at first cripple some of the forces toward whose liberation that struggle aims. All activity in this contradictory reality has itself a contradictory character. The renunciation of individual interests and their transferrence to the symbol of the community may therefore be relatively useful and rational not only for the most

economically powerful, but for a time for other strata and indeed for the majority within a given structure of power as well. From the perspective of the theory as a whole, however, this rationality appears in its limited nature. The small advantage that human beings within one of the contending power groups might gain at the expense of another by throwing into the scales their claim to happiness—indeed, their very lives—is purchased not merely at this cost, but indeed with a prolongation and exacerbation of the senseless misery, and with the injustice and barbarism in the entire world. The implications of this condition must ultimately affect those who originally had the advantage. Irrationalism retains this awareness of the senselessness of sacrifice for the individuals who make it; indeed, this awareness belongs to its essence. In its eyes, therefore, the victims of our era "must be the more highly esteemed as they have been brought to the edge of senselessness."[46]

The psychological mechanism through which the transformation [*Vorzeichenänderung*] of instincts takes place has been widely studied in psychology. With the concepts of ambivalence and reaction formation, Freud described the fundamental characteristics of psychic life.[47] It was above all Nietzsche, however, who understood the social significance of the psychic capacity for making a virtue of necessity by way of a reinterpretation of powerlessness. According to him, the ascetic ideal is "a dodge for the preservation of life."[48] He has studied in detail the psychic means by which the underclass resists the depressive effects of the economic sacrifice demanded of it. In addition to the "hypnotic damping of the sensibilities," he mentions "mechanical activity, with its numerous implications (regular performance, punctual and automatic obedience, unvarying routine, a sanctioning, even an enjoining of impersonality, self-oblivion)."[49] Of course, Nietzsche's analysis relates in the first instance to the priest. He describes the priest's technique, however, in a manner quite appropriate to recent irrationalism:

> All he has to do, especially when dealing with sufferers of the lower classes, slaves or prisoners (or women, who as a rule are both things), has been to exercise a little art of name changing in order to make them see as blessings things which hitherto they had abominated. The dissatisfaction of the slave with his lot has not, at any rate, been an invention of the priest.—An even more highly prized specific against depression has been the ministration of

small pleasures, which are readily accessible and can be made routine. This form of medication is frequently associated with the preceding one.[50]

Social development since Nietzsche has, however, in many ways outpaced his investigation, which referred primarily to the practice of Christianity and which only captured some of its historical functions. Though in the modern period religion had assumed certain humanistic traits, it now adapts itself to changed circumstances by its broad forfeiture of these traits, and has moved strongly in the direction of the biological side of Nietzsche's philosophy. Furthermore, in its efforts to overcome dissatisfaction, it has been substantially supplemented by new socializing forces. Despite its inadequacies, however, Nietzsche's "revaluation" also retains its significance for these new social functions. Symbolic categories of another order replace religious concepts, or they are both valid together. That which in religion is demanded for the sake of God now takes place for the whole, for the community. The true life—which was once to be achieved through grace—is now supposed to emerge from a vital connection to nature, from the powers of blood and soil [*Blut und Boden*]. Contrary to a declining rationalism, it is correct to say that the Understanding is not wholly created of itself, and that intellectual powers are an expression of the overall human condition. This view is unjustifiably hypostatized, however, where the differences in this condition among individuals and peoples are conceived as directly posited by nature, and not as the result of a developmental process including both social and extrasocial factors. Nature is thus arbitrarily given evaluative accents according to which group is referred to—one's own or one's opponents. Occasionally, it is confused with God or, indeed, deified.

Materialist thought cannot offer a view of the problem of sacrifice that is valid once and for all; it is not radical in the manner of metaphysics. The historical tendencies with which it is connected are codetermined by the threat to individual happiness and life, but it is not oriented merely to the self-preservation of the individual. For materialism, existence is by no means the highest or the only end. The sacrifice of one's existence can unquestionably be demanded in the course of historical practice, and exclusive preoccupation with existence can completely debase the individual. The motives with which the individual participates in this practice are certainly not rooted in

the intellect alone; they derive from the overall character of the acting subject. But without the correct theory of society as a whole, social action—however clever it might be in technical details—is abandoned to mere accident. It only pretends to serve its own ends; in truth, it serves a constellation of interests unknown to the actor. Rational action is oriented to a theory of society that—as elaborated above—is no mere summation of abstract conceptual elements. Rather, it is the attempt, with the aid of all the various disciplines, to reconstruct an image of the social life process that can assist in understanding the critical condition of the world and the possibilities for a more rational order. This theory is based on analysis, and the dogmatic concept of community has a great deal to fear from it. What contradicts materialism is not the engagement of life as such, but its engagement for antihuman interests—that sacrifice that presupposes the *sacrificium intellectus,* or at least a dearth of intellect. The demand to stay at the forefront of available knowledge is not "rationalism" for the most progressive social groups; rather, it derives of necessity from their life situation. To be sure, knowledge in itself means little to them. Like the action it informs, knowledge first gains significance in connection with the struggles concerning a humanization of life. Cut adrift from all need and hope, even the genuine thoughts of human beings have little value for them.

But doesn't the struggle for the realization of a dignified human order itself have a deeper meaning? Is there not some determination of history, perhaps hidden to individuals, so that those who intervene in their specific situation serve a higher, unknowable, and yet venerable aim? Rationalism and irrationalism have both given a number of positive answers to these questions. They thus fall prey to an optimistic metaphysics, and make even easier their current social pessimism. Materialism knows no second reality, whether above us or below us. The happiness and peace that human beings do not receive on earth is not just apparently but actually lost to them, and for all eternity—for death is not peace, but truly leads to nothingness. Love of one's fellow human beings, as materialism understands it, has nothing to do with beings that find eternal security after their death, but with individuals that are quite literally ephemeral.

The escape hatch of modern philosophy—which, given the demise of the hope of an afterlife, posits death as "the necessary fulfillment

of the meaning of life"[51]—is a specific attempt to make an intellectual accommodation to a senseless reality; it cannot stand up before the materialist view. The latter lacks any trace of an ideological [*weltanschaulich*] optimism, and thus has a more difficult time reconciling itself to the course of world history. It diverts all energies, even the most desperate, toward this world, and thus exposes to disappointment the only belief that it permits: the hope for the earthly possibilities of humanity. In contrast, metaphysical and religious optimism is not forced to clutch at even the tiniest prospects for human beings in this world and hold onto them energetically.

The future of humanity is extremely endangered and the regression to barbarism seems to threaten directly that part of the world most promising for the development of cultural potentials. In times like these, materialism's unconditional rejection of any possibility of an ideal harmonization comes to the fore in an especially striking way. All the various conclusions imparted in the gloomiest moments by rationalism and irrationalism as branches of idealist metaphysics—the eternal ideas and inexhaustible life, the autonomous ego and the true meaning of existence, the indestructible core of personality and the mission of one's own people—prove to be abstract concepts in which are immortalized the reflection of a transitory reality. Rationalism and irrationalism have both assumed the function of accommodating human beings to things as they are. Rationalism bestowed upon the liberal period the conviction that the future is anticipated in the reason of the individual. World history was, so to speak, the unfolding of the rational essence that each individual carried in its core; in its substance, the individual could feel itself immortal. The rationalist belief in progress was not merely an expression of respect for the unlimited possibilities of the development of human powers and the moral desire for a better human future. It was at the same time a narcissistic projection of the individual, timebound ego into all eternity. In monopoly capitalism, which holds most people in its thrall as mere elements of a mass, irrationalism passes along the theory that the essence of these individuals exists in the overarching historical unity to which they belong. And, as long as they are obedient, they have nothing to be concerned about: their better selves will be sublated in the community after their deaths. Thus rationalism and irrationalism both provide the service of mystification.

That materialism should entirely lack this quality seems to contradict its historical origins. To ban fear and despair from the soul through thought was the stated fundamental motive of Epicurean philosophy; it ascribed to theory the power to heal.[52] But in contrast to idealist philosophy, materialism never provided this psychological service, even in antiquity, by pointing to the eternal and creating for human beings a home to which they could hope to return, as had Plato in the immortal concepts or the Stoics in a deified nature. By unmasking the metaphysical idols which have long constituted a centerpiece of its theory, materialism directed the human capacity for love away from the products of fantasy, away from the mere symbols and reflections, and toward real living beings. For many of them, a greater composure may emerge not only from their solidarity with one another but from a clarity of consciousness. The simple establishment of commonality in suffering and the description of oppressive relations, which tend to be hidden from the light of consciousness by the ideological apparatus, can be liberating.

Neither is it simply thought as such that can acquire such signficance, but rather the structure in which the various ideas stand to each other and toward reality. However differentiated and meticulous, thought in itself means little to materialism. What matters is that a few insights stand at the center of knowledge, capable of illuminating the reality of a particular historical moment. The mere quantity of knowledge plays a decidedly subsidiary role. Whereas at various periods in antiquity—and even then only for certain ruling strata—a precise concept of matter and liberation from fear of the gods were of decisive significance, correct knowledge in the Renaissance was centered around a progressive anthropology and cosmology. At that time, men [*Männer*] and ideas were characterized by subtle differences of opinion concerning matters which in other times may have been irrelevant for the character of philosophical theories and that of their adherents. At present, certain fundamental insights into the essence of society are more decisive for the truth of an overall view than the possession or lack of extensive specialized knowledge. In these fundamental insights themselves, the most apparently trivial shadings are crucial. The boundary that one could draw today between human beings with respect to the weight of their knowledge would thus be oriented less to the extent of their academic training than to certain

features of their behavior, in which are expressed their stance toward social struggles. When it becomes necessary, those who have the decisive insights can acquire the knowledge developed in other areas; beginning from an anachronistically structured education, however, the path to such knowledge can be strewn with serious obstacles. It is sometimes but a short stop from the limited individual discipline to superstition: some representatives of such sciences, themselves outstanding contributors to their fields, prove this as soon as they discuss things that cut close for all human beings. The mass of specialized knowledge, which is certainly extremely important for the overall society as a means of production, means less today for the individual than it had in the positivist period of science because, since Hegel's dialectic, the view gained sway that the progress of knowledge no longer takes place through the summation of data. It is not the growth of facts and theories but the spasmodic reconfiguration of the basic categories that characterizes the stages of science. Of course, that is preceded by the progressive revision of specialized knowledge; this takes place necessarily with respect to the highest system principles, which supply the standards for correction. The revolutionizing of the fundamental categories, which are only prepared in this way, raises knowledge as a whole to a higher level and affects its entire structure. Thus, next to its historical role as a weapon in social struggles, materialist thought may exert a liberating and affirming effect on the individual and thereby constitute a psychic aid. If it does so, this is not only because it values highly the possession of knowledge irrespective of all practical tasks and aims, but because some psychic fetters under which human beings suffer today burst when the right word is sounded, and because this word can to a great extent dissolve the tremendous isolation of human beings from one another peculiar to the current period. This force is characteristic of truth, though truth not only rejects all ideological consolation but is indeed intent upon destroying it.

Materialism supports neither side in the controversy between rationalism and irrationalism. Since the Cartesian isolation of mental substance from all spatial reality, rationalism has absolutized a specific form of thought—namely, the discovery of abstract concepts and the establishment of purely statistical relationships among them—as the

highest human activity. In the process, it has clung to an intellectualistic psychology and explained human actions exclusively on the basis of their conscious motives. Its anthropology was determined from the very beginning by a concept of isolated mental substance, by the monad, which expresses faithfully the one-sidedness of human beings in the bourgeois epoch. Because this anthropology overlooks the individual's dependence upon the total social life process, however, either the claims of the social whole were seen only as a furtherance or an obstacle to egoistic purposes, or these claims were mythologized as conscience or divine commandments. "When irrationalism, as the counterplay to rationalism, talks about the things to which rationalism is blind, it does so only with a squint."[53] With its concept of the community, it pushes unresolved problems off into the "sanctuary of the irrational." It has its logical genesis in the failure of rationalism in the face of social problems. Its power stems from the current decline of a society of self-conscious individuals. The false rationalist concept of equality—which is grounded logically in the hypostatization of the capacity for abstract thought, and transformed from a demand for the rational ordering of relations into a metaphysical doctrine—today flies in the face of truth. Given the emerging laws of the economy, only very small groups emerge truly victorious from the competitive struggle among bourgeois individuals concerned solely with their own interests. The vast majority of people lose their individuality and become a mass capable only of acting heteronomously, even if their own interests must, for better or worse, to a certain extent be incorporated in the ends that are set for them. Irrationalism correctly grasps the bankruptcy of rationalism, but draws from it the wrong conclusion. It does not criticize one-sided thought and egoistic interest in favor of a construction of the world according to the powers available to humanity. Instead, it leaves untouched the essentials of the economic laws that have ushered in the contemporary situation, and serves the ends of the economically powerful people who are merely the executors of those economic forces. It promotes blind affirmation of them with its precept of subordination to an allegedly universal whole. It is an obstacle to the reorganization of society in that it apparently acknowledges the necessity of such a reorganization but limits that process to an inner conversion and mere spiritual renewal. It makes a primitive

pedagogical issue of a complicated social problem, which may suffice for the regressive strata that stand in intimate relation to this philosophy. The negative character of irrationalism derives from the peculiarities of the period in which it plays a role, just as the positive character of rationalism is connected to the great creative achievements of the bourgeoisie. In the present, rationalism becomes easy prey for its opponent; history has long since left behind the era of rationalistic systems. The reason inherent in rationalism lives on today in the theory whose method was developed by rationalism itself under the rubric of dialectics.