

their separate ways because classical philosophy was unable to complete its programme, this process which had been designed to be suprahistorical, inevitably exhibits a historical structure at every point. And since the method, having become abstract and contemplative, now as a result falsifies and does violence to history, it follows that history will gain its revenge and violate the method which has failed to integrate it, tearing it to pieces. (Consider in this context the transition from the logic to the philosophy of nature.)

In consequence, as Marx has emphasised in his criticism of Hegel, the demiurgic role of the 'spirit' and the 'idea' enters the realm of conceptual mythology.⁶⁴ Once again—and from the standpoint of Hegel's philosophy itself—it must be stated that the demiurge only seems to make history. But this semblance is enough to dissipate wholly the attempt of the classical philosophers to break out of the limits imposed on formal and rationalistic (bourgeois, reified) thought and thereby to restore a humanity destroyed by that reification. Thought relapses into the contemplative duality of subject and object.⁶⁵

Classical philosophy did, it is true, take all the antinomies of its life-basis to the furthest extreme it was capable of in thought; it conferred on them the highest possible intellectual expression. But even for this philosophy they remain unsolved and insoluble. Thus classical philosophy finds itself historically in the paradoxical position that it was concerned to find a philosophy that would mean the end of bourgeois society, and to resurrect in thought a humanity destroyed in that society and by it. In the upshot, however, it did not manage to do more than provide a complete intellectual copy and the *a priori* deduction of bourgeois society. It is only the *manner* of this deduction, namely the dialectical method that points beyond bourgeois society. And even in classical philosophy this is only expressed in the form of an unsolved and insoluble antinomy. This antinomy is admittedly the most profound and the most magnificent intellectual expression of those antinomies which lie at the roots of bourgeois society and which are unceasingly produced and reproduced by it—albeit in confused and inferior forms. Hence classical philosophy had nothing but these unresolved antinomies to bequeath to succeeding (bourgeois) generations. The continuation of that course which at least in method started to point the way beyond these limits, namely the dialectical method as the true historical

method was reserved for the class which was able to discover within itself on the basis of its life-experience the identical subject-object, the subject of action; the 'we' of the genesis: namely the proletariat.

III

The Standpoint of the Proletariat

In his early *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx gave a lapidary account of the special position of the proletariat in society and in history, and the standpoint from which it can function as the identical subject-object of the social and historical processes of evolution. "When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the previous world-order it does no more than reveal the secret of its own existence, for it represents the effective dissolution of that world-order." The self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class-aims it simultaneously achieves the conscious realisation of the—objective—aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for this conscious intervention.¹

What change has been brought about, then, socially by this point of view and even by the possibility of taking up a point of view at all towards society? 'In the first instance' nothing at all. For the proletariat makes its appearance as the product of the capitalist social order. The forms in which it exists are—as we demonstrated in Section I—the repositories of reification in its acutest and direst form and they issue in the most extreme dehumanisation. Thus the proletariat shares with the bourgeoisie the reification of every aspect of its life. Marx observes: "The property-owning class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels at home in this self-alienation and feels itself confirmed by it; it recognises alienation as its own instrument and in it it possesses the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself destroyed by this alienation and sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence."²

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It would appear, then, that—even for Marxism—nothing has

changed in the objective situation. Only the 'vantage point from which it is judged' has altered, only 'the value placed on it' has acquired a different emphasis. This view does in fact contain a very essential grain of truth, one which must constantly be borne in mind if true insight is not to degenerate into its opposite.

To put it more concretely: the objective reality of social existence is *in its immediacy* 'the same' for both proletariat and bourgeois. But this does not prevent the *specific categories of mediation* by means of which both classes raise this immediacy to the level of consciousness, by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different, thanks to the different position occupied by the two classes within the 'same' economic process. It is evident that once again we are approaching—this time from another angle—the fundamental problem of bourgeois thought, the problem of the thing-in-itself. The belief that the transformation of the immediately given into a truly understood (and not merely an immediately perceived) and *for that reason* really objective reality, i.e. the belief that the impact of the category of mediation upon the picture of the world is merely 'subjective', i.e. is no more than an 'evaluation' of a reality that 'remains unchanged', all this is as much as to say that objective reality has the character of a thing-in-itself.

It is true that the kind of knowledge which regards this 'evaluation' as merely 'subjective', as something which does not go to the heart of the facts, nevertheless claims to penetrate the essence of actuality. The source of its self-deception is to be found in its uncritical attitude to the fact that its own standpoint is conditioned (and above all that it is conditioned by the society underlying it). Thus—to take this view of history at its most developed and most highly articulated—we may consider Rickert's arguments with regard to the historian who studies "his own cultural environment". He claims that: "If the historian forms his concepts with an eye on the values of the community to which he himself belongs, the objectivity of his presentation will depend entirely on the accuracy of his factual material, and the question of whether this or that event in the past is crucial will not even arise. He will be immune from the charge of arbitrariness, as long as he relates, e.g. the history of art to the aesthetic values of his culture and the history of the state to its political values and, so long as he refrains from making unhistorical *value-judgements*, he will create

a mode of historical narrative that is valid for all who regard political or aesthetic values as normative for the members of his community."³

By positing the materially unknown and only formally valid 'cultural values' as the founders of a 'value-related' historical objectivity, the subjectivity of the historian is, to all appearances, eliminated. However, this does no more than enthrone as the measure and the index of objectivity, the "cultural values" *actually* "prevailing in his community" (i.e. in his class). The arbitrariness and subjectivity are transformed from the material of the particular facts and from judgements on these into the criterion itself, into the "prevailing cultural values". And to judge or even investigate the validity of these values is not possible *within that framework*; for the historian the 'cultural values' become the thing-in-itself; a structural process analogous to those we observed in economics and jurisprudence in Section I.

Even more important, however, is the other side of the question, viz. that the thing-in-itself character of the form-content relation necessarily opens up the *problem of totality*. Here, too, we must be grateful to Rickert for the clarity with which he formulates his view. Having stressed the methodological need for a substantive theory of value for the philosophy of history, he continues: "Indeed, universal or world history, too, can only be written *in a unified manner* with the aid of a system of cultural values and to that extent it presupposes a substantive philosophy of history. For the rest, however, knowledge of a value system is irrelevant to the question of the scientific objectivity of purely empirical narrative."⁴

We must ask, however: is the distinction between historical monograph and universal history purely one of *scope* or does it also involve *method*? Of course, even in the former case history according to Rickert's epistemological ideal would be extremely problematic. For the 'facts' of history must remain—notwithstanding their 'value-attributes'—in a state of crude, uncomprehended facticity as every path to, or real understanding of them, of their real meaning, their real function in the historical process has been blocked *systematically* by methodically abandoning any claim to a knowledge of the totality. But, as we have shown,⁵ the question of universal history is a problem of methodology that necessarily emerges in every account of even the smallest segment of history. For history as a totality (universal history) is neither

the mechanical aggregate of individual historical events, nor is it a transcendent heuristic principle opposed to the events of history, a principle that could only become effective with the aid of a special discipline, the philosophy of history. The totality of history is itself a real historical power—even though one that has not hitherto become conscious and has therefore gone unrecognised—a power which is not to be separated from the reality (and hence the knowledge) of the individual facts without at the same time annulling their reality and their factual existence. It is the real, ultimate ground of their reality and their factual existence and hence also of their knowability even as individual facts.

In the essay referred to above we used Sismondi's theory of crisis to illustrate how the real understanding of a particular phenomenon can be thwarted by the misapplication of the category of totality, even when all the details have been correctly grasped. We saw there, too, that integration in the totality (which rests on the assumption that it is precisely the *whole* of the historical process that constitutes the authentic historical reality) does not merely affect our judgement of individual phenomena decisively. But also, as a result, the objective structure, the actual content of *the individual phenomenon—as individual phenomenon—is* changed fundamentally. The difference between this method which treats individual historical phenomena in isolation and one which regards them from a totalising point of view becomes even more apparent if we compare the function of the machine in the view of bourgeois economics and of Marx: "The contradictions and antagonisms inseparable from the capitalist employment of machinery, do not exist, they say, since they do not arise out of machinery, as such, but out of its capitalist employment! Since therefore machinery, considered alone shortens the hours of labour, but, when in the service of capital, lengthens them; since in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital, heightens the intensity of labour; since in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of Nature, but in the hands of capital, makes man the slave of those forces; since in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital, makes them paupers—for all these reasons and others besides, says the bourgeois economist without more ado, it is clear as noonday that all these contradictions are a mere semblance of the reality, and that, as a matter of fact, they have neither an actual nor a theoretical existence."⁶

Ignoring for the moment the aspect of bourgeois economics

that constitutes an apologia on class lines, let us examine the distinction solely from the point of view of method. We then observe that the bourgeois method is to consider the machine as an isolated unique thing and to view it simply as an existing 'individual' (for as a phenomenon of the process of economic development *the* machine as a class rather than the particular appliance constitutes the historical individual in Rickert's sense). We see further that to view the machine thus is to distort its true objective nature by representing its function in the capitalist production process as its 'eternal' essence, as the indissoluble component of its 'individuality'. Seen methodologically, this approach makes of every historical object a variable monad which is denied any interaction with other—similarly viewed—monads and which possesses characteristics that appear to be absolutely immutable essences. It does indeed retain an individual uniqueness but this is only the uniqueness of mere facticity, of being-just-so. The 'value-relation' does not at all affect this structure, for it does no more than make it possible to *select* from the infinite mass of such facticities. Just as these individual historical monads are only related to each other in superficial manner, one which attempts no more than a simple factual description, so too their relation to the guiding value principle remains purely factual and contingent.

And yet, as the really important historians of the nineteenth century such as Riegl, Dilthey and Dvořák could not fail to notice, the essence of history lies precisely in the changes undergone by those *structural forms* which are the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and his outer life. But this only becomes objectively possible (and hence can only be adequately comprehended) when the individuality, the uniqueness of an epoch or an historical figure, etc., is grounded in the character of these structural forms, when it is discovered and exhibited in them and through them.

However, neither the people who experience it nor the historian have direct access to immediate reality in these, its true structural forms. It is first necessary to search for them and to find them—and the path to their discovery is the path to a knowledge of the historical process in its totality. At first sight—and anyone who insists upon immediacy may never go beyond this 'first sight' his whole life long—it may look as if the next stages implied a purely

intellectual exercise, a mere process of abstraction. But this is an illusion which is itself the product of the habits of thought and feeling of mere immediacy where the immediately given form of the objects, the fact of their existing here and now and in this particular way appears to be primary, real and objective, whereas their 'relations' seem to be secondary and subjective. For anyone who sees things in such immediacy every true change must seem incomprehensible. The undeniable fact of change must then appear to be a catastrophe, a sudden, unexpected turn of events that comes from outside and eliminates all mediations.⁷ If change is to be understood at all it is necessary to abandon the view that objects are rigidly opposed to each other, it is necessary to elevate their interrelatedness and the interaction between these 'relations' and the 'objects' to the same plane of reality. The greater the distance from pure immediacy the larger the net encompassing the 'relations', and the more complete the integration of the 'objects' within the system of relations, the sooner change will cease to be impenetrable and catastrophic, the sooner it will become comprehensible.

But this will only be true if the road beyond immediacy leads in the direction of a greater concreteness, if the system of mediating concepts so constructed represents the "totality of the empirical"—to employ Lassalle's felicitous description of the philosophy of Hegel. We have already noted the methodological limits of formal, rational and abstract conceptual systems. In this context it is important only to hold on to the fact that it is not possible to use them to surpass the purely factual nature of historical facts. (The critical efforts of Rickert and of modern historiography also focus on this point and they too have successfully proved this.) The very most that can be achieved in this way is to set up a formal typology of the manifestations of history and society using historical facts as *illustrations*. This means that only a chance connection links the theoretical system to the objective historical reality that the theory is intended to comprehend. This may take the form of a naïve 'sociology' in search of 'laws' (of the Comte/Spencer variety) in which the insolubility of the task is reflected in the absurdity of the results. Or else the methodological intractability may be a matter of critical awareness from the beginning (as with Max Weber) and, instead, an auxiliary science of history is brought into being. But in either case the upshot is the same: the problem of facticity is pushed back into history once again

and the purely historical standpoint remains unable to transcend its immediacy regardless of whether this is desired or not.

We have described the stance adopted by the historian in Rickert's sense (i.e. critically the most conscious type in the bourgeois tradition) as a prolongation of the state of pure immediacy. This appears to contradict the obvious fact that historical reality can only be achieved, understood and described in the course of a complicated process of mediation. However, it should not be forgotten that immediacy and mediation are themselves aspects of a dialectical process and that every stage of existence (and of the mind that would understand it) has its own immediacy in the sense given to it in the *Phenomenology* in which, when confronted by an immediately given object, "we should respond just as immediately or receptively, and therefore make no alteration to it, leaving it just as it presents itself".⁸ To go beyond this immediacy can only mean the genesis, the 'creation' of the object. But this assumes that the forms of mediation in and through which it becomes possible to go beyond the immediate existence of objects as they are given, can be shown to be *the structural principles and the real tendencies of the objects themselves*.

In other words, intellectual genesis must be identical in principle with historical genesis. We have followed the course of the history of ideas which, as bourgeois thought has developed, has tended more and more to wrench these two principles apart. We were able to show that as a result of this duality in method, reality disintegrates into a multitude of irrational facts and over these a network of purely formal 'laws' emptied of content is then cast. And by devising an 'epistemology' that can go beyond the abstract form of the immediately given world (and its conceivability) the structure is made permanent and acquires a justification—not inconsistently—as being the necessary 'precondition of the possibility' of this world view. But unable to turn this 'critical' movement in the direction of a true creation of the object—in this case of the thinking subject—and indeed by taking the very opposite direction, this 'critical' attempt to bring the analysis of reality to its logical conclusion ends *by returning to the same immediacy that faces the ordinary man of bourgeois society in his everyday life. It has been conceptualised, but only immediately*.

Immediacy and mediation are therefore not only related and mutually complementary ways of dealing with the objects of reality. But corresponding to the dialectical nature of reality and

the dialectical character of our efforts to come to terms with it, they are related dialectically. That is to say that every mediation must necessarily yield a standpoint from which the objectivity it creates assumes the form of immediacy. Now this is the relation of bourgeois thought to the social and historical reality of bourgeois society—illuminated and made transparent as it has been by a multiplicity of mediations. Unable to discover further mediations, unable to comprehend the reality and the origin of bourgeois society as the product of the same subject that has 'created' the comprehended totality of knowledge, *its ultimate point of view, decisive for the whole of its thought, will be that of immediacy*. For, in Hegel's words: "the mediating factor would have to be something in which both sides were one, in which consciousness would discern each aspect in the next, its purpose and activity in its fate, its fate in its purpose and activity, *its own essence in this necessity*".⁹

It may be hoped that our arguments up to this point have demonstrated with sufficient clarity that this particular mediation was absent and could not be otherwise than absent from bourgeois thought. In the context of economics this has been proved by Marx time and time again.¹⁰ And he explicitly attributed the mistaken ideas of bourgeois economists concerning the economic processes of capitalism to the absence of mediation, to the systematic avoidance of the categories of mediation, to the immediate acceptance of secondary forms of objectivity, to the inability to progress beyond the stage of merely immediate cognition. In Section II we were able to point out as emphatically as possible the various intellectual implications flowing from the character of bourgeois society and the systematic limitations of its thought. We drew attention there to the antinomies (between subject and object, freedom and necessity, individual and society, form and content, etc.) to which such thought necessarily led. It is important to realise at this point that although bourgeois thought only landed in these antinomies after the very greatest mental exertions, it yet accepted their existential basis as self-evident, as a simply unquestionable reality. Which is to say: bourgeois thought entered into an unmediated relationship with reality as it was given.

Thus Simmel has this to say about the ideological structure of reification in consciousness: "And therefore now that these counter-tendencies have come into existence, they should at least strive towards an ideal of absolutely pure separation: every

material content of life should become more and more material and impersonal so that the non-reifiable remnant may become all the more personal and all the more indisputably the property of the person."¹¹ In this way the very thing that should be understood and deduced with the aid of mediation becomes the accepted principle by which to explain all phenomena and is even elevated to the status of a value: namely the unexplained and inexplicable facticity of bourgeois existence as it is here and now acquires the patina of an eternal law of nature or a cultural value enduring for all time.

At the same time this means that history must abolish itself.¹² As Marx says of bourgeois economics: "Thus history existed once upon a time, but it does not exist any more." And even if this antinomy assumes increasingly refined forms in later times, so that it even makes its appearance in the shape of historicism, of historical relativism, this does not affect the basic problem, the abolition of history, in the slightest.

We see the unhistorical and antihistorical character of bourgeois thought most strikingly when we consider *the problem of the present as a historical problem*. It is unnecessary to give examples here. Ever since the World War and the World Revolution the total inability of every bourgeois thinker and historian to see the world-historical events of the present as universal history must remain one of the most terrible memories of every sober observer. This complete failure has reduced otherwise meritorious historians and subtle thinkers to the pitiable or contemptible mental level of the worst kind of provincial journalism. But it cannot always be explained simply as the result of external pressures (censorship, conformity to 'national' class interests, etc.). It is grounded also in a theoretical approach based upon unmediated contemplation which opens up an irrational chasm between the subject and object of knowledge, the same "dark and empty" chasm that Fichte described. This murky void was also present in our knowledge of the past, though this was obscured by the distance created by time, space and historical mediation. Here, however, it must appear fully exposed.

A fine illustration borrowed from Ernst Bloch will perhaps make this theoretical limitation clearer than a detailed analysis which in any case would not be possible here. When nature becomes landscape—e.g. in contrast to the peasant's unconscious living within nature—the artist's unmediated experience of the

landscape (which has of course only achieved this immediacy after undergoing a whole series of mediations) presupposes a distance (spatial in this case) between the observer and the landscape. The observer stands outside the landscape, for were this not the case it would not be possible for nature to become a landscape at all. If he were to attempt to integrate himself and the nature immediately surrounding him in space within 'nature-seen-as-landscape', without modifying his aesthetic contemplative immediacy, it would then at once become apparent that landscape only *starts* to become landscape at a definite (though of course variable) distance from the observer and that only as an observer set apart in space can he relate to nature in terms of landscape at all.

This illustration is only intended to throw light on the theoretical situation, for it is only in art that the relation to landscape is expressed in an appropriate and unproblematic way, although it must not be forgotten that even in art we find the same unbridgeable gap opening up between subject and object that we find confronting us everywhere in modern life, and that art can do no more than shape this problematic without however finding a real solution to it. But as soon as history is forced into the present—and this is inevitable as our interest in history is determined in the last analysis by our desire to understand the present—this "pernicious chasm" (to use Bloch's expression) opens up.

As a result of its incapacity to understand history, the contemplative attitude of the bourgeoisie became polarised into two extremes: on the one hand, there were the 'great individuals' viewed as the autocratic makers of history, on the other hand, there were the 'natural laws' of the historical environment. They both turn out to be equally impotent—whether they are separated or working together—when challenged to produce an interpretation of the present in all its radical novelty.¹³ The inner perfection of the work of art can hide this gaping abyss because in its perfected immediacy it does not allow any further questions to arise about a mediation no longer available to the point of view of contemplation. However, the present is a problem of history, a problem that refuses to be ignored and one which imperiously demands such mediation. It must be attempted. But in the course of these attempts we discover the truth of Hegel's remarks about one of the stages of self-consciousness that follow the definition of mediation already cited: "Therefore consciousness has become

an enigma to itself as a result of the very experience which was to reveal its truth to itself; it does not regard the effects of its deeds as its own deeds: what happens to it is not the same experience *for it* as it is *in itself*; the transition is not merely a formal change of the same content and essence seen on the one hand as the content and essence of consciousness and on the other hand as the object or *intuited* essence of itself. *Abstract necessity*, therefore passes for the merely negative, uncomprehended *power of the universal* by which individuality is destroyed".

2

The historical knowledge of the proletariat begins with knowledge of the present, with the self-knowledge of its own social situation and with the elucidation of its necessity (i.e. its genesis). That genesis and history should coincide or, more exactly, that they should be different aspects of the same process, can only happen if two conditions are fulfilled. On the one hand, all the categories in which human existence is constructed must appear as the determinants of that existence itself (and not merely of the description of that existence). On the other hand, their succession, their coherence and their connections must appear as aspects of the historical process itself, as the structural components of the present. Thus the succession and internal order of the categories constitute neither a purely logical sequence, nor are they organised merely in accordance with the facts of history. "Their sequence is rather determined by the relation which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society, and which is the exact opposite of what seems to be their natural order or the order of their historical development."¹⁴

This in turn assumes that the world which confronts man in theory and in practice exhibits a kind of objectivity which—if properly thought out and understood—need never stick fast in an immediacy similar to that of forms found earlier on. This objectivity must accordingly be comprehensible as a constant factor mediating between past and future and it must be possible to demonstrate that it is everywhere the product of man and of the development of society. To pose the question thus is to bring up the issue of the 'economic structure' of society. For, as Marx points out in his attack on Proudhon's pseudo-Hegelianism and vulgar

Kantianism for its erroneous separation of principle (i.e. category) from history: "When we ask ourselves why a particular principle was manifested in the eleventh or in the eighteenth century rather than in any other, we are necessarily forced to examine minutely what men were like in the eleventh century, what they were like in the eighteenth, what were their respective needs, their productive forces, their mode of production and their raw materials—in short, what were the relations between man and man which resulted from all these conditions of existence. To get to the bottom of all these questions—what is this but to draw up the real, profane history of men in every century and to present these men as both the authors and the actors of their own drama? But the moment we present men as the actors and authors of their own history, we arrive—by a detour—at the real starting-point, because we have abandoned those eternal principles of which we spoke at the outset."¹⁵

It would, however, be an error—an error which marks the point of departure of all vulgar Marxism—to believe that to adopt this standpoint is simply to accept the immediately given (i.e. the empirical) social structure. Moreover, the refusal to be content with this empirical reality, this going beyond the bounds of what is immediately given by no means signifies a straightforward dissatisfaction with it and a straightforward—abstract—desire to alter it. Such a desire, such an evaluation of empirical reality would indeed be no more than subjective: it would be a 'value-judgement', a wish, a utopia. And even though to aspire to a utopia is to affirm the will in what is philosophically the more objective and distilled form of an 'ought' (Sollen) it does not imply that the tendency to accept empirical reality has been overcome. This applies, too, to the subjectivism of the impulse to initiate change which admittedly appears here in a philosophically sophisticated form.

For precisely in the pure, classical expression it received in the philosophy of Kant it remains true that the 'ought' presupposes an existing reality to which the category of 'ought' remains *inapplicable* in principle. Whenever the refusal of the subject simply to accept his empirically given existence takes the form of an 'ought', this means that the immediately given empirical reality receives affirmation and consecration at the hands of philosophy: it is philosophically immortalised. "Nothing in the world of phenomena can be explained by the concept of freedom,"

Kant states, "the guiding thread in that sphere must always be the mechanics of nature."¹⁶

Thus every theory of the 'ought' is left with a dilemma: either it must allow the—meaningless—existence of empirical reality to survive unchanged with its meaninglessness forming the basis of the 'ought'—for in a meaningful existence the problem of an 'ought' could not arise. This gives the 'ought' a purely subjective character. Or else, theory must presuppose a principle that transcends the concept of both what 'is' and what 'ought to be' so as to be able to explain the real impact of the 'ought' upon what 'is'. For the popular solution of an infinite progression [towards virtue, holiness], which Kant himself had already proposed, merely conceals the fact that the problem is insoluble. Philosophically it is not important to determine the time needed by the 'ought' in order to reorganise what 'is'. The task is to discover the principles by means of which it becomes *possible in the first place* for an 'ought' to modify existence. And it is just this that the theory rules out from the start by establishing the mechanics of nature as an unchangeable fact of existence, by setting up a strict dualism of 'ought' and 'is', and by creating the rigidity with which 'is' and 'ought' confront each other—a rigidity which this point of view can never eliminate. However, if a thing is theoretically impossible it cannot be first reduced to infinitesimal proportions and spread over an infinite process and then suddenly be made to reappear as a reality.

It is, however, no mere chance that in its attempt to find a way out of the contradictions created by the fact that history is simply given, bourgeois thought should have taken up the idea of an infinite progression. For, according to Hegel, this progression makes its appearance "everywhere where *relative* determinants are driven to the point where they become antithetical so that they are united inseparably whilst an independent existence is attributed to each *vis-à-vis* the other. This progression is, therefore, the *contradiction* that is never resolved but is always held to be simply present."¹⁷ And Hegel has also shown that the methodological device that forms the logical first link in the infinite progression consists in establishing a purely quantitative relationship between elements that are and remain qualitatively incommensurable but in such a way that "each is held to be indifferent to this change".¹⁸

With this we find ourselves once more in the old antinomy of

the thing-in-itself but in a new form: on the one hand 'is' and 'ought' remain rigidly and irreducibly antithetical; on the other hand, by forging a link between them, an external, illusory link that leaves their irrationality and facticity untouched, an area of apparent Becoming is created thanks to which growth and decay, the authentic theme of history, is really and truly thrust out into the darkness of incomprehensibility. For the reduction to quantitative terms must affect not only the basic elements of the process but also its individual stages, and the fact that this procedure makes it appear as if a gradual transition were taking place, goes unobserved. "But this gradualness only applies to the externals of change, not to their quality; the preceding quantitative situation, infinitely close to the succeeding one yet possesses a different existence qualitatively. . . . One would like to employ gradual transitions in order to make a change *comprehensible* to oneself; but the gradual change is precisely the trivial one, it is the reverse of the true qualitative change. In the gradualness the connection between the two realities is abolished—this is true whether they are conceived of as states or as independent objects—; it is assumed that . . . one is simply external to the other; in this way the very thing necessary to *comprehension* is removed. . . . With this growth and decay are altogether abolished, or else the In Itself, the inner state of a thing prior to its existence is transformed into a *small amount of external existence* and the essential or conceptual distinction is changed into a simple, external difference of magnitude."¹⁹

The desire to leave behind the immediacy of empirical reality and its no less immediate rationalist reflections must not be allowed to become an attempt to abandon immanent (social) reality. The price of such a false process of transcendence would be the reinstating and perpetuating of empirical reality with all its insoluble questions, but this time in a philosophically sublimated way. But in fact, to leave empirical reality behind can only mean that the objects of the empirical world are to be understood as aspects of a totality, i.e. as the aspects of a total social situation caught up in the process of historical change. Thus the category of mediation is a lever with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such it is not something (subjective) foisted on to the objects from outside, it is no value-judgement or 'ought' opposed to their 'is'. *It is rather the manifestation of their authentic objective structure.* This can only become

apparent in the visible objects of consciousness when the false attitude of bourgeois thought to objective reality has been abandoned. Mediation would not be possible were it not for the fact that the empirical existence of objects is itself mediated and only appears to be unmediated in so far as the awareness of mediation is lacking so that the objects are torn from the complex of their true determinants and placed in artificial isolation.²⁰

Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the process by which the objects are isolated is not the product of chance or caprice. When true knowledge does away with the false separation of objects (and the even falser connections established by unmediated abstractions) it does much more than merely correct a false or inadequate scientific method or substitute a superior hypothesis for a defective one. It is just as characteristic of the social reality of the present that its objective form should be subjected to this kind of intellectual treatment as it is that the objective starting-point of such treatment should have been chosen. If, then, the standpoint of the proletariat is opposed to that of the bourgeoisie, it is nonetheless true that proletarian thought does not require a *tabula rasa*, a new start to the task of comprehending reality and one without any preconceptions. In this it is unlike the thought of the bourgeoisie with regard to the mediaeval forms of feudalism—at least in its basic tendencies. Just because its practical goal is the *fundamental* transformation of the whole of society it conceives of bourgeois society together with its intellectual and artistic productions as the *point of departure* for its own method.

The methodological function of the categories of mediation consists in the fact that with their aid those immanent meanings that necessarily inhere in the objects of bourgeois society but which are absent from the immediate manifestation of those objects as well as from their mental reflection in bourgeois thought, now become objectively effective and can therefore enter the consciousness of the proletariat. That is to say, if the bourgeoisie is held fast in the mire of immediacy from which the proletariat is able to extricate itself, this is neither purely accidental nor a purely theoretical scientific problem. The distance between these two theoretical positions is an expression of the differences between the social existence of the two classes.

Of course, the knowledge yielded by the standpoint of the proletariat stands on a higher scientific plane objectively; it does

after all apply a method that makes possible the solution of problems which the greatest thinkers of the bourgeois era have vainly struggled to find and in its substance, it provides the adequate historical analysis of capitalism which must remain beyond the grasp of bourgeois thinkers. However, this attempt to grade the methods objectively in terms of their value to knowledge is itself a social and historical problem, an inevitable result of the types of society represented by the two classes and their place in history. It implies that the 'falseness' and the 'one-sidedness' of the bourgeois view of history must be seen as a necessary factor in the systematic acquisition of knowledge about society.²¹

But also, it appears that every method is necessarily implicated in the existence of the relevant class. For the bourgeoisie, method arises directly from its social existence and this means that mere immediacy adheres to its thought, constituting its outermost barrier, one that can not be crossed. In contrast to this the proletariat is confronted by the need to break through this barrier, to overcome it inwardly *from the very start* by adopting its own point of view. And as it is the nature of the dialectical method constantly to produce and reproduce its own essential aspects, as its very being constitutes the denial of any smooth, linear development of ideas, the proletariat finds itself *repeatedly* confronted with the problem of its own point of departure both in its efforts to increase its theoretical grasp of reality and to initiate practical historical measures. For the proletariat the barrier imposed by immediacy has become an inward barrier. With this the problem becomes clear; by putting the problem in this way the road to a possible answer is opened up.²²

But it is no more than a possible answer. The proposition with which we began, viz. that in capitalist society reality is—immediately—the same for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, remains unaltered. But we may now add that this same reality employs the motor of class interests to keep the bourgeoisie imprisoned within this immediacy while forcing the proletariat to go beyond it. For the social existence of the proletariat is far more powerfully affected by the dialectical character of the historical process in which the mediated character of every factor receives the imprint of truth and authentic objectivity only in the mediated totality. For the proletariat to become aware of the dialectical nature of its existence is a matter of life and death, whereas the bourgeoisie uses the abstract categories of reflection, such as

quantity and infinite progression, to conceal the dialectical structure of the historical process in daily life only to be confronted by unmediated catastrophes when the pattern is reversed. This is based—as we have shown—on the fact that the bourgeoisie always perceives the subject and object of the historical process and of social reality in a double form: in terms of his consciousness the single individual is a perceiving subject confronting the overwhelming objective necessities imposed by society of which only minute fragments can be comprehended. But in reality it is precisely the conscious activity of the individual that is to be found on the object-side of the process, while the subject (the class) cannot be awakened into consciousness and this activity must always remain beyond the consciousness of the—apparent—subject, the individual.

Thus we find the subject and object of the social process co-existing in a state of dialectical interaction. But as they always appear to exist in a rigidly twofold form, each external to the other, the dialectics remain unconscious and the objects retain their twofold and hence rigid character. This rigidity can only be broken by catastrophe and it then makes way for an equally rigid structure. This unconscious dialectic which is for that very reason unmanageable "breaks forth in their confession of naïve surprise, when what they have just thought to have defined with great difficulty as a thing suddenly appears as a social relation and then reappears to tease them again as a thing, before they have barely managed to define it as a social relation."²³

For the proletariat social reality does not exist in this double form. It appears in the first instance as the pure *object* of societal events. In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed by the immediacy of his existence. This forces upon him the knowledge that the most elementary gratification of his needs, "his own individual consumption, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of reproduction or not, forms therefore an aspect of the production and the reproduction of capital; just as cleaning machinery does, whether it be done while the machinery is working or while it is standing idle".²⁴ The quantification of objects, their subordination to abstract mental categories makes its appearance in the life of the worker immediately as a process of abstraction of which he is the victim, and which cuts him off

from his labour-power, forcing him to sell it on the market as a commodity, belonging to him. And by selling this, his only commodity, he integrates it (and himself: for his commodity is inseparable from his physical existence) into a specialised process that has been rationalised and mechanised, a process that he discovers already existing, complete and able to function without him and in which he is no more than a cipher reduced to an abstract quantity, a mechanised and rationalised tool.

Thus for the worker the reified character of the immediate manifestations of capitalist society receives the most extreme definition possible. It is true: for the capitalist also there is the same doubling of personality, the same splitting up of man into an element of the movement of commodities and an (objective and impotent) observer of that movement.²⁵ But for his consciousness it necessarily appears as an activity (albeit this activity is objectively an illusion), in which effects emanate from himself. This illusion blinds him to the true state of affairs, whereas the worker, who is denied the scope for such illusory activity, perceives the split in his being preserved in the brutal form of what is in its whole tendency a slavery without limits. He is therefore forced into becoming the object of the process by which he is turned into a commodity and reduced to a mere quantity.

But this very fact forces him to surpass the immediacy of his condition. For as Marx says, "Time is the place of human development".²⁶ The quantitative differences in exploitation which appear to the capitalist in the form of quantitative determinants of the objects of his calculation, must appear to the worker as the decisive, qualitative categories of his whole physical, mental and moral existence. The transformation of quantity into quality is not only a particular aspect of the dialectical process of development, as Hegel represents it in his philosophy of nature and, following him, Engels in the *Anti-Dühring*. But going beyond that, as we have just shown with the aid of Hegel's *Logic*, it means the emergence of the truly objective form of existence and the destruction of those confusing categories of reflection which had deformed true objectivity into a posture of merely immediate, passive, contemplation.

Above all, as far as labour-time is concerned, it becomes abundantly clear that quantification is a reified and reifying cloak spread over the true essence of the objects and can only be regarded as an objective form of reality inasmuch as the subject is

uninterested in the essence of the object to which it stands in a contemplative or (seemingly) practical relationship. When Engels illustrates the transformation of quantity into quality by pointing to the example of water changing into solid or gaseous form²⁷ he is in the right so far as these points of transition are concerned. But this ignores the fact that when the point of view is changed even the transitions that had seemed to be purely quantitative now become qualitative. (To give an extremely trivial example, consider what happens when water is drunk; there is here a point at which 'quantitative' changes take on a qualitative nature.) The position is even clearer when we consider the example Engels gives from *Capital*. The point under discussion is the amount needed at a particular stage of production to transform a given sum into capital; Marx observes that it is at this point that quantity is changed into quality.²⁸

Let us now compare these two series (the growth or reduction in the sum of money and the increase or decrease in labour-time) and examine their possible quantitative changes and their transformation into quality. We note that in the first case we are in fact confronted only by what Hegel calls a "knotted line of proportional relations". Whereas in the second case every change is one of quality in its innermost nature and although its quantitative appearance is forced on to the worker by his social environment, its essence for him lies in its qualitative implications. This second aspect of the change obviously has its origin in the fact that for the worker labour-time is not merely the objective form of the commodity he has sold, i.e. his labour-power (for in that form the problem for him, too, is one of the exchange of equivalents, i.e. a quantitative matter). But in addition it is the determining form of his existence as subject, as human being.

This does not mean that immediacy together with its consequences for theory, namely the rigid opposition of subject and object, can be regarded as having been wholly overcome. It is true that in the problem of labour-time, just because it shows reification at its zenith, we can see how proletarian thought is necessarily driven to surpass this immediacy. For, on the one hand, in his social existence the worker is immediately placed *wholly* on the side of the object: he appears to himself immediately as an object and not as the active part of the social process of labour. On the other hand, however, the role of object is no longer purely immediate. That is to say, it is true that the worker is objectively

transformed into a mere object of the process of production by the methods of capitalist production (in contrast to those of slavery and servitude) i.e. by the fact that the worker is forced to objectify his labour-power over against his total personality and to sell it as a commodity. But because of the split between subjectivity and objectivity induced in man by the compulsion to objectify himself as a commodity, the situation becomes one that can be made conscious. In earlier, more organic forms of society, work is defined "as the direct function of a member of the social organism":²⁹ in slavery and servitude the ruling powers appear as the "immediate mainsprings of the production process" and this prevents labourers enmeshed in such a situation with their personalities undivided from achieving clarity about their social position. By contrast, "work which is represented as exchange value has for its premise the work of the isolated individual. It becomes social by assuming the form of its immediate antithesis, the form of abstract universality."

We can already see here more clearly and concretely the factors that create a dialectic between the social existence of the worker and the forms of his consciousness and force them out of their pure immediacy. Above all the worker can only become conscious of his existence in society when he becomes aware of himself as a commodity. As we have seen, his immediate existence integrates him as a pure, naked object into the production process. Once this immediacy turns out to be the consequence of a multiplicity of mediations, once it becomes evident how much it presupposes, then the fetishistic forms of the commodity system begin to dissolve: in the commodity the worker recognises himself and his own relations with capital. Inasmuch as he is incapable in practice of raising himself above the role of object his consciousness is the *self-consciousness of the commodity*; or in other words it is the self-knowledge, the self-revelation of the capitalist society founded upon the production and exchange of commodities.

By adding self-consciousness to the commodity structure a new element is introduced, one that is different in principle and in quality from what is normally described as consciousness 'of' an object. Not just because it is a matter of self-consciousness. For, as in the science of psychology, this might very well be consciousness 'of' an object, one which without modifying the way in which consciousness and object are related and thus without changing the knowledge so attained, might still 'accidentally' choose itself for

an object. From this it would follow that knowledge acquired in this way must have the same truth-criteria as in the case of knowledge of 'other' objects. Even when in antiquity a slave, an *instrumentum vocale*, becomes conscious of himself as a slave this is not self-knowledge in the sense we mean here: for he can only attain to knowledge of an object which happens 'accidentally' to be himself. Between a 'thinking' slave and an 'unconscious' slave there is no real distinction to be drawn in an objective social sense. No more than there is between the possibility of a slave's becoming conscious of his own social situation and that of a 'free' man's achieving an understanding of slavery. The rigid epistemological doubling of subject and object remains unaffected and hence the perceiving subject fails to impinge upon the structure of the object despite his adequate understanding of it.

In contrast with this, when the worker knows himself as a commodity his knowledge is practical. *That is to say, this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge.* In this consciousness and through it the special objective character of labour as a commodity, its 'use-value' (i.e. its ability to yield surplus produce) which like every use-value is submerged without a trace in the quantitative exchange categories of capitalism, now awakens and becomes *social reality*. The special nature of labour as a commodity which in the absence of this consciousness acts as an unacknowledged driving wheel in the economic process now objectifies itself by means of this consciousness. The specific nature of this kind of commodity had consisted in the fact that beneath the cloak of the thing lay a relation between men, that beneath the quantifying crust there was a qualitative, living core. Now that this core is revealed it becomes possible to recognise the fetish character of *every commodity* based on the commodity character of labour power: in every case we find its core, the relation between men, entering into the evolution of society.

Of course, all of this is only contained implicitly in the dialectical antithesis of quantity and quality as we meet it in the question of labour-time. That is to say, this antithesis with all its implications is only the *beginning* of the complex process of mediation whose goal is the knowledge of society as a historical totality. The dialectical method is distinguished from bourgeois thought not only by the fact that it alone can lead to a knowledge of totality; it is also significant that such knowledge is only attainable because the relationship between parts and whole has

become fundamentally different from what it is in thought based on the categories of reflection. In brief, from this point of view, the essence of the dialectical method lies in the fact that in every aspect correctly grasped by the dialectic the whole totality is comprehended and that the whole method can be unravelled from every single aspect.⁹⁰ It has often been claimed—and not without a certain justification—that the famous chapter in Hegel's *Logic* treating of Being, Non-Being and Becoming contains the whole of his philosophy. It might be claimed with perhaps equal justification that the chapter dealing with the fetish character of the commodity contains within itself the whole of historical materialism and the whole self-knowledge of the proletariat seen as the knowledge of capitalist society (and of the societies that preceded it). [*Capital I*, Chapter 1, Section 4].

Obviously, this should not be taken to mean that the whole of history with its teeming abundance should be thought of as being superfluous. Quite the reverse. Hegel's programme: to see the absolute, the goal of his philosophy, as a *result* remains valid for Marxism with its very different objects of knowledge, and is even of greater concern to it, as the dialectical process is seen to be identical with the course of history. The theoretical point we are anxious to emphasise here is merely the structural fact that the single aspect is not a segment of a mechanical totality that could be put together out of such segments, for this would lead us to see knowledge as an infinite progression. It must be seen instead as containing the possibility of unravelling the whole abundance of the totality from within itself. But this in turn can only be done if the aspect is seen as aspect, i.e. as a point of transition to the totality; if every movement beyond the immediacy that had made the aspect an aspect of the dialectical process (whereas before it had been nothing more than the evident contradiction of two categories of thought) is not to freeze once more in a new rigidity and a new immediacy.

This reflection leads us back to our concrete point of departure. In the Marxist analysis of labour under capitalism that we have sketched above, we encountered the antithesis between the isolated individual and the abstract generality within which he finds mediated the relation between his work and society. And once again it is important to emphasise, that as in every immediate and abstract form of existence as it is simply given, here, too, we find bourgeoisie and proletariat placed in an immediately similar

situation. But, here too, it appears that while the bourgeoisie remains enmeshed in its immediacy by virtue of its class role, the proletariat is driven by the specific dialectics of its class situation to abandon it. The transformation of all objects into commodities, their quantification into fetishistic exchange-values is more than an intensive process affecting the form of every aspect of life in this way (as we were able to establish in the case of labour-time). But also and inseparably bound up with this we find the extensive expansion of these forms to embrace the whole of society. For the capitalist this side of the process means an increase in the quantity of objects for him to deal with in his calculations and speculations. In so far as this process does acquire the semblance of a qualitative character, this goes no further than an aspiration towards the increased rationalisation, mechanisation and quantification of the world confronting him. (See the distinction between the dominance of merchant's capital and that of industrial capital, the capitalisation of agriculture, etc.) Interrupted abruptly now and again by 'irrational' catastrophes, the way is opened up for an infinite progression leading to the thorough-going capitalist rationalisation of society as a whole.

For the proletariat, however, the 'same' process means *its own emergence as a class*. In both cases a transformation from quantity to quality is involved. We need only consider the line of development leading from the mediaeval craft via simple co-operation and manufacture to the modern factory and we shall see the extent to which even for the bourgeoisie the qualitative changes stand out as milestones on the road. The *class meaning* of these changes lies precisely in the fact that the bourgeoisie regularly transforms each new qualitative gain back on to the quantitative level of yet another rational calculation. Whereas for the proletariat the 'same' development has a different class meaning: it means the *abolition of the isolated individual*, it means that workers can become conscious of the social character of labour, it means that the abstract, universal form of the societal principle as it is manifested can be increasingly concretised and overcome.

This enables us to understand why it is only in the proletariat that the process by which a man's achievement is split off from his total personality and becomes a commodity leads to a revolutionary consciousness. It is true, as we demonstrated in Section I, that the basic structure of reification can be found in all the social forms of modern capitalism (e.g. bureaucracy.) But this structure

can only be made fully conscious in the work-situation of the proletarian. For his work as he experiences it directly possesses the naked and abstract form of the commodity, while in other forms of work this is hidden behind the façade of 'mental labour', of 'responsibility', etc. (and sometimes it even lies concealed behind 'patriarchal' forms). The more deeply reification penetrates into the soul of the man who sells his achievement as a commodity the more deceptive appearances are (as in the case of journalism). Corresponding to the objective concealment of the commodity form, there is the subjective element. This is the fact that while the process by which the worker is reified and becomes a commodity dehumanises him and cripples and atrophies his 'soul'—as long as he does not consciously rebel against it—it remains true that precisely his humanity and his soul are not changed into commodities. He is able therefore to objectify himself completely against his existence while the man reified in the bureaucracy, for instance, is turned into a commodity, mechanised and reified in the only faculties that might enable him to rebel against reification. Even his thoughts and feelings become reified. As Hegel says: "It is much harder to bring movement into fixed ideas than into sensuous existence."³¹

In the end this corruption assumes objective forms also. The worker experiences his place in the production process as ultimate but at the same time it has all the characteristics of the commodity (the uncertainties of day-to-day movements of the market). This stands in contrast to other groups which have both the appearance of stability (the routine of duty, pension, etc.) and also the—abstract—possibility of an *individual's* elevating himself into the ruling class. By such means a 'status-consciousness' is created that is calculated to inhibit effectively the growth of a class consciousness. Thus the purely abstract negativity in the life of the worker is objectively the most typical manifestation of reification, it is the constitutive type of capitalist socialisation. But for this very reason it is also *subjectively* the point at which this structure is raised to consciousness and where it can be breached in practice. As Marx says: "Labour . . . is no longer grown together with the individual into one particular determination";³² once the false manifestations of this unmediated existence are abolished, the true existence of the proletariat as a class will begin.

3

It could easily appear at this point that the whole process is nothing more than the 'inevitable' consequence of concentrating masses of workers in large factories, of mechanising and standardising the processes of work and levelling down the standard of living. It is therefore of vital importance to see the truth concealed behind this deceptively one-sided picture. There is no doubt that the factors mentioned above are *the indispensable precondition* for the emergence of the proletariat as a class. *Without* them the proletariat would never have become a class and if they had not been continually intensified—by the natural workings of capitalism—it would never have developed into the decisive factor in human history.

Despite this it can be claimed without self-contradiction that we are not concerned here with an unmediated relation. What is unmediated is the fact that, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "these labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce". And the fact that this commodity is able to become aware of its existence as a commodity does not suffice to eliminate the problem. For the unmediated consciousness of the commodity is, in conformity with the simple form in which it manifests itself, precisely an awareness of abstract isolation and of the merely abstract relationship—external to consciousness—to those factors that create it socially. I do not wish to enter here into a discussion of the conflict between the (immediate) interests of the individual and the (mediated) interests of the class that have been arrived at through experience and knowledge; nor shall I discuss the conflict between immediate and momentary interests as opposed to general long-term interests.

It is self-evident that immediacy must be abandoned at this point. If the attempt is made to attribute an immediate form of existence to class consciousness, it is not possible to avoid lapsing into mythology: the result will be a mysterious species-consciousness (as enigmatic as the 'spirits of the nations' in Hegel) whose relation to and impact upon the individual consciousness is wholly incomprehensible. It is then made even more incomprehensible by a mechanical and naturalistic psychology and finally appears as a demiurge governing historical movement.³³

On the other hand, the growing class consciousness that has been brought into being through the awareness of a common

situation and common interests is by no means confined to the working class. The unique element in its situation is that its surpassing of immediacy represents an *aspiration towards society in its totality* regardless of whether this aspiration remains conscious or whether it remains unconscious for the moment. This is the reason why its *logic* does not permit it to remain stationary at a relatively higher stage of immediacy but forces it to persevere in an uninterrupted movement towards this totality, i.e. to persist in the dialectical process by which immediacies are constantly annulled and transcended. Marx recognised this aspect of proletarian class consciousness very early on. In his comments on the revolt of the Silesian weavers he lays emphasis on its "conscious and theoretical character".³⁴ He sees in the 'Song of the Weavers' a "bold battle cry which does not even mention the hearth, factory or district but in which the proletariat immediately proclaims its opposition to private property in a forceful, sharp, ruthless and violent manner". Their action revealed their "superior nature" for "whereas every other movement turned initially only against the industrialist, the visible enemy, this one attacked also the hidden enemy, namely the banker."

We would fail to do justice to the theoretical significance of this view if we were to see in the attitude that Marx—rightly or wrongly—attributes to the Silesian weavers nothing more than their ability to see further than their noses and to give weight to considerations whether spatial or conceptual that were rather more remote. For this is something that can be said in varying degrees of almost every class in history. What is crucial is how to interpret the connection between these remoter factors and the structure of the objects immediately relevant to action. We must understand the importance of this remoteness for the consciousness of those initiating the action and for its relation to the existing state of affairs. And it is here that the differences between the standpoints of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are thrown sharply into relief.

In bourgeois thought these remoter factors are simply incorporated into the rational calculation. They are conceived of as being similar to the factors that are within easy reach and which can be rationalised and quantified. The view that things as they appear can be accounted for by 'natural laws' of society is, according to Marx, both the highpoint and the 'insuperable barrier' of bourgeois thought. The notion of the laws of society

undergoes changes in the course of history and this is due to the fact that it originally represented the principle of the overthrow of (feudal) reality. Later on, while preserving the same structure, it became the principle for conserving (bourgeois) reality. However, even the initial revolutionary movement was unconscious from a social point of view.

For the proletariat, however, this ability to go beyond the immediate in search of the 'remoter' factors means the *transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action*. At first sight it appears as if the more immediate objects are no less subject to this transformation than the remote ones. It soon becomes apparent, however, that in their case the transformation is even more visible and striking. For the change lies on the one hand in the practical interaction of the awakening consciousness and the objects from which it is born and of which it is the consciousness. And on the other hand, the change means that the objects that are viewed here as aspects of the development of society, i.e. of the dialectical totality become fluid: they become parts of a process. And as the innermost kernel of this movement is praxis, its point of departure is of necessity that of action; it holds the immediate objects of action firmly and decisively in its grip so as to bring about their total, structural transformation and thus the movement of the whole gets under way.

The category of totality begins to have an effect long before the whole multiplicity of objects can be illuminated by it. It operates by ensuring that actions which seem to confine themselves to particular objects, in both content and consciousness, yet preserve an aspiration towards the totality, that is to say: action is directed objectively towards a transformation of totality. We pointed out earlier in the context of a purely methodological discussion, that the various aspects and elements of the dialectical method contain the structure of the whole; we see the same thing here in a more concrete form, a form more closely orientated towards action. As history is essentially dialectical, this view of the way reality changes can be confirmed at every decisive moment of transition. Long before men become conscious of the decline of a particular economic system and the social and juridical forms associated with it, its contradictions are fully revealed in the objects of its day-to-day actions.

When, for example, the theory and practice of tragedy from Aristotle to the age of Corneille, regard family conflicts as provid-

ing the most fruitful subject-matter for tragedy, we glimpse lying behind this view—ignoring its technical merits such as concentration—the feeling that the great changes in society are being revealed here with a sensuous, practical vividness. This enables their contours to be drawn clearly whereas it is subjectively and objectively impossible to grasp their essence, to understand their origins and their place in the whole process. Thus an Aeschylus³⁵ or a Shakespeare draw pictures of family life that provide us with such penetrating and authentic portraits of the social upheavals of their age that it is only now, with the aid of historical materialism, that it has become at all possible for theory to do justice to these artistic insights.

The place in society and hence the viewpoint of the proletariat goes further than the example just cited in one vital qualitative way. The uniqueness of capitalism is to be seen precisely in its abolition of all 'natural barriers' and its transformation of all relations between human beings into purely social relations.³⁶ Bourgeois thought, however, remains enmeshed in fetishistic categories and in consequence the products of human relations become ossified, with the result that such thought trails behind objective developments. The abstract, rational categories of reflection which constitute the objectively immediate expression of this—the first—socialisation of the whole of human society, appear in the eyes of the bourgeoisie as something ultimate and indestructible. (For this reason bourgeois thought remains always in an unmediated relation to such categories.) The proletariat, however, stands at the focal point of this socialising process. On the one hand, this transformation of labour into a commodity removes every 'human' element from the immediate existence of the proletariat, on the other hand the same development progressively eliminates everything 'organic', every direct link with nature from the forms of society so that socialised man can stand revealed in an objectivity remote from or even opposed to humanity. It is just in this objectification, in this rationalisation and reification of all social forms that we see clearly for the first time how society is constructed from the relations of men with each other.

But we can see this only if we also remember that these human interrelations are, in Engels' words, "bound to objects" and that they "appear as objects", only if we do not forget for a single moment that these human interrelations are not direct relations

between one man and the next. They are instead typical relations mediated by the objective laws of the process of production in such a way that these 'laws' necessarily become the forms in which human relations are directly manifested.

From this it follows, firstly, that man, who is the foundation and the core of all reified relations, can only be discovered by abolishing the immediacy of those relations. It is always necessary, therefore, to begin from this immediacy and from these reified laws. Secondly, these manifestations are by no means merely modes of thought, they are the forms in which contemporary bourgeois society is objectified. Their abolition, if it is to be a true abolition, cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their *practical* abolition as the *actual forms of social life*. Every kind of knowledge that aspires to remain pure knowledge is doomed to end up granting recognition to these forms once again. Thirdly, this praxis cannot be divorced from knowledge. A praxis which envisages a genuine transformation of these forms can only start to be effective if it intends to think out the process immanent in these forms to its logical conclusion, to become conscious of it and to make it conscious. "Dialectics", Hegel says, "is this *immanent* process of transcendence, in the course of which the one-sidedness and the limitation of the determinants of the understanding shows itself to be what it really is, namely their negation."³⁷

The great advance over Hegel made by the scientific standpoint of the proletariat as embodied in Marxism lay in its refusal to see in the categories of reflection a 'permanent' stage of human knowledge and in its insistence that they were the necessary mould both of thought and of life in bourgeois society, in the reification of thought and life. With this came the discovery of dialectics in history itself. Hence dialectics is not imported into history from outside, nor is it interpreted in the light of history (as often occurs in Hegel), but is *derived* from history made conscious as its logical manifestation at this particular point in its development.

Fourthly, it is the proletariat that embodies this process of consciousness. Since its consciousness appears as the immanent product of the historical dialectic, it likewise appears to be dialectical. That is to say, this consciousness is nothing but the expression of historical necessity. The proletariat "has no ideals to realise". When its consciousness is put into practice it can only breathe life into the things which the dialectics of history have forced to a crisis;

it can never 'in practice' ignore the course of history, forcing on it what are no more than its own desires or knowledge. For it is itself nothing but the contradictions of history that have become conscious. On the other hand, however, a dialectical necessity is far from being the same thing as a mechanical, causal necessity. Marx goes on to say, following the passage already quoted: The working class "has only to *liberate* (my italics) the elements of the new society that have already grown within the womb of the disintegrating society of the bourgeoisie".

In addition to the mere contradiction—the automatic product of capitalism—a *new* element is required: the consciousness of the proletariat must become deed. But as the mere contradiction is raised to a consciously dialectical contradiction, as the act of becoming conscious turns into *a point of transition in practice*, we see once more in greater concreteness the character of proletarian dialectics as we have often described it: namely, since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object *the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object*.

Only with this consciousness do we see the emergence of that profound irrationality that lurks behind the particular rationalistic disciplines of bourgeois society. This irrationality appears normally as an eruption, a cataclysm, and for that very reason it fails to alter the form and the arrangement of the objects on the surface. This situation, too, can be seen most easily in the simple events of everyday. The problem of labour-time has already been mentioned but only from the standpoint of the worker, where it was seen as the moment at which his consciousness emerges as the consciousness of the commodity (i.e. of the substantive core of bourgeois society). The instant that this consciousness arises and goes beyond what is immediately given we find in concentrated form the basic issue of the class struggle: the problem of *force*. For this is the point where the 'eternal laws' of capitalist economics fail and become dialectical and are thus compelled to yield up the decisions regarding the fate of history to the conscious actions of men. Marx elaborates this thought as follows: "We see then, that, apart from extremely elastic bounds, the nature of the exchange of commodities itself imposes no limit to the working day, no limit to surplus-labour. The capitalist maintains his right as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working days out of

one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the labourer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to one of definite normal duration. There is here, therefore, an antinomy, right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. Between equal rights force decides. Hence it is that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class."³⁸

But here, too, we must emphasise that force, which appears here concretely as the point at which capitalist rationalism becomes irrational, at which its laws fail to function, means something quite different for the bourgeoisie and for the proletariat. For the former, force is simply the continuation of its daily reality: it is true that it is no novelty but at the same time and for that very reason it is not able to resolve any single one of the contradictions the bourgeoisie has created itself. For the latter, on the other hand, its use, its efficacy, its potentiality and its intensity depend upon the degree to which the immediacy of the given has been overcome. No doubt, the fact that it is possible to go beyond the given, the fact that this consciousness is so great and so profound is itself a product of history. But what is historically possible cannot be achieved simply by a straightforward progression of the immediately given (with its 'laws'), but only by a consciousness of the whole of society acquired through manifold mediations, and by a clear aspiration to realise the dialectical tendencies of history. And the series of mediations may not conclude with unmediated contemplation: it must direct itself to the qualitatively new factors arising from the dialectical contradictions: it must be a movement of mediations advancing from the present to the future.³⁹

This in turn presupposes that the rigidly reified existence of the objects of the social process will dissolve into mere illusion, that the dialectic, which is self-contradictory, a logical absurdity as long as there is talk of the change of one 'thing' into another 'thing' (or of one thing-like concept into another), should test itself on every object. That is to say, its premise is that *things should be shown to be aspects of processes*. With this we reach the limits of the dialectics of the Ancients, the point at which they diverge from materialist and historical dialectics. (Hegel, too, marks the point of transition, i.e. he, too, combines elements of both views in a

not fully clarified manner.) The dialectics of the Eleatic philosophers certainly lay bare the contradictions underlying movement but the moving object is left unaffected. Whether the arrow is flying or at rest its objective nature as an arrow, as a thing remains untouched amidst the dialectical turmoil. It may be the case, as Heraclitus says, that one cannot step into the same river twice; but as the eternal flux is and does not become, i.e. does not bring forth anything qualitatively new, it is just a becoming that confronts the rigid existence of the *individual objects*. As a theory of the whole eternal becoming eternal being; behind stands revealed as the flowing river stands an unchanging essence, even though it may express itself in the incessant transformations of the individual objects.⁴⁰

Opposed to this is the Marxian dialectical process where the objective forms of the objects are themselves transformed into a process, a flux. Its revolutionary character appears quite clearly in the simple process of the reproduction of capital. The simple "repetition or continuity imbues the process with quite novel characteristics or rather causes the disappearance of some apparent characteristics which it possessed as an isolated discontinuous process". For "quite apart from all accumulation, the mere continuity of the process of production, in other words simple reproduction, sooner or later, and of necessity, converts every capital into accumulated capital, or capitalised surplus-value. Even if that capital was originally acquired by the personal labour of its employer, it sooner or later becomes value appropriated without an equivalent, the unpaid labour of others materialised either in money or in some other object."⁴¹

Thus the knowledge that social facts are not objects but relations between men is intensified to the point where facts are wholly dissolved into processes. But if their Being appears as a Becoming this should not be construed as an abstract universal flux sweeping past, it is no vacuous *durée réelle* but the unbroken production and reproduction of those relations that, when torn from their context and distorted by abstract mental categories, can appear to bourgeois thinkers as things. Only at this point does the consciousness of the proletariat elevate itself to the self-consciousness of society in its historical development. By becoming aware of the commodity relationship the proletariat can only become conscious of itself as the object of the economic process. For the commodity is produced and even the worker in his quality

as commodity, as an immediate producer is at best a mechanical driving wheel in the machine. But if the reification of capital is dissolved into an unbroken process of its production and reproduction, it is possible for the proletariat to discover that it is itself the *subject* of this process even though it is in chains and is for the time being unconscious of the fact. As soon, therefore, as the ready-made, immediate reality is abandoned the question arises: "Does a worker in a cotton factory produce merely cotton textiles? No, he produces capital. He produces values which serve afresh to command his labour and by means of it to create new values."⁴²

4

This throws an entirely new light on the problem of reality. If, in Hegel's terms, Becoming now appears as the truth of Being, and process as the truth about things, then this means that the *developing tendencies of history constitute a higher reality than the empirical 'facts'*. It is doubtless true that in capitalist society the past dominates the present—as indeed we have shown elsewhere.⁴³ But this only means that there is an antagonistic process that is not guided by a consciousness but is instead driven forward by its own immanent, blind dynamic and that this process stands revealed in all its immediate manifestations as the rule of the past over the present, the rule of capital over labour. It follows that any thinker who bases his thought on such ideas will be trapped in the frozen forms of the various stages. He will nevertheless stand helpless when confronted by the enigmatic forces thrown up by the course of events, and the actions open to him will never be adequate to deal with this challenge.

This image of a frozen reality that nevertheless is caught up in an unremitting, ghostly movement at once becomes meaningful when this reality is dissolved into the process of which man is the driving force. This can be seen only from the standpoint of the proletariat because the meaning of these tendencies is the abolition of capitalism and so for the bourgeoisie to become conscious of them would be tantamount to suicide. Moreover, the 'laws' of the reified reality of capitalism in which the bourgeoisie is compelled to live are only able to prevail over the heads of those who seem to be its active embodiments and agents. The average profit rate is the paradigm of this situation. Its relation to individual capitalists whose actions are determined by this

unknown and unknowable force shows all the symptoms of Hegel's 'ruse of reason'. The fact that these individual 'passions', despite which these tendencies prevail, assume the form of the most careful, farsighted and exact calculations does not affect this conclusion in the least; on the contrary, it reinforces it still further. For the fact that there exists the illusion of a rationalism perfected in every detail—dictated by class interests and hence subjectively based—makes it even more evident that this rationalism is unable to grasp the meaning of the overall process as it really is. Moreover, the situation is not attenuated by the fact that we are not confronted here by a unique event, a catastrophe, but by the unbroken production and reproduction of the same relation whose elements are converted into empirical facts and incorporated in reified form in the web of rational calculation. It only shows the strength of the dialectical antagonism controlling the phenomena of capitalist society.

The conversion of social-democratic ideas into bourgeois ones can always be seen at its clearest in the jettisoning of the dialectical method. As early as the Bernstein Debate it was clear that the opportunists had to take their stand 'firmly on the facts' so as to be able to ignore the general trends⁴⁴ or else to reduce them to the status of a subjective, ethical imperative. In like fashion the manifold misunderstandings in the debate on accumulation should be seen as part of the same phenomenon. Rosa Luxemburg was a genuine dialectician and so she realised that it was not possible for a purely capitalist society to exist as a tendency of history, as a tendency which inevitably determines the actions of men—unknown to them—long before it had itself become 'fact'. Thus the economic impossibility of accumulation in a purely capitalist society does not show itself by the 'cessation' of capitalism once the last non-capitalist has been expropriated, but by actions that force upon the capitalist class the awareness that this (empirically still remote) state of affairs is on its way: actions such as feverish colonialisation, disputes about territories providing raw materials or markets, imperialism and world war. For dialectical trends do not constitute an infinite progression that gradually nears its goal in a series of quantitative stages. They are rather expressed in terms of an unbroken *qualitative revolution* in the structure of society (the composition of the classes, their relative strengths, etc.) The ruling class of the moment attempts to meet the challenge of these changes in the only way open to it,

and on matters of detail it does appear to meet with some success. But in reality the blind and unconscious measures that seem to it to be so necessary simply hasten the course of events that destroy it.

The difference between 'fact' and tendency has been brought out on innumerable occasions by Marx and placed in the foreground of his studies. After all, the basic thought underlying his *magnum opus*, the retranslation of economic objects from things back into processes, into the changing relations between men, rests on just this idea. But from this it follows further that the question of theoretical priority, the location within the system (i.e. whether original or derivative) of the particular forms of the economic structure of society depends on their distance from this retranslation. Upon this is based the prior importance of industrial capital over merchant capital, money-dealing capital, etc. And this priority is expressed historically by the fact that these derivative forms of capital, that do not themselves determine the production process, are only capable of performing the negative function of dissolving the original forms of production. However, the question of "whither this process of dissolution will lead, in other words, what new mode of production will replace the old, does not depend on commerce, but on the character of the old mode of production itself".⁴⁵

On the other hand, merely from the point of view of theory it would appear that the 'laws governing these forms are in fact only determined by the 'contingent' empirical movements of supply and demand and that they are not the expression of any universal social trend. As Marx points out in a discussion of interest: "Competition does not, in this case, determine the deviations from the rule. There is rather no law of division except that enforced by competition."⁴⁶

In this theory of reality which allots a higher place to the prevailing trends of the total development than to the facts of the empirical world, the antithesis we stressed when considering the particular questions raised by Marxism (the antithesis between movement and final goal, evolution and revolution, etc.) acquires its authentic, concrete and scientific shape. For only this analysis permits us to investigate the concept of the 'fact' in a truly concrete manner, i.e. in the *social context* in which it has its origin and its existence. The direction to be taken by such an investigation has been outlined elsewhere,⁴⁷ although only with reference to

the relation between the 'facts' and the concrete totality to which they belong and in which they become 'real'.

But now it becomes quite clear that the social development and its intellectual reflex that was led to form 'facts' from a reality that had been undivided (originally, in its autochthonous state) did indeed make it possible to subject nature to the will of man. At the same time, however, they served to conceal the socio-historical grounding of these facts in relations between men "so as to raise strange, phantom powers against them".⁴⁸ For the ossifying quality of reified thought with its tendency to oust the process is exemplified even more clearly in the 'facts' than in the 'laws' that would order them. In the latter it is still possible to detect a trace of human activity even though it often appears in a reified and false subjectivity. But in the 'facts' we find the crystallisation of the essence of capitalist development into an ossified, impenetrable thing alienated from man. And the form assumed by this ossification and this alienation converts it into a foundation of reality and of philosophy that is perfectly self-evident and immune from every doubt. When confronted by the rigidity of these 'facts' every movement seems like a movement *impinging on* them, while every tendency to change them appears to be a merely subjective principle (a wish, a value judgement, an ought). Thus only when the theoretical primacy of the 'facts' has been broken, only when *every phenomenon is recognised to be a process*, will it be understood that what we are wont to call 'facts' consists of processes. Only then will it be understood that the facts are nothing but the parts, the *aspects* of the total process that have been broken off, artificially isolated and ossified. This also explains why the total process which is uncontaminated by any trace of reification and which allows the process-like essence to prevail *in all its purity* should represent the authentic, higher reality. Of course, it also becomes clear why in the reified thought of the bourgeoisie the 'facts' have to play the part of its highest fetish in both theory and practice. This petrified factuality in which everything is frozen into a 'fixed magnitude',⁴⁹ in which the reality that just happens to exist persists in a totally senseless, unchanging way precludes any theory that could throw light on even this immediate reality.

This takes reification to its ultimate extreme: it no longer points dialectically to anything beyond itself: its dialectic is mediated only by the reification of the immediate forms of pro-

duction. But with that a climax is reached in the conflict between existence in its immediacy together with the abstract categories that constitute its thought, on the one hand, and a vital societal reality on the other. For these forms (e.g. interest) appear to capitalist thinkers as the fundamental ones that determine all the others and serve as paradigms for them. And likewise, every decisive turn of events in the production process must more or less reveal that the true categorical structure of capitalism has been turned completely upside down.

Thus bourgeois thought remains fixated on these forms which it believes to be immediate and original and from there it attempts to seek an understanding of economics, blithely unaware that the only phenomenon that has been formulated is its own inability to comprehend its own social foundations. Whereas for the proletariat the way is opened to a complete penetration of the forms of reification. It achieves this by starting with what is dialectically the clearest form (the immediate relation of capital and labour). It then relates this to those forms that are more remote from the production process and so includes and comprehends them, too, in the dialectical totality.⁵⁰

5

Thus man has become the measure of all (societal) things. The conceptual and historical foundation for this has been laid by the methodological problems of economics: by dissolving the fetishistic objects into processes that take place among men and are objectified in concrete relations between them; by deriving the indissoluble fetishistic forms from the primary forms of human relations. At the conceptual level the structure of the world of men stands revealed as a system of dynamically changing relations in which the conflicts between man and nature, man and man (in the class struggle, etc.) are fought out. The structure and the hierarchy of the categories are the index of the degree of clarity to which man has attained concerning the foundations of his existence in these relations, i.e. the degree of consciousness of himself.

At the same time this structure and this hierarchy are the central theme of history. History is no longer an enigmatic flux *to which* men and things are subjected. It is no longer a thing to be explained by the intervention of transcendental powers or made meaningful by reference to transcendental values. History

is, on the one hand, the product (albeit the unconscious one) of man's own activity, on the other hand it is the succession of those processes in which the forms taken by this activity and the relations of man to himself (to nature, to other men) are overthrown. So that if—as we emphasised earlier on—the categories describing the structure of a social system are not immediately historical, i.e. if the empirical succession of historical events does not suffice to explain the origins of a particular form of thought or existence, then it can be said that despite this, or better, because of it, any such conceptual system will describe in its totality a definite stage in the society as a whole.

And the nature of history is precisely that every definition degenerates into an illusion: *history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man*. It is therefore not possible to reach an understanding of particular forms by studying their successive appearances in an empirical and historical manner. This is not because they transcend history, though this is and must be the bourgeois view with its addiction to thinking about isolated 'facts' in isolated mental categories. The truth is rather that these particular forms are not immediately connected with each other either by their simultaneity or by their consecutiveness. What connects them is their place and function in the totality and by rejecting the idea of a 'purely historical' explanation the notion of history as a universal discipline is brought nearer. When the problem of connecting isolated phenomena has become a problem of categories, by the same dialectical process every problem of categories becomes transformed into a historical problem. Though it should be stressed: it is transformed into a problem of universal history which now appears—more clearly than in our introductory polemical remarks—simultaneously as a problem of method and a problem of our knowledge of the present.

From this standpoint alone does history really become a history of mankind. For it contains nothing that does not lead back ultimately to men and to the relations between men. It is because Feuerbach gave this new direction to philosophy that he was able to exercise such a decisive influence on the origins of historical materialism. However, by transforming philosophy into 'anthropology' he caused man to become frozen in a fixed objectivity and thus pushed both dialectics and history to one side. And precisely this is the great danger in every 'humanism' or anthro-

pological point of view.⁵¹ For if man is made the measure of all things, and if with the aid of that assumption all transcendence is to be eliminated without man himself being measured against this criterion, without applying the same 'standard' to himself or—more exactly—without making man himself dialectical, then man himself is made into an absolute and he simply puts himself in the place of those transcendental forces he was supposed to explain, dissolve and systematically replace. At best, then, a dogmatic metaphysics is superseded by an equally dogmatic relativism.

This dogmatism arises because the failure to make man dialectical is complemented by an equal failure to make reality dialectical. Hence relativism moves within an essentially static world. As it cannot become conscious of the immobility of the world and the rigidity of its own standpoint it inevitably reverts to the dogmatic position of those thinkers who likewise offered to explain the world from premises they did not consciously acknowledge and which, therefore, they adopted uncritically. For it is one thing to relativise the truth about an individual or a species in an ultimately static world (masked though this stasis may be by an illusory movement like the "eternal recurrence of the same things" or the biological or morphological 'organic' succession of periods). And it is quite another matter when *the concrete, historical function and meaning* of the various 'truths' is revealed within a unique, concretised historical process. Only in the former case can we accurately speak of relativism. But in that case it inevitably becomes dogmatic. For it is only meaningful to speak of relativism where an 'absolute' is in some sense assumed. The weakness and the half-heartedness of such 'daring thinkers' as Nietzsche or Spengler is that their relativism only abolishes the absolute in appearance.

For, from the standpoint of both logic and method, the 'systematic location' of the absolute is to be found just where the apparent movement stops. The absolute is nothing but the fixation of thought, it is the projection into myth of the intellectual failure to understand reality concretely as a historical process. Just as the relativists have only appeared to dissolve the world into movement, so too they have only appeared to exile the absolute from their systems. Every 'biological' relativism, etc., that turns its limits into 'eternal' limits thereby involuntarily reintroduces the absolute, the 'timeless' principle of thought. And as long as

the absolute survives in a system (even unconsciously) it will prove logically stronger than all attempts at relativism. For it represents the highest principle of thought attainable in an undialectical universe, in a world of ossified things and a logical world of ossified concepts. So that *here* both *logically and methodologically* Socrates must be in the right as against the sophists, and logic and value theory must be in the right as against pragmatism and relativism.

What these relativists are doing is to take the present philosophy of man with its social and historical limits and to allow these to ossify into an 'eternal' limit of a biological or pragmatic sort. Actuated either by doubt or despair they thus stand revealed as a *decadent version* of the very rationalism or religiosity they mean to oppose. Hence they may sometimes be a not unimportant *symptom* of the inner weakness of the society which produced the rationalism they are 'combating'. But they are significant only as symptoms. It is always the culture they assail, the culture of the class that has not yet been broken, that embodies the authentic spiritual values.

Only the dialectics of history can create a radically new situation. This is not only because it relativises all limits, or better, because it puts them in a state of flux. Nor is it just because all those forms of existence that constitute the counterpart of the absolute are dissolved into processes and viewed as concrete manifestations of history so that the absolute is not so much denied as endowed with *its concrete historical shape and treated as an aspect of the process itself*.

But, in addition to these factors, it is also true that the historical process is something unique and its dialectical advances and reverses are an incessant struggle to reach higher stages of the truth and of the (societal) *self-knowledge of man*. The 'relativisation' of truth in Hegel means that the higher factor is always the truth of the factor beneath it in the system. This does not imply the destruction of 'objective' truth at the lower stages but only that it means something different as a result of being integrated in a more concrete and comprehensive totality. When Marx makes dialectics the essence of history, the movement of thought also becomes just a part of the overall movement of history. History becomes the history of the objective forms from which man's environment and inner world are constructed and which he strives to master in thought, action and art, etc. (Whereas

relativism always works with rigid and immutable objective forms.)

In the period of the "pre-history of human society" and of the struggles between classes the only possible function of truth is to establish the various possible attitudes to an essentially uncomprehended world in accordance with man's needs in the struggle to master his environment. Truth could only achieve an 'objectivity' relative to the standpoint of the individual classes and the objective realities corresponding to it. But as soon as mankind has clearly understood and hence *restructured* the foundations of its existence truth acquires a wholly novel aspect. When theory and practice are united it becomes possible to change reality and when this happens the absolute and its 'relativistic' counterpart will have played their historical role for the last time. For as the result of these changes we shall see the disappearance of that reality which the absolute and the relative expressed in like manner.

This process *begins* when the proletariat becomes conscious of its own class point of view. Hence it is highly misleading to describe dialectical materialism as 'relativism'. For although they share a common premise: man as the measure of all things, they each give it a different and even contradictory interpretation. The beginning of a 'materialist anthropology' in Feuerbach is in fact only a beginning and one that is in itself capable of a number of continuations. Marx took up Feuerbach's suggestion and thought it out to its logical conclusion. In the process he takes issue very sharply with Hegel: "Hegel makes of man a man of self-consciousness instead of making self-consciousness the self-consciousness of man, i.e. of real man as he lives in the real world of objects by which he is conditioned."⁵²

Simultaneously, however, and this is moreover at the time when he was most under the influence of Feuerbach, he sees man historically and dialectically, and both are to be understood in a double sense. (1) He never speaks of man in general, of an abstractly absolutised man: he always thinks of him as a link in a concrete totality, in a society. The latter must be explained from the standpoint of man but only after man has himself been integrated in the concrete totality and has himself been made truly concrete. (2) Man himself is the objective foundation of the historical dialectic and the subject-object lying at its roots, and as such he is decisively involved in the dialectical process. To formulate it in the initial abstract categories of dialectics: *he both*

is and at the same time is not. Religion, Marx says, in the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, "is the realisation in phantasy of the essence of man because the essence of man does not possess any true reality."⁵³ And as this non-existent man is to be made the measure of all things, the true demiurge of history, his non-being must at once become the concrete and historically dialectical form of critical knowledge of the present in which man is necessarily condemned to non-existence. The negation of his being becomes concretised, then, in the understanding of bourgeois society. At the same time—as we have already seen—the dialectics of bourgeois society and the contradictions of its abstract categories stand out clearly when measured against the nature of man. Following the criticism of Hegel's theory of consciousness we have just quoted, Marx announces his own programme in these terms: "It must be shown how the state and private property, etc., transform men into abstractions, or that they are the products of abstract man instead of being the reality of individual, concrete men." And the fact that in later years Marx adhered to this view of the abstract non-existence of man can be seen from the well-known and oft-quoted words from the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* in which bourgeois society is described as the last manifestation of the "pre-history of human society".

It is here that Marx's 'humanism' diverges most sharply from all the movements that seem so similar to it at first glance. Others have often recognised and described how capitalism violates and destroys everything human. I need refer only to Carlyle's *Past and Present* whose descriptive sections received the approval and in part the enthusiastic admiration of the young Engels. In such accounts it is shown, on the one hand, that it is not possible to be human in bourgeois society, and, on the other hand, that man as he exists is opposed without mediation—or what amounts to the same thing, through the mediations of metaphysics and myth—to this non-existence of the human (whether this is thought of as something in the past, the future or merely an imperative).

But this does no more than present the problem in a confused form and certainly does not point the way to a solution. The solution can only be discovered by seeing these two aspects as they appear in the concrete and real process of capitalist development, namely inextricably bound up with one another: i.e. the categories of dialectics must be applied to man as the measure of all things in a manner that also includes simultaneously a com-

plete description of the economic structure of bourgeois society and a correct knowledge of the present. For otherwise, any description will inevitably succumb to the dilemmas of empiricism and utopianism, of voluntarism and fatalism, even though it may give an accurate account of matters of detail. At best it will not advance beyond crude facticity on the one hand, while on the other it will confront the immanent course of history with alien and hence subjective and arbitrary demands.

This is without exception the fate that has befallen all those systems that start with man as their premise and strive in theory to solve the problems of his existence while in practice they seek to liberate him from them. This duality can be seen in all attempts of the type of the Christianity of the Gospels. Society as it actually exists is left unscathed. It makes no difference whether this takes the form of "giving to Caesar the things which are Caesar's", of Luther's sanctification of the powers that be, or of Tolstoy's "resist not evil". For as long as society, as it is, is to be declared sacrosanct it is immaterial with what emotional force or what metaphysical and religious emphasis this is done. What is crucial is that reality as it seems to be should be thought of as something man cannot change and its unchangeability should have the force of a moral imperative.

There are two aspects of the utopian counterpart to this ontology. The first is seen in God's annihilation of empirical reality in the Apocalypse, which can on occasion be absent (as with Tolstoy) without materially affecting the situation. The second lies in the utopian view of man as a 'saint' who can achieve an inner mastery over the external reality that cannot be eliminated. As long as such a view survives with all its original starkness its claims to offer a 'humanistic' solution to man's problems are self-refuting. For it is forced to deny humanity to the vast majority of mankind and to exclude them from the 'redemption' which alone confers meaning upon a life which is meaningless on the level of empirical experience. In so doing it reproduces the inhumanity of class society on a metaphysical and religious plane, in the next world, in eternity—of course with the signs reversed, with altered criteria and with the class structure stood on its head. And the most elementary study of any monastic order as it advances from a community of 'saints' to the point where it becomes an economic and political power at the side of the ruling class will make it abundantly clear that every relaxation of the utopian's

requirements will mean an act of adaptation to the society of the day.

But the 'revolutionary' utopianism of such views cannot break out of the inner limits set to this undialectical 'humanism'. Even the Anabaptists and similar sects preserve this duality. On the one hand, they leave the objective structure of man's empirical existence unimpaired (consumption communism), while on the other hand they expect that reality will be changed by awakening man's inwardness which, independent of his concrete historical life, has existed since time immemorial and must now be brought to life—perhaps through the intervention of a transcendental deity.

They, too, start from the assumption of man as he exists and an empirical world whose structure is unalterable. That this is the consequence of their historical situation is self-evident, but needs no further discussion in this context. It was necessary to emphasise it only because it is no accident that it was the revolutionary religiosity of the sects that supplied the ideology for capitalism in its purest forms (in England and America). For the union of an inwardness, purified to the point of total abstraction and stripped of all traces of flesh and blood, with a transcendental philosophy of history does indeed correspond to the basic ideological structure of capitalism. It could even be maintained that the equally revolutionary Calvinist union of an ethics in which man has to prove himself (interiorised asceticism) with a thorough-going transcendentalism with regard to the objective forces that move the world and control the fate of man (*deus absconditus* and predestination) contain the bourgeois reified consciousness with its things-in-themselves in a mythologised but yet quite pure state.⁵⁴

In the actively revolutionary sects the elemental vigour of a Thomas Münzer seems at first glance to obscure the irreducible quality and unsynthesised amalgam of the empirical and the utopian. But closer inspection of the way in which the religious and utopian premises of the theory *concretely impinge* upon Münzer's actions will reveal the same 'dark and empty chasm', the same 'hiatus irrationalis' between theory and practice that is everywhere apparent where a subjective and hence undialectical utopia directly assaults historical reality with the intention of changing it. Real actions then appear—precisely in their objective, revolutionary sense—wholly independent of the religious utopia: the latter can neither lead them in any real sense, nor can it offer concrete objectives or concrete proposals for their realisation.

When Ernst Bloch claims⁵⁵ that this union of religion with socio-economic revolution points the way to a deepening of the 'merely economic' outlook of historical materialism, he fails to notice that his deepening simply by-passes the real depth of historical materialism. When he then conceives of economics as a concern with objective things to which soul and inwardness are to be opposed, he overlooks the fact that the real social revolution can only mean the restructuring of the real and concrete life of man. He does not see that what is known as economics is nothing but the system of forms objectively defining this real life. The revolutionary sects were forced to evade this problem because in their historical situation such a restructuring of life and even of the definition of the problem was objectively impossible. But it will not do to fasten upon their weakness, their inability to discover the Archimedean point from which the whole of reality can be overthrown, and their predicament which forces them to aim too high or too low and to see in these things a sign of greater depth.

The individual can never become the measure of all things. For when the individual confronts objective reality he is faced by a complex of ready-made and unalterable objects which allow him only the subjective responses of recognition or rejection. Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way. (The 'species' cannot do this as it is no more than an individual that has been mythologised and stylised in a spirit of contemplation.) And the class, too, can only manage it when it can see through the reified objectivity of the given world to the process that is also its own fate. For the individual, reification and hence determinism (determinism being the idea that things are necessarily connected) are irremovable. Every attempt to achieve 'freedom' from such premises must fail, for 'inner freedom' presupposes that the world cannot be changed. Hence, too, the cleavage of the ego into 'is' and 'ought', into the intelligible and the empirical ego, is unable to serve as the foundation for a dialectical process of becoming, even for the individual subject. The problem of the external world and with it the structure of the external world (of things) is referred to the category of the empirical ego. Psychologically and physiologically the latter is subject to the same deterministic laws as apply to the external world in the narrow sense. The intelligible ego becomes a transcendental idea (regardless of whether it is viewed as a metaphysical existent

or an ideal to be realised). It is of the essence of this idea that it should preclude a dialectical interaction with the empirical components of the ego and *a fortiori* the possibility that the intelligible ego should recognise itself in the empirical ego. The impact of such an idea upon the empirical reality corresponding to it produces the same riddle that we described earlier in the relationship between 'is' and 'ought'.

This discovery makes it quite clear why all such views must end in mysticism and conceptual mythologies. Mythologies are always born where two terminal points, or at least two stages in a movement, have to be regarded as terminal points without its being possible to discover any concrete mediation between them and the movement. This is equally true of movements in the empirical world and of indirectly mediated movements of thought designed to encompass the totality. This failure almost always has the appearance of involving simultaneously the unbridgeable distance between the movement and the thing moved, between movement and mover, and between mover and thing moved. But mythology inevitably adopts the structure of the problem whose opacity had been the cause of its own birth. This insight confirms once again the value of Feuerbach's 'anthropological' criticism.

And thus there arises what at first sight seems to be the paradoxical situation that this projected, mythological world seems closer to consciousness than does the immediate reality. But the paradox dissolves as soon as we remind ourselves that we must abandon the standpoint of immediacy and solve the problem if immediate reality is to be mastered in truth. Whereas mythology is simply *the reproduction in imagination of the problem in its insolubility*. Thus immediacy is merely reinstated on a higher level. The desert beyond God which, according to Master Eckhart, the soul must seek in order to find the deity is nearer to the isolated individual soul than is its concrete existence within the concrete totality of a human society which from this background must be indiscernible even in its general outlines. Thus for reified man a robust causal determinism is more accessible than those mediations that could lead him out of his reified existence. But to posit the individual man as the measure of all things is to lead thought into the labyrinths of mythology.

Of course, 'indeterminism' does not lead to a way out of the difficulty for the individual. The indeterminism of the modern

pragmatists was in origin nothing but the acquisition of that margin of 'freedom' that the conflicting claims and irrationality of the reified laws can offer the individual in capitalist society. It ultimately turns into a mystique of intuition which leaves the fatalism of the external reified world even more intact than before. Jacobi had rebelled in the name of 'humanism' against the tyranny of the 'law' in Kant and Fichte, he demanded that "laws should be made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the law". But we can see that where Kant had left the established order untouched in the name of rationalism, Jacobi did no more than offer to glorify the same empirical, merely existing reality in the spirit of irrationalism.⁵⁶

Even worse, having failed to perceive that man in his negative immediacy was a moment in a dialectical process, such a philosophy, when consciously directed toward the restructuring of society, is forced to distort the social reality in order to discover the positive side, man as he exists, in one of its manifestations. In support of this we may cite as a typical illustration the well-known passage in Lassalle's *Bastiat-Schulze*: "There is no *social way* that leads out of this social situation. The vain efforts of *things* to behave like *human beings* can be seen in the English strikes whose melancholy outcome is familiar enough. *The only way* out for the workers is to be found in *that sphere within which* they can still be *human beings*, i.e. in the *state*. Hence the instinctive but infinite hatred which the liberal bourgeoisie bears the concept of the state in its every manifestation."⁵⁷

It is not our concern here to pillory Lassalle for his material and historical misconceptions. But it is important to establish that the abstract and absolute separation of the state from the economy and the rigid division between man as thing on the one hand and man as man on the other, is not without consequences. (1) It is responsible for the birth of a fatalism that cannot escape from immediate empirical facticity (we should think here of Lassalle's *Iron Law of Wages*). And (2) the 'idea' of the state is divorced from the development of capitalism and is credited with a completely utopian function, wholly alien to its concrete character. And this means that every path leading to a change in this reality is systematically blocked. Already the mechanical separation between economics and politics precludes any really effective action encompassing society in its totality, for this itself is based on the mutual interaction of both these factors. For a fatalism in

economics would prohibit any thorough-going economic measure, while a state utopianism would either await a miracle or else pursue a policy of adventurous illusions.

This disintegration of a dialectical, practical unity into an inorganic aggregate of the empirical and the utopian, a clinging to the 'facts' (in their untranscended immediacy) and a faith in illusions as alien to the past as to the present is characteristic in increasing measure of the development of social democracy. We have only to consider it in the light of our systematic analysis of reification in order to establish that such a posture conceals a total capitulation before the bourgeoisie—and this notwithstanding the apparent 'socialism' of its policies. For it is wholly within the class interests of the bourgeoisie to separate the individual spheres of society from one another and to fragment the existence of men correspondingly. Above all we find, justified in different terms but essential to social democracy nevertheless, this very dualism of economic fatalism and ethical utopianism as applied to the 'human' functions of *the state*. It means inevitably that the proletariat will be drawn on to the territory of the bourgeoisie and naturally the bourgeoisie will maintain its superiority.⁵⁸

The danger to which the proletariat has been exposed since its appearance on the historical stage was that it might remain imprisoned in its immediacy together with the bourgeoisie. With the growth of social democracy this threat acquired a real political organisation which artificially cancels out the mediations so laboriously won and forces the proletariat back into its immediate existence where it is merely a component of capitalist society and not *at the same time* the motor that drives it to its doom and destruction. Thus the proletariat submits to the 'laws' of bourgeois society either in a spirit of supine fatalism (e.g. towards the natural laws of production) or else in a spirit of 'moral' affirmation (the state as an ideal, a cultural positive). It is doubtless true that these 'laws' are part of an objective dialectic inaccessible to the reified consciousness and as such lead to the downfall of capitalism.⁵⁹ But as long as capitalism survives, such a view of society corresponds to the elementary class interests of the bourgeoisie. It derives every practical advantage from revealing aspects of the structure of immediate existence (regardless of how many insoluble problems may be concealed behind these abstract reflected forms) while veiling the overall unified dialectical structure.

On this territory, social democracy must inevitably remain in

the weaker position. This is not just because it renounces of its own free will the historical mission of the proletariat to point to the way out of the problems of capitalism that the bourgeoisie cannot solve, nor is it because it looks on fatalistically as the 'laws' of capitalism drift towards the abyss. But social democracy must concede defeat on every particular issue also. For when confronted by the overwhelming resources of knowledge, culture and routine which the bourgeoisie undoubtedly possesses and will continue to possess as long as it remains the ruling class, the only effective superiority of the proletariat, its only decisive weapon is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete historical totality; to see the reified forms as processes between men; to see the immanent meaning of history that only appears negatively in the contradictions of abstract forms, to raise its positive side to consciousness and to put it into practice. With the ideology of social democracy the proletariat falls victim to all the antinomies of reification that we have hitherto analysed in such detail. The important role increasingly played in this ideology by 'man' as a value, an ideal, an imperative, accompanied, of course, by a growing 'insight' into the necessity and logic of the actual economic process, is only one symptom of this relapse into the reified immediacy of the bourgeoisie. For the unmediated juxtaposition of natural laws and imperatives is the logical expression of immediate societal existence in bourgeois society.

6

Reification is, then, the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by *constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development.* But it must be emphasised that (1) the structure can be disrupted only if the immanent contradictions of the process are made conscious. Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality. If the proletariat fails to take this step

the contradiction will remain unresolved and will be reproduced by the dialectical mechanics of history at a higher level, in an altered form and with increased intensity. It is in *this* that the objective necessity of history consists. The deed of the proletariat can never be more than to take the *next step*⁶⁰ in the process. Whether it is 'decisive' or 'episodic' depends on the concrete circumstances, but in this context, where we are concerned with our knowledge of the structure, it does not much matter as we are talking about an unbroken process of such disruptions.

(2) Inseparable from this is the fact that the relation to totality does not need to become explicit, the plenitude of the totality does not need to be consciously integrated into the motives and objects of action. What is crucial is that there should be an aspiration towards totality, that action should serve the purpose, described above, in the totality of the process. Of course, with the mounting capitalist socialisation of society it becomes increasingly possible and hence necessary to integrate the content of each specific event into the totality of contents.⁶¹ (World economics and world politics are much more immediate forms of existence today than they were in Marx's time.) However, this does not in the least contradict what we have maintained here, namely that the decisive actions can involve an—apparently—trivial matter. For here we can see in operation the truth that in the dialectical totality the individual elements incorporate the structure of the whole. This was made clear on the level of theory by the fact that e.g. it was possible to gain an understanding of the whole of bourgeois society from its commodity structure. We now see the same state of affairs in practice, when the fate of a whole process of development can depend on a decision in an—apparently—trivial matter.

Hence (3) when judging whether an action is right or wrong it is essential to relate it to its function in the total process. Proletarian thought is practical thought and as such is strongly pragmatic. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating," Engels says, providing an idiomatic gloss on Marx's second *Thesis on Feuerbach*: "The question whether human thinking can pretend to objective truth is not a theoretical but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question." This pudding, however, is the making of the

proletariat into a class: the process by which its class consciousness becomes real in practice. This gives a more concrete form to the proposition that the proletariat is the identical subject-object of the historical process, i.e. the first subject in history that is (objectively) capable of an adequate social consciousness. It turns out that the contradictions in which the antagonisms of the mechanics of history are expressed are only capable of an objective social solution in practice if the solution is at the same time a new, practically-won consciousness on the part of the proletariat.⁶² Whether an action is functionally right or wrong is decided ultimately by the evolution of proletarian class consciousness.

The eminently practical nature of this consciousness is to be seen (4) in that an adequate, correct consciousness means a change in its own objects, and in the first instance, in itself. In Section II of this essay we discussed Kant's view of the ontological proof of God's existence, of the problem of existence and thought, and we quoted his very logical argument to the effect that if existence were a true predicate, then "I could not say that precisely the object of my concept exists". Kant was being very consistent when he denied this. At the same time it is clear that from the standpoint of the proletariat the empirically given reality of the objects does dissolve into processes and tendencies; this process is no single, unrepeatably tearing of the veil that masks the process but the unbroken alternation of ossification, contradiction and movement; and thus the proletariat represents the true reality, namely the tendencies of history awakening into consciousness. We must therefore conclude that Kant's seemingly paradoxical statement is a precise description of what actually follows from every functionally correct action of the proletariat.

This insight alone puts us in a position to see through the last vestiges of the reification of consciousness and its intellectual form, the problem of the thing-in-itself. Even Friedrich Engels has put the matter in a form that may easily give rise to misunderstandings. In his account of what separates Marx and himself from the school of Hegel, he says: "We comprehend the concepts in our heads once more materialistically—as reflections of real things instead of regarding the real things as reflections of this or that stage of the absolute concept."⁶³

But this leaves a question to be asked and Engels not only asks it but also answers it on the following page quite in agreement with us. There he says: "that the world is not to be comprehended

as a complex of ready-made *things*, but as a complex of *processes*". But if there are no things, what is 'reflected' in thought? We cannot hope to offer even an outline of the history of the 'reflection theory' even though we could only unravel the full implications of this problem with its aid. In the theory of 'reflection' we find the theoretical embodiment of the duality of thought and existence, consciousness and reality, that is so intractable to the reified consciousness. And from *that point of view* it is immaterial whether things are to be regarded as reflections of concepts or whether concepts are reflections of things. In both cases the duality is firmly established.

Kant's grandiose and very cogent attempt to overcome this duality *by logic*, his theory of the synthetic function of consciousness in the creation of the domain of theory could not arrive at any *philosophical* solution to the question. For his duality was merely banished from logic to reappear in perpetuity in the form of the duality of phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. And in these terms it remained an insoluble philosophical problem. The later history of his theory shows how very unsatisfactory his solution was. To see Kant's epistemology as scepticism and agnosticism is of course a misunderstanding. But it is one that has at least one root in the theory itself—not, be it admitted, in the logic but in the relation between the logic and the metaphysics, in the relation between thought and existence.

It must be clearly understood that every contemplative stance and thus every kind of 'pure thought' that must undertake the task of knowing an object outside itself raises the problem of subjectivity and objectivity. The object of thought (as something outside) becomes something alien to the subject. This raises the problem of whether thought corresponds to the object! The 'purer' the cognitive character of thought becomes and the more 'critical' thought is, the more vast and impassable does the abyss appear that yawns between the 'subjective' mode of thought and the objectivity of the (existing) object. Now it is possible—as with Kant—to view the object of thought as something 'created' by the forms of thought. But this does not suffice to solve the problem of existence, and Kant, by removing it from the sphere of epistemology, creates this philosophical situation for himself: even his excogitated objects must correspond to some 'reality' or other. But this reality is treated as a thing-in-itself and placed outside the realm of that which can be known by the

'critical' mind. It is with respect to *this* reality (which is the authentic, the metaphysical reality for Kant, as his ethics shows) that his position remains one of scepticism and agnosticism. This remains true however unsceptical was the solution he found for epistemological objectivity and the immanent theory of truth.

It is, therefore, no accident that it is from Kant that the various agnostic trends have taken their cue (one has only to think of Maimon or Schopenhauer). It is even less of an accident that Kant himself was responsible for the reintroduction into philosophy of the principle that is most violently opposed to his own synthetic principle of 'creation' (*Erzeugung*), namely the Platonic theory of ideas. For this theory is the most extreme attempt to rescue the objectivity of thought and its correspondence with its object, without having to resort to empirical and material reality to find a criterion for the correspondence.

Now it is evident that every consistent elaboration of the theory of ideas requires a principle that both links thought with the objects of the world of ideas and also connects these with the objects of the empirical world (recollection, intellectual intuition, etc.). But this in turn leads the theory of thought to transcend the limits of thought itself: and it becomes psychology, metaphysics or the history of philosophy. Thus instead of a solution to the problem we are left with complexities that have been doubled or tripled. And the problem remains without a solution. For the insight that a correspondence or relationship of 'reflection' cannot in principle be established between heterogeneous objects is precisely the driving force behind every view of the type of the Platonic theory of ideas. This undertakes to prove that the same ultimate essence forms the core of the objects of thought as well as of thought itself. Hegel gives an apt description of the basic philosophical theme of the theory of recollection from this standpoint when he says that it provides a myth of man's fundamental situation: "in him lies the truth and the only problem is to make it conscious".⁶⁴ But how to prove this identity in thought and existence of the ultimate substance?—above all when it has been shown that they are completely heterogeneous in the way in which they present themselves to the intuitive, contemplative mind? It becomes necessary to invoke metaphysics and with the aid of its overt or concealed mythical mediations thought and existence can once again be reunited. And this despite the fact that their separation is not merely the starting-point of 'pure'

thought but also a factor that constantly informs it whether it likes it or not.

The situation is not improved in the slightest when the mythology is turned on its head and thought is deduced from empirical material reality. Rickert once described materialism as an inverted Platonism. And he was right in so doing. As long as thought and existence persist in their old, rigid opposition, as long as their own structure and the structure of their interconnections remain unchanged, then the view that thought is a product of the brain and hence must correspond to the objects of the empirical world is just such a mythology as those of recollection and the world of Platonic ideas. It is a mythology for it is incapable of explaining the *specific* problems that arise here by reference to *this principle*. It is forced to leave them unsolved, to solve them with the 'old' methods and to reinstate the mythology as a key to the whole unanalysed complex.⁶⁵ But as will already be clear, it is not possible to eliminate the distinction by means of an infinite progression. For that produces either a pseudo-solution or else the theory of reflection simply reappears in a different guise.⁶⁶

Historical thought perceives the correspondence of thought and existence in their—immediate, but no more than immediate—rigid, reified structure. This is precisely the point at which non-dialectical thought is confronted by this insoluble problem. From the fact of this rigid confrontation it follows (1) that thought and (empirical) existence cannot reflect each other, but also (2) that the criterion of correct thought can only be found in the realm of reflection. As long as man adopts a stance of intuition and contemplation he can only relate to his own thought and to the objects of the empirical world in an immediate way. He accepts both as ready-made—produced by historical reality. As he wishes only to know the world and not to change it he is forced to accept both the empirical, material rigidity of existence and the logical rigidity of concepts as unchangeable. His mythological analyses are not concerned with the concrete origins of this rigidity nor with the real factors inherent in them that could lead to its elimination. They are concerned solely to discover how the *unchanged nature* of these data could be conjoined whilst leaving them unchanged and how to explain them *as such*.

The solution proposed by Marx in his *Theses on Feuerbach* is to transform philosophy into praxis. But, as we have seen, this praxis has its objective and structural preconditions and complement

in the view that reality is a "complex of processes". That is to say, in the view that the movements of history represent the true reality; not indeed a transcendental one, but at all events a higher one than that of the rigid, reified facts of the empirical world, from which they arise. For the reflection theory this means that thought and consciousness are orientated towards reality but, at the same time, the criterion of truth is provided by relevance to reality. This reality is by no means identical with empirical existence. This reality is not, it becomes.

The process of Becoming is to be understood in a twofold sense. (1) In this Becoming, in this tendency, in this process the true nature of the object is revealed. This is meant in the sense that—as in the case of the instances we have cited and which could easily be multiplied—the transformation of things into a process provides a *concrete* solution to all the *concrete* problems created by the paradoxes of existent objects. The recognition that one cannot step into the same river twice is just an extreme way of highlighting the unbridgeable abyss between concept and reality. It does nothing to increase our concrete knowledge of the river.

In contrast with this, the recognition that capital as a process can only be accumulated, or rather accumulating, capital, provides the positive, concrete solution to a whole host of positive, concrete problems of method and of substance connected with capital. Hence only by overcoming the—theoretical—duality of philosophy and special discipline, of methodology and factual knowledge can the way be found by which to annul the duality of thought and existence. Every attempt to overcome the duality dialectically in logic, in a system of thought stripped of every concrete relation to existence, is doomed to failure. (And we may observe that despite many other opposing tendencies in his work, Hegel's philosophy was of this type.) For every pure logic is Platonic: it is thought released from existence and hence ossified. Only by conceiving of thought as a form of reality, as a factor in the total process can philosophy overcome its own rigidity dialectically and take on the quality of Becoming.⁶⁷

(2) Becoming is also the mediation between past and future. But it is the mediation between the concrete, i.e. historical past, and the equally concrete, i.e. historical future. When the concrete here and now dissolves into a process it is no longer a continuous, intangible moment, immediacy slipping away;⁶⁸ it is the focus of the deepest and most widely ramified mediation, the focus of

decision and of the birth of the new. As long as man concentrates his interest contemplatively upon the past *or* future, both ossify into an alien existence. And between the subject and the object lies the unbridgeable "pernicious chasm" of the present. Man must be able to comprehend the present as a becoming. He can do this by seeing in it the tendencies out of whose dialectical opposition he can *make* the future. Only when he does this will the present be a process of becoming, that belongs to *him*. Only he who is willing and whose mission it is to create the future can see the present in its concrete truth. As Hegel says: "Truth is not to treat objects as alien."⁶⁹

But when the truth of becoming is the future that is to be created but has not yet been born, when it is the new that resides in the tendencies that (with our conscious aid) will be realised, then the question whether thought is a reflection appears quite senseless. It is true that reality is the criterion for the correctness of thought. But reality is not, it becomes—and to become the participation of thought is needed. We see here the fulfilment of the programme of classical philosophy: the principle of genesis means in fact that dogmatism is overcome (above all in its most important historical incarnation: the Platonic theory of reflection). But only concrete (historical) becoming can perform the function of such a genesis. And consciousness (the practical class consciousness of the proletariat) is a necessary, indispensable, integral part of that process of becoming.

Thus thought and existence are not identical in the sense that they 'correspond' to each other, or 'reflect' each other, that they 'run parallel' to each other or 'coincide' with each other (all expressions that conceal a rigid duality). Their identity is that they are aspects of one and the same real historical and dialectical process. What is 'reflected' in the consciousness of the proletariat is the new positive reality arising out of the dialectical contradictions of capitalism. And this is by no means the invention of the proletariat, nor was it 'created' out of the void. It is rather the inevitable consequence of the process in its totality; one which changed from being an abstract possibility to a concrete reality only after it had become part of the consciousness of the proletariat and had been made practical by it. And this is no mere formal transformation. For a possibility to be realised, for a tendency to become actual, what is required is that the objective components of a society should be transformed; their functions must be changed

and with them the structure and content of every individual object.

But it must never be forgotten: *only the practical class consciousness of the proletariat* possesses this ability to transform things. Every contemplative, purely cognitive stance leads ultimately to a divided relationship to its object. Simply to transplant the structure we have discerned here into any stance other than that of proletarian action—for only the class can be practical in its relation to the total process—would mean the creation of a new conceptual mythology and a regression to the standpoint of classical philosophy refuted by Marx. For every purely cognitive stance bears the stigma of immediacy. That is to say, it never ceases to be confronted by a whole series of ready-made objects that cannot be dissolved into processes. Its dialectical nature can survive only in the tendency towards praxis and in its orientation towards the actions of the proletariat. It can survive only if it remains critically aware of its own tendency to immediacy inherent in every non-practical stance and if it constantly strives to explain critically the mediations, the relations to the totality as a process, to the actions of the proletariat as a class.

The practical character of the thought of the proletariat is born and becomes real as the result of an equally dialectical process. In this thought self-criticism is more than the self-criticism of its object, i.e. the self-criticism of bourgeois society. It is also a critical awareness of how much of its own practical nature has really become manifest, which stage of the genuinely practicable is objectively possible and how much of what is objectively possible has been made real. For it is evident that however clearly we may have grasped the fact that society consists of processes, however thoroughly we may have unmasked the fiction of its rigid reification, this does not mean that we are able to annul the 'reality' of this fiction in capitalist society *in practice*. The moments in which this insight *can* really be converted into practice are determined by developments in society. Thus proletarian thought is in the first place merely a *theory of praxis* which only gradually (and indeed often spasmodically) transforms itself into a *practical theory* that overturns the real world. The individual stages of this process cannot be sketched in here. They alone would be able to show how proletarian class consciousness evolves dialectically (i.e. how the proletariat becomes a class). Only then would it be possible to throw light on the intimate dialectical process of inter-

action between the socio-historical situation and the class consciousness of the proletariat. Only then would the statement that the proletariat is the identical subject-object of the history of society become truly concrete.⁷⁰

Even the proletariat can only overcome reification as long as it is oriented towards practice. And this means that there can be no single act that will eliminate reification in all its forms at one blow; it means that there will be a whole host of objects that at least in appearance remain more or less unaffected by the process. This is true in the first instance of nature. But it is also illuminating to observe how a whole set of social phenomena become dialecticised by a different path than the one we have traced out to show the nature of the dialectics of history and the process by which the barriers of reification can be shattered. We have observed, for instance, how certain works of art are extraordinarily sensitive to the qualitative nature of dialectical changes without their becoming conscious of the antagonisms which they lay bare and to which they give artistic form.

At the same time we observed other societal phenomena which contain inner antagonisms but only in an abstract form, i.e. their inner contradictions are merely the secondary effects of the inner contradictions of other, more primary phenomena. This means that these last contradictions can only become visible if mediated by the former and can only become dialectical when they do. (This is true of interest as opposed to profit.) It would be necessary to set forth the whole system of these qualitative gradations in the dialectical character of the different kinds of phenomena before we should be in a position to arrive at the concrete totality of the categories with which alone true knowledge of the present is possible. The hierarchy of these categories would determine at the same time the point where system and history meet, thus fulfilling Marx's postulate (already cited) concerning the categories that "their sequence is determined by the relations they have to each other in modern bourgeois society".

In every consciously dialectical system of thought, however, any sequence is itself dialectical—not only for Hegel, but also as early as Proclus. Moreover, the dialectical deduction of categories cannot possibly involve a simple juxtaposition or even the succession of identical forms. Indeed, if the method is not to degenerate into a rigid schematicism, even identical formal patterns must not be allowed to function in a repetitively mechanical way (thus, the

famous triad: thesis, antithesis and synthesis). When the dialectical method becomes rigid, as happens frequently in Hegel, to say nothing of his followers, the only control device and the only protection is the concrete historical method of Marx. But it is vital that we should draw all the conclusions possible from this situation. Hegel himself distinguishes between negative and positive dialectics.⁷¹ By positive dialectics he understands the growth of a particular content, the elucidation of a concrete totality. In the process, however, we find that he almost always advances from the determinants of reflection to the positive dialectics even though his conception of nature, for example, as "otherness", as the idea in a state of "being external to itself"⁷² directly precludes a positive dialectics. (It is here that we can find one of the theoretical sources for the frequently artificial constructs of his philosophy of nature.) Nevertheless, Hegel does perceive clearly at times that the dialectics of nature can never become anything more exalted than a dialectics of movement witnessed by the detached observer, as the subject cannot be integrated into the dialectical process, at least not at the stage reached hitherto. Thus he emphasises that Zeno's antinomies reached the same level as those of Kant,⁷³ with the implication that it is not possible to go any higher.

From this we deduce the necessity of separating the merely objective dialectics of nature from those of society. For in the dialectics of society the subject is included in the reciprocal relation in which theory and practice become dialectical with reference to one another. (It goes without saying that the growth of *knowledge* about nature is a social phenomenon and therefore to be included in the second dialectical type.) Moreover, if the dialectical method is to be consolidated concretely it is essential that the different types of dialectics should be set out in concrete fashion. It would then become clear that the Hegelian distinction between positive and negative dialectics as well as the different levels of intuition, representation and concept [Anschauung, Vorstellung, Begriff]—(a terminology that need not be adhered to) are only some of the possible types of distinction to be drawn. For the others the economic works of Marx provide abundant material for a clearly elaborated analysis of structures. However, even to outline a typology of these dialectical forms would be well beyond the scope of this study.

Still more important than these systematic distinctions is the

fact that even the objects in the very centre of the dialectical process can only slough off their reified form after a laborious process. A process in which the seizure of power by the proletariat and even the organisation of the state and the economy on socialist lines are only stages. They are, of course, extremely important stages, but they do not mean that the ultimate objective has been achieved. And it even appears as if the decisive crisis-period of capitalism may be characterised by the tendency to intensify reification, to bring it to a head. Roughly in the sense in which Lassalle wrote to Marx: "Hegel used to say in his old age that directly before the emergence of something qualitatively new, the old state of affairs gathers itself up into its original, purely general, essence, into its simple totality, transcending and absorbing back into itself all those marked differences and peculiarities which it evinced when it was still viable."⁷⁴ On the other hand, Bukharin, too, is right when he observes that in the age of the dissolution of capitalism, the fetishistic categories collapse and it becomes necessary to have recourse to the 'natural form' underlying them.⁷⁵ The contradiction between these two views is, however, only apparent. For the contradiction has two aspects: on the one hand, there is the increasing undermining of the forms of reification—one might describe it as the cracking of the crust because of the inner emptiness—their growing inability to do justice to the phenomena, even as isolated phenomena, even as the objects of reflection and calculation. On the other hand, we find the quantitative increase of the forms of reification, their empty extension to cover the whole surface of manifest phenomena. And the fact that these two aspects together are in conflict provides the key signature to the decline of bourgeois society.

As the antagonism becomes more acute two possibilities open up for the proletariat. It is given the opportunity to substitute its own positive contents for the emptied and bursting husks. But also it is exposed to the danger that for a time at least it might adapt itself ideologically to conform to these, the emptiest and most decadent forms of bourgeois culture.

History is at its least automatic when it is the consciousness of the proletariat that is at issue. The truth that the old intuitive, mechanistic materialism could not grasp turns out to be doubly true for the proletariat, namely that it can be transformed and liberated only by its own actions, and that "the educator must himself be educated". The objective economic evolution could

do no more than create the position of the proletariat in the production process. It was this position that determined its point of view. But the objective evolution could only give the proletariat the opportunity and the necessity to change society. Any transformation can only come about as the product of the—free—action of the proletariat itself.

NOTES ON SECTION I

- 1 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 53.
- 2 *Capital* III, p. 324.
- 3 *Capital* III, p. 810.
- 4 *Capital* I, p. 72. On this antagonism cf. the purely economic distinction between the exchange of goods in terms of their value and the exchange in terms of their cost of production. *Capital* III, p. 174.
- 5 *Capital* I, p. 170.
- 6 Cf. *Capital* I, pp. 322, 345.
- 7 This whole process is described systematically and historically in *Capital* I. The facts themselves can also be found in the writings of bourgeois economists like Bücher, Sombart, A. Weber and Gottl among others—although for the most part they are not seen in connection with the problem of reification.
- 8 *Capital* I, p. 384.
- 9 *Capital* I, p. 355 (note).
- 10 That this should appear so is fully justified from the point of view of the *individual* consciousness. As far as class is concerned we would point out that this subjugation is the product of a lengthy struggle which enters upon a new stage with the organisation of the proletariat into a class—but on a higher plane and with different weapons.
- 11 *Capital* I, pp. 374–6, 423–4, 460, etc. It goes without saying that this 'contemplation' can be more demanding and demoralizing than 'active' labour. But we cannot discuss this further here.
- 12 *The Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 58–9.
- 13 *Capital* I, p. 344.
- 14 Cf. Gottl: *Wirtschaft und Technik*, Grundriss der Sozialökonomik II, 234 et seq.
- 15 *Capital* I, p. 77.
- 16 This refers above all to capitalist private property. *Der heilige Max. Dokumente des Sozialismus* III, 363. Marx goes on to make a number of very fine observations about the effects of reification upon language. A philological study from the standpoint of historical materialism could profitably begin here.
- 17 *Capital* III, pp. 384–5.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 809.

- 57 Cf. Plekhanov, op. cit., pp. 9, 51, etc. But *methodologically* only formalistic rationalism is confronted by an insoluble problem at this point. Setting aside the *substantive* scientific value of mediaeval solutions to these questions, it is indubitable that the Middle Ages did not see any problem here, let alone an insoluble one. We may compare Holbach's statement, quoted by Plekhanov, that we cannot know "whether the chicken preceded the egg, or the egg the chicken" with e.g. the statement of Master Eckhard, "Nature makes the man from the child and the chicken from the egg; God makes the man before the child and the chicken before the egg" (Sermon of the noble man). Needless to say, we are here concerned *exclusively* with the contrast in *methodology*. On the basis of this methodological limitation as the result of which history is made to appear as a thing-in-itself, Plekhanov has rightly judged these materialists to be naive idealists in their approach to history. *Zu Hegels 60. Todestag*, Neue Zeit X. I. 273.
- 58 Here too we can do no more than refer in passing to the history of this problem. The opposed positions were clearly established very early on. I would point to e.g. Friedrich Schlegel's critique of Condorcet's attempt (1795) to provide a rationalist explanation of history (as it were, of the type of Comte or Spencer). "*The enduring qualities of man are the subject of pure science, but the changing aspects of man, both as an individual and in the mass, are the subject of a scientific history of mankind.*" *Prosaische Jugendschriften*, Vienna, 1906. Vol. II, p. 52.
- 59 *Die Encyclopädie*, § 309. For us, of course, *only* the methodological aspect has any significance. Nevertheless, we must emphasise that all formal, rationalist concepts exhibit this same reified impenetrability. The modern substitution of functions for things does not alter this situation in the least, as concepts of function do not at all differ from thing-concepts in the only area that matters, i.e. the form-content relationship. On the contrary, they take their formal, rationalist structure to its extreme logical conclusion.
- 60 Hegel, Werke II, p. 267.
- 61 *Die Philosophie des Rechts*, § 345-7. *Encyclopädie*, § 548-52.
- 62 In the last versions of the system history represents the transition from the philosophy of right to the absolute spirit. (In the Phenomenology the relation is more complex but methodologically just as ambiguous and undefined.) 'Absolute spirit' is the truth of the preceding moment, of history and therefore, in accordance with Hegel's logic, it would have to have annulled and preserved history within itself. However, in the dialectical method history cannot be so transcended and this is the message at the end of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* where at the climax of the system, at the moment where the 'absolute spirit' realises itself, history makes its reappearance and points beyond philosophy in its turn: "That the determinants of thought had this importance is a further insight that does not belong within the history of philosophy. These concepts are the simplest revelation of the

- spirit of the world: this in its most concrete form is history." Werke XV, p. 618.
- 63 Werke I, p. 174. Needless to say, Fichte places an even heavier emphasis on chance.
- 64 Cf. the essay "What is orthodox Marxism?"
- 65 With this the Logic itself becomes problematic. Hegel's postulate that the concept is "reconstituted being" (Werke V, 30) is only possible on the assumption of the real creation of the identical subject-object. A failure at this point means that the concept acquires a Kantian, idealistic emphasis which is in conflict with its dialectical function. To show this in detail would be well beyond the scope of this study.

NOTES ON SECTION III

- 1 Cf. "What is orthodox Marxism?", "Class Consciousness" and "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism". In view of the fact that the themes in these essays are so closely interrelated it has regrettably not always been possible to avoid repetition.
- 2 Nachlass II, p. 132. [*The Holy Family*, Chapter 4.]
- 3 *Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 2nd ed., p. 562.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 606-7.
- 5 Cf. "What is orthodox Marxism?"
- 6 *Capital I*, p. 441.
- 7 For eighteenth century materialism, see Plekhanov, op. cit., p. 51. In Section I we have shown how this belief underlies the bourgeois theory of crisis, the theory of the origin of law, etc. In history itself anyone can easily understand that an approach that is not world-historical and that does not relate to the overall development must necessarily interpret the most important turning-points of history as senseless cataclysms as their causes lie outside its scheme. This can be seen, e.g. in the Germanic Migrations, in the downward trend of German history from the Renaissance on, etc.
- 8 Hegel's Werke II, p. 73.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 10 Cf. e.g. *Capital III*, pp. 336, 349-50, 370-1, 374-6, 383-4.
- 11 *Die Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 531.
- 12 *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 135.
- 13 I would refer the reader once again to Plekhanov's statement of the dilemma confronting older forms of materialism. As Marx showed in his critique of Bruno Bauer (Nachlass II, pp. 178 et seq.) every bourgeois view of history logically ends up by mechanising the 'masses' and irrationalising the hero. However, exactly the same dualism can be found in such thinkers as Carlyle or Nietzsche. Even a cautious thinker like Rickert, (despite some reservations, e.g. op. cit., p. 380) is inclined to regard 'milieu' and the 'movements of masses' as subject to natural laws and to

- see only the isolated personality as a historical individual. Op. cit., pp. 444, 460-1.
- 14 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 304.
 - 15 *The Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 128-9.
 - 16 *Die Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, pp. 38-9. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 24, 123; *Die Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten*, pp. 4, 38. Cf. also Hegel's critique, *Werke III*, pp. 133 et seq.
 - 17 *Werke III*, p. 147.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 262.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 432-5. Plehkanov deserves the credit for having pointed to the importance of this side of Hegel's Logic for the distinction between evolution and revolution as early as 1891 (*Neue Zeit X/I*, pp. 280 et seq.). Regrettably his insight was neglected by later theorists.
 - 20 On the methodological side of this question, see above all the first part of Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*. In particular, *Werke XI*, pp. 158-9. "There is no immediate knowledge. Immediate knowledge is where we have no consciousness of mediation; but it is mediated for all that." Similarly in the Preface to the Phenomenology: "The true is not an original unity as such or an immediate one, but only this reconstituting equality or reflection in otherness in itself." *Werke II*, p. 15.
 - 21 Engels in fact accepted the Hegelian theory of the false (which has its finest definition in the Preface to the Phenomenology, *Werke II*, p. 30 et seq.). Cf. his analysis of the role of 'evil' in history, *Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in *S.W. II*, p. 345 et seq. This refers, of course, only to the truly original representatives of bourgeois thought. Epigones, eclectics and simple partisans of the interests of a declining class belong in quite a different category.
 - 22 On this distinction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, see the essay on "Class Consciousness".
 - 23 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 31.
 - 24 *Capital I*, p. 572.
 - 25 All so-called theories of abstinence are based on this. We may mention especially the importance attributed by Max Weber to 'inner worldly asceticism' in the origins of the 'spirit' of capitalism. Marx, too, confirms this fact when he points out that for the capitalist "his own private consumption is a robbery perpetrated on accumulation, just as in book-keeping by double entry, the private expenditure of the capitalist is placed on the debtor side of his account against his capital". *Capital I*, p. 592.
 - 26 *Wages, Price and Profit* in *S.W. I*, p. 398.
 - 27 *Anti-Dühring*, p. 141.
 - 28 *Capital I*, p. 309.
 - 29 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 29.
 - 30 Thus Marx writes to Engels: "These gentry, the economists, have hitherto overlooked the extremely simple point that the form: 20 yards of linen = 1 coat is only the undeveloped basis of

- 20 yards of linen = £2, and that therefore the simplest form of a commodity, in which its value is not yet expressed as a relation to all other commodities but only as something differentiated from the commodity in its natural form, contains the whole secret of the money form and with it, in embryo, of all the bourgeois forms of the product of labour. (22 June, 1867). *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, n.d., p. 228. On this point see also the magisterial analysis of the distinction between exchange value and price in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* where it is shown that in this distinction "all the tempests that threaten the commodity in the real process of circulation are concentrated", p. 80.
- 31 *Werke II*, p. 27.
 - 32 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 299.
 - 33 Thus Marx says of Feuerbach's use of the term 'species'—and all such views fail to advance beyond Feuerbach and many indeed do not go as far—that "it can be understood only as the inward dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals". *6th Thesis on Feuerbach*.
 - 34 *Nachlass II*, p. 54. [*Critical Notes on "The King of Prussia and Social Reform"*.] We are interested here solely in the methodical implications. Mehring's question (*ibid.*, p. 30) about the extent to which Marx overestimated the consciousness of the Weavers' Uprising does not concern us here. *Methodologically* he has provided a perfect description of the development of revolutionary class consciousness in the proletariat and his later views (in the *Manifesto*, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, etc.) about the difference between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions are wholly in line with this.
 - 35 We have in mind here Bachofen's analysis of the *Orestia* and of its significance for the history of social development. The fact that Bachofen's ideological timidity prevented him from going further than the correct interpretation of the drama is additional proof of the rightness of the views set out here.
 - 36 On this point cf. Marx's analysis of the industrial reserve army and surplus-population. *Capital I*, pp. 628 et seq.
 - 37 *Encyclopädie*, § 15.
 - 38 *Capital I*, pp. 234-5. Cf. also *Wages, Price and Profit*, *S.W. I*, pp. 401-2.
 - 39 Cf. what is said on the 'post festum' nature of the consciousness of the bourgeoisie in the essays "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism" and "What is Orthodox Marxism?"
 - 40 A detailed examination of this question is not possible here although this distinction would enable us to differentiate clearly between the ancient and the modern world, because Heraclitus' self-annulling conception of the object bears the closest resemblance to the reified structure of modern thought. This alone would clearly reveal the limitation of the thought of the Ancients, viz. their inability to grasp dialectically their own societal existence in the present and hence also in history, as a limitation of classical

- society. In various other contexts, but always in a way that leads to the same methodological goal, Marx has made the same point about Aristotle's 'economics'. Hegel's and Lassalle's overestimation of the modernity of Heraclitus' dialectics has symptomatic importance for their own. This only means, however, that this limitation of the thought of the 'Ancients' (the ultimately uncritical attitude towards the historical conditioning of the formations from which thought arises) remains decisive for them, too, and then emerges in the contemplative and speculative character of their thought, as opposed to a material and practical one.
- 41 *Capital* I, pp. 570, 572-3. Here too, as we have already emphasised, the change from quantity to quality is seen to be a characteristic of every single moment. The quantified moments only remain quantitative when regarded separately. Seen as aspects of a process they appear as qualitative changes in the economic structure of capital.
- 42 *Wage, Labour and Capital*, S.W. I, p. 86.
- 43 Cf. "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism". On fact and reality see the essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?"
- 44 Cf. the dispute about the disappearance or increase of the medium-sized firms in Rosa Luxemburg, *Soziale Reform oder Revolution*, pp. 11 et seq.
- 45 *Capital* III, p. 326.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50. The rate of interest is thus "given as a fixed magnitude, like the price of commodities on the market" and the general profit rate is expressly contrasted with it as an opposing tendency. *Ibid.*, p. 359. We see here the fundamental issue dividing us from bourgeois thought.
- 47 Cf. the essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?"
- 48 *Origin of the Family*, S.W. II, p. 92.
- 49 Cf. Marx's comments on Bentham, *Capital* I, pp. 609-10.
- 50 A fine elucidation of the different stages can be found in *Capital* III, pp. 806 et seq.
- 51 Modern pragmatism provides a model illustration of this.
- 52 Nachlass II (*The Holy Family*, chap. 8), p. 304.
- 53 Nachlass I, p. 384. (*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* in *Bottomore, Early Writings*, p. 43.) The italics are mine.
- 54 On this point, see Max Weber's essays in Vol. I of his *Sociology of Religion*. Whether we accept his causal interpretation or not is irrelevant to a judgement of his factual material. On the connection between Calvinism and capitalism, see also Engels' remarks in *Über historischen Materialismus*, *Neue Zeit* XI, I, p. 43. The same structure of ethics and existence is still active in the Kantian system. Cf. e.g. the passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 120, which sounds wholly in line with Franklin's acquisitive Calvinist ethics. An analysis of the profound similarities would lead us too far away from our theme.
- 55 *Thomas Münzer*, pp. 73 et seq.
- 56 *Werke* III, pp. 37-8. Except that there is also an echo of the

- nostalgia—here of no importance—for natural social formations. Cf. Hegel's methodologically correct negative criticisms in *Glauben und Wissen*, *Werke* I, pp. 105 et seq. His positive conclusions, of course, amount to much the same thing.
- 57 Lassalle, *Werke*, Cassirer Verlag, V, pp. 275-6. The extent to which Lassalle, by exalting a notion of the state founded in natural law, moves on to the terrain of the bourgeoisie, can be seen not only in the development of particular theories of natural law that have deduced the impropriety of every organised movement of the proletariat from the very idea of 'freedom' and the 'dignity of man'. (Cf. e.g. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 497, on American natural law.) But also C. Hugo, the cynical founder of the historical school of law arrives at a similar theoretical construction—though he does so in order to prove the opposite of Lassalle—viz. the view that it is possible to devise certain rights that transform men into a commodity without negating their 'human dignity' in other spheres. *Naturrecht*, § 144.
- 58 Cf. the essay "Class Consciousness".
- 59 These views can be found in an undiluted form in Kautsky's latest programmatic statement. One need not go beyond the rigid, mechanical separation of politics and economics to see that he is treading the same mistaken path as Lassalle. His conception of democracy is too familiar to require a fresh analysis here. And as for his economic fatalism, it is symptomatic that even where Kautsky admits that it is impossible to make concrete predictions about the economic phenomenon of crises it remains self-evident for him that the course of events will unfold according to the laws of the capitalist economy, p. 57.
- 60 Lenin's achievement is that he rediscovered this side of Marxism that points the way to an understanding of its practical core. His constantly reiterated warning to seize the 'next link' in the chain with all one's might, that link on which the fate of the totality depends in that one moment, his dismissal of all utopian demands, i.e. his 'relativism' and his 'Realpolitik': all these things are nothing less than the practical realisation of the young Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.
- 61 It must now be self-evident that totality is a problem of category and in particular a problem of revolutionary action. It is obvious that we cannot regard a method as authentically totalising if it deals with 'all problems' in a substantive manner (which is, of course, an impossibility) while remaining contemplative. This is to be referred above all to the social-democratic treatment of history in which a plethora of material is designed constantly to divert attention from social action.
- 62 Cf. the essay "Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation".
- 63 *Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, S.W. II, p. 350.
- 64 Hegel, *Werke* XI, p. 160.
- 65 This rejection of the metaphysical import of bourgeois materialism

does not affect our historical evaluation of it: it was the ideological form of the bourgeois revolution, and as such it remains of *practical relevance* as long as the bourgeois revolution remains relevant (including its relevance as an aspect of the proletarian revolution). On this point, see my essays on "Moleschott", "Feuerbach" and "Atheism" in the Rote Fahne, Berlin; and above all Lenin's comprehensive essay "Under the Banner of Marxism", The Communist International, 1922, No. 21.

- 66 Lask has very logically introduced a distinction between an antecedent and subsequent region ['vorbildlich' and 'nachbildlich'] (Die Lehre vom Urteil.) This does indeed enable him to eliminate pure Platonism, the reflective duality of idea and reality—in the spirit of criticism—but it then experiences a logical resurrection.
- 67 Purely logical and systematic studies simply refer to the historical point at which we find ourselves: they signify our temporary inability to grasp and represent the totality of categoric problems as the problems of a historical reality in the process of revolutionising itself.
- 68 Cf. on this point Hegel's *Phenomenology*, especially Werke II, pp. 73 et seq., where this problem receives its profoundest analysis. See also Ernst Bloch's theory of the "opacity of the lived moment" and his theory of "knowledge that has not yet become conscious".
- 69 Hegel, Werke XII, p. 207.
- 70 On the relationship between a theory of praxis to a practical theory, see the interesting essay by Josef Révai in *Kommunismus* I, Nos. 46-9, "The Problem of Tactics", even though I am not in agreement with all his conclusions.
- 71 *Encyclopädie*, §16.
- 72 *Ibid.*, § 192.
- 73 Hegel, Werke XIII, pp. 299 et seq.
- 74 Letter dated 12 December, 1851. Ed. G. Mayer, p. 41.
- 75 Bukharin, *Ökonomie der Transformationsperiode*, pp. 50-1.

The Changing Function of Historical Materialism

A Lecture given at the inauguration of the Institute for Research into Historical Materialism in Budapest

THE victory gained by the proletariat evidently confronts it with the task of perfecting as far as possible the intellectual weapons which have hitherto enabled it to hold its own in the class struggle. Among these weapons historical materialism is, of course, pre-eminent.

Historical materialism was one of the proletariat's most potent weapons at a time when it was oppressed and now that it is preparing to rebuild society and culture anew it is natural to take the method over into the new age. If only for this reason it was necessary to found this Institute with the aim of applying the methods of historical materialism to the historical sciences as a whole. Up to now historical materialism was doubtless a superb weapon but from a scientific point of view it was hardly more than a programme, an indication of the way in which history ought to be written. Now, however, a further task devolves upon it: the whole of history really has to be re-written; the events of the past have to be sorted, arranged and judged from the point of view of historical materialism. We must strive to turn historical materialism into the authentic method for carrying out concrete historical research and for historiography in general.

But here we must answer the question why this has only now become possible. A superficial answer would be to claim that the time was only now ripe for converting historical materialism into a scientific method because it was only now that the proletariat had seized power and with it control of the physical and intellectual forces without which this could not be achieved and which society as it was would never have made available to it. However, much deeper underlying factors than the fact of naked power place the proletariat of today in a position to organise science as it thinks fit. These deeper factors are closely connected with the profound change in function resulting from the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. from the fact that the class struggle is now waged from above and not from below. This change in function