

Theodor W. Adorno, *Meditations on Metaphysics*
from *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966)
translated by Simon Jarvis

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1~ After Auschwitz

It can no longer be asserted that the immutable is the true, and that what changes is transient illusion; that eternal ideas and what is temporal have nothing to do with each other. This cannot be maintained even with the help of Hegel's bold declaration that, thanks to the annihilation which inheres in the very concept of temporal existence, temporal existence itself promotes the Eternal -- which is manifested in the eternity of annihilation. One of the mystical impulses which was secularized in dialectic was the doctrine that historical and intra-mundane matters were relevant to what traditional metaphysics elevated as "transcendence", or relevant at least (less gnostically and radically put) to consciousness's position with respect to those questions which the canon of philosophy allocated to metaphysics. The feeling which resists any assertion of the positivity of existence after Auschwitz, on the grounds that it is cant, an injustice to the victims -- a feeling that no meaning, however exhausted, should be squeezed out of their fate -- this feeling finds its objective moment in events which condemn to mockery any construction of a meaning for immanence, a meaning which might radiate from some affirmatively posited transcendence. Any such construction would affirm absolute negativity and would conspire, ideologically, with that negativity in prolonging its own survival, a survival which anyway, in reality, subsists in the principle of the society which currently exists -- until that society should destroy itself. The Lisbon earthquake was enough to cure Voltaire of Leibniz's theodicy; and the catastrophe of first nature, which the mind could grasp, was inconsiderable when compared with the second, social catastrophe, which baffles human imagination, even as it brought about a real hell out of human evil. The capacity for metaphysics is paralyzed because what happened shattered any basis which could allow speculative metaphysical thought to be reconciled with experience. Once again the dialectical motif of the conversion of quantity into quality has -- unspeakably -- triumphed. With the murder of millions by

administrative means, death has become something to be feared as never before. There is no possibility any longer that death might in some way be fitting to the experienced life of the individual. The individual is deprived of the last and poorest thing which remained to him. The fact that in the camps it was not the individual who died, but the specimen, necessarily affects the deaths of those who escaped the reckoning. Genocide is the absolute integration which is underway wherever human beings are levelled down -- polished off, as the military put it -- until they are literally erased, as deviations from the concept of their own perfect nothingness. Auschwitz confirms the philosopheme that pure identity is death. The most unguarded dictum from Beckett's *Endgame* -- that there really isn't so much to be afraid of any more -- is a reaction to a praxis which furnished its first sample in the camps, and in whose once venerable concept the annihilation of the non-identical already, teleologically, lurks. Absolute negativity is foreseeable and no longer surprises anyone. Fear was connected with the *principium individuationis* of self-preservation, a principle which, according to its own logic, works itself to death. What the sadists in the camp told their victims -- "tomorrow you'll be smoke coming out of that chimney" -- names the indifference of the life of every individual in the face of history: already, in his formal freedom, the individual is as fungible and disposable as he later becomes beneath the feet of the liquidators. But because the individual, in a world whose law is universal individual gain, has nothing other than this self which has become a matter of indifference, the fulfilment of this long-familiar tendency is at the same time what is most horrifying; nothing escapes from it, any more than the electrified barbed wire surrounding the camp could be escaped from. Everlasting suffering has as much right to express itself as the torture-victim has to scream; so it might have been wrong to say that poetry could no longer be written after Auschwitz. The less cultural question, however, of whether it be possible to live after Auschwitz, or whether one who by chance escaped, and by rights should have been killed, may be allowed to live, is not a false one. His survival itself required the coldness, the fundamental principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which Auschwitz would have been impossible: the drastic guilt of the one who was spared. In revenge for being spared he will be visited by dreams; as, that he did not survive, that he was gassed in 1944; that his whole existence has been carried on only in his imagination, an emanation of the insane wish of one who was killed twenty years ago.

Reflective people, and artists, have not seldom noted a feeling of not quite being present, of not playing a part; as though they were not themselves at all, but rather a kind of spectator. Others are often repelled by this; Kierkegaard based his polemic against what he called the aesthetic sphere on it. The critique of philosophical personalism, however, testifies to the fact that this stance towards immediacy, disavowing any existential attitude, receives an objective truth from an element which leads beyond the blindness of the motive of self-preservation. It is in the idea that “it’s not so important after all”, although this idea itself admittedly goes happily enough with bourgeois coldness, that the individual can still most readily become aware of existence without fear of being annihilated. The inhuman part of this, the capacity to distance oneself from, and rise above, what one sees, is in the end precisely that *humanness* whose ideologists resist this detachment. It is not utterly implausible that the part which behaves in this way might be the immortal part of the self. The scene in which Shaw, in a hurry on the way to the theatre, held up his pass to a beggar, saying “Press”, conceals behind its cynicism an awareness of this point. This might help to explain the state of affairs which so astonished Schopenhauer: that the emotions experienced in the face, not only of another’s death, but also of our own, are often so feeble. Human beings are indeed without exception under the spell, none is fully capable of love, and so each thinks himself too little loved. But at the same time the spectatorial attitude expresses a doubt as to whether this can really be all there is, whilst the subject, which appears to itself, in its blindness, to be so *relevant*, has nothing more than this poor and, in its impulses, brutal ephemerality. Under the spell, the living have the alternative between involuntary ataraxy – aestheticism out of weakness – and the brutalized character of being *involved*. Both are false lives. Something of both, however, belongs to the correct *désinvolture* [candour, freedom from constraint] and sympathy. The culpable drive for self-preservation has survived and has strengthened itself, perhaps precisely through the relentless presence of a threat. Except that self-preservation must suspect that life, to which self-preservation anchors itself, has become that before which self-preservation shudders: a ghost, a portion of the spirit-world, a world which sees through waking consciousness as though through what does not exist. The guilt of life -- which by its very fact is already robbing other lives of breath, in keeping with a statistics which supplements an overwhelming count of the dead with a minimal count of those rescued,

as if this had been foreseen by a calculation of probabilities -- can no longer be reconciled with life. Such guilt reproduces itself tirelessly, because it can never become wholly present to consciousness at any moment. This, and nothing else, is what compels towards philosophy. Philosophy experiences in this the shock that, the more deeply and more strongly it penetrates, the more the suspicion announces itself that philosophy is moving further away from things as they are; that the most superficial and trivial perceptions would be capable, if the essence were once revealed, of being justified against perceptions directed towards that essence. A glaring light thus falls upon truth itself. Speculation senses a certain obligation to concede the position of a corrective to its opponent, *common sense*. Life nurses the horrifying presentiment that what is to be known is much more like what is found to be *down to earth* than it is like anything elevated; it may be that this presentiment is confirmed beyond what is pedestrian; yet thought, meanwhile, has its happiness, the promise of its truth, only in elevation. If what is pedestrian were to have the last word, even if it were the truth, truth itself would be devalued. The trivial consciousness which is expressed theoretically in positivism and in unreflected nominalism may be nearer to the *adequatio rei atque cogitationis* than the sublime consciousness; it may, in its grotesque scorn for truth, be truer than the meditative consciousness -- unless another concept of truth than that of *adequatio* should come good. Such an other truth is aimed at by the innervation that metaphysics can only be attained by being thrown away. It is not least this other truth which motivates the transition to materialism. The tendency towards this may be pursued from the Hegelian Marx, through to Benjamin's rescue of induction; Kafka's work might form its apotheosis. If negative dialectic requires the self-reflection of thinking, that obviously implies that in order to be true, at least today, thinking must also think against itself. If thinking does not measure itself against the uttermost extreme of that which eludes the concept, it is already marching to the beat of the background music with which the SS preferred to drown out the screams of their victims.

2 ~ Metaphysics and culture

Hitler has forced human beings, in the circumstances of their unfreedom to recognize a new categorical imperative: to order their thinking and acting so that Auschwitz should never be repeated, so that nothing similar should happen. This imperative is as resistant to being grounded as once was the givenness of the Kantian categorical imperative itself. To treat this imperative discursively would be an insult: in this imperative the moment of a supplement to the ethical can be felt in the body. 'In the body', because this moment is a practical aversion to unbearable physical pain, an aversion to which individuals are subject even now that individuality as a form of spiritual reflection is beginning to disappear. Morality survives only in the unvarnished materialistic motive. The course of history compels metaphysics – that which was traditionally materialism's immediate opposite – towards materialism. That which spirit once prided itself on being able to determine or construct in its image, moves towards that which is unlike spirit; towards that which escapes spirit's mastery, and yet manifests itself to spirit as absolute evil. The somatic level of the living individual, the level remote from meaning, is the scene upon which is played out that suffering which, in the camps, reduced all the consolations of spirit, together with culture, the objectification of such consolations, to ashes. The process by which metaphysics irresistibly disappeared into just what it was once conceived against, has reached its vanishing point. Ever since the young Hegel philosophy, wherever it has not sold out to officially approved cerebration, has been unable to suppress the extent to which it slides over into questions of material existence. Children sense something of this in the fascination exerted by the area of the corpse, the knacker, the perversely sweet aroma of decay, and by the indecent expressions for that area. The power of that realm in the unconscious may not be less than that of infantile sexuality; both are mingled in the anal fixation, but they are hardly the same as each other. Unconscious knowledge whispers to children of what has been repressed to the unconscious by civilizatory upbringing: "that's what it's all about": poor physical existence kindles into the highest interest, an interest can hardly any longer be suppressed, into "what's that?" and "where's it going to?". Anyone who could manage to recall to mind what once struck him when he heard the words *shit-heap* and *pigsty* would be closer to absolute knowing than the chapter of that name in which Hegel

promises such knowing to the reader, only to deny it to him with a superior air. Theory ought to deprecate the integration of physical death into culture; not for the sake of the ontologically pure essence of death, but for the sake of that which finds expression in the stink of the corpse, and which is belied by its transfiguration into 'remains'. A landlord called Adam killing rats with a stick as they poured out of holes into a courtyard in front of the child who liked the publican: that child formed his idea of the first man on the basis of this picture. That all this gets forgotten -- that we no longer know how we felt, once, when we saw the dog-catcher's cart -- is both the triumph of culture and its failure. Culture cannot tolerate the memory of that area, because culture behaves like old Adam over and over again, and just this is incompatible with its own idea of itself. It reviles the stink because it stinks itself; because the palace of culture, as a magnificent line of Brecht's has it, is built out of dogshit. Years after that line was written, Auschwitz irrefutably demonstrated the failure of culture. The fact that Auschwitz could happen in the middle of the whole tradition of philosophy, art, and the enlightening sciences, says more than just that all these were unable, that spirit was unable, to take hold of people and change them; in those fields themselves, in the emphatic claim that they make to autarky, dwells untruth. All culture after Auschwitz, including its urgent critique, is garbage. By restoring itself after what happened in its own province without any resistance, it has gone over in its entirety to the ideology that it always potentially was, ever since it presumed, in opposition to material existence, to breathe light into the latter -- a light of which the separation of spirit from manual labour had in the first place deprived material existence. Whoever pleads for the preservation of a culture which has become radically guilty and sordid, makes himself an accomplice, whilst whoever refuses culture immediately furthers the barbarism which culture has revealed itself to be. Not even silence escapes from this circle; it merely rationalizes the subject's own incapacity into conformity with the state of objective truth, and thereby once again devalues that objective truth into a lie. The states of the eastern bloc have -- despite all the talk to the contrary -- abolished culture and converted it, as a pure means of domination, into rubbish; but in this culture has only got what it deserved and what it is for its own part tending towards, in the name of the democratic right of human beings to what is like themselves. In the East, though, because the functionaries' administrative barbarism is esteemed as culture and is guarded as an

inalienable cultural heritage, it convicts its own reality, the infrastructure, of being as barbaric as the superstructure which those functionaries dismantle by taking it into their care. At least in the West it is permitted to say this. – The ‘theology of crisis’ registered what it abstractly, and therefore ineffectually, protested against: that metaphysics has become fused with culture. The absoluteness of spirit, the nimbus of culture, was the same principle that relentlessly did violence to what it claimed to speak for. After Auschwitz, no word resounding from on high, not even a theological word, retains its rights unaltered. The provocation of the conventional phrase – the trial as to whether God would let this happen or whether he would not furiously intervene – extended to the victims the judgements which Nietzsche had long ago passed on the ideas. One man who, with a strength that is to be marvelled at, survived Auschwitz and other camps, contended vehemently against Beckett: if Beckett had been in Auschwitz, he said, he would have written differently, that is, with the soldierly faith of the escapee, more positively. The escapee was right, but not in the way he thought; Beckett, and anyone else who remained in command of himself, would have been broken there and probably forced to acknowledge that soldierly faith which the escapee clothed in the words that “he wanted to give people heart”: as though that were within the power of any individual spiritual creation; as though the intention which puts itself at people’s service and which arranges itself to fit in with them, did not deprive them of that to which they have a claim, even when they believe the opposite. This is what metaphysics has come to.

3 ~ Dying today

This is what lends suggestive force to the desire to make a fresh start with metaphysics, or, as they say, radically to question it, to scrape away the illusion with which a failed culture has painted over the truth and its guilt. But as soon as such a supposed dismantling obeys the drive towards an untainted foundation, it already conspires with the culture which it boasts of dismantling. Whilst the fascists thundered against

destructive cultural bolshevism, Heidegger was making destruction respectable as a means of penetrating Being. The critique of culture and barbarism are not without their compacts. This was soon experienced in practice. Metaphysical considerations which seek to disburden themselves of those elements which they regard as mediated or cultural deny the relation between their own supposedly pure categories and social content. When they fail to consider society, they foster its persistence in its existing forms, forms which lock out both the knowledge and the realization of truth. The idol of pure primal experience is as much of a mockery as what has been culturally processed, the obsolete category-hoard of what is *qesei*. A way out lies only through the determination of both in their mediatedness – culture as the lid over the rubbish; nature, even where it comes forward as the corner-stone of Being, as a projection of the bad cultural desire that in the midst of change everything should stay the same. Even the experience of death will not suffice as something final and free from doubt, as a metaphysics of the kind which Descartes once deduced from the frail *ego cogitans*.

That the metaphysics of death degenerated either into advertisements for the heroic death, or into the triviality of simply repeating -- what none can fail to know -- that all must die: this whole ideological confusion no doubt results from the fact that human consciousness, to this day, is too weak to withstand the experience of death, perhaps too weak even to accept the idea of it. No human life in which the objects are treated candidly and freely suffices to realize the potential which is present in the spirit of any single human being; a chasm opens between human life and death. Reflections which confer a meaning on death are as little help as are tautologies. The more consciousness extricates itself from animal nature, the more it becomes something firm and lasting in its forms, the more stubbornly it resists everything which makes it doubt its own everlastingness. The historical enthronement of the subject as spirit was coupled with the delusion that subjectivity could not be lost. If early forms of property were accompanied by magical practices designed to ward off death, then the *ratio* drives death away as obdurately as those rites once did, the more completely all human relations are determined by property. At a final stage, in despair, death itself becomes property. The metaphysical elevation of death relieves us of the experience of death. The current metaphysics of death is nothing but society's powerless consolation for the

fact that because of social transformations human beings have lost what once made death bearable for them, the feeling of death's epic unity with a ripened life. Even that feeling perhaps only transfigured the domination of death with the weariness of the person who is old and has had enough of life, who imagines that it is right that he should die because his laborious life was in any case no life at all, and robbed him of the strength to resist death. In the socialized society, however, in the exitless closely-woven fabric of immanence, human beings experience death only as something external and alien, without any illusion that it be commensurable with their lives. They cannot assimilate the fact that they must die. A bit of hope is attached, scattered aslant, to this inability: precisely because death does not, as it does in Heidegger, constitute the totality of existence, death and its messengers, the illnesses, are experienced (provided one is not doting) as heterogenous, alien to the self. One might quickly say that the reason for this is that the self is nothing other than the principle of self-preservation which is opposed to death, and that it is incapable of absorbing death into the consciousness which is itself "I". But the experience of consciousness gives that explanation little nourishment; such experience does not necessarily take the defiant shape which one might expect it to in the face of death. Hegel's doctrine that that which is, founders upon itself, is hardly confirmed by the subject. That we are going to die strikes even one who is getting old and who notices the signs of frailty rather as an unlucky accident caused by his own physical frame, bearing the marks of the same contingency as the external accidents which are typical today. This gives strength to a speculation which offers a counterpoint to the insight into the priority of the object: whether spirit might not possess a moment of independence, of unadulteratedness, which becomes free just at the point when it does not devour everything and reproduces of itself its own subjection to death. Despite the deluding interest of self-preservation, the power of resistance possessed by the idea of immortality, which even Kant harboured, could hardly be explained without this moment. Admittedly this power of resistance appears to be subsiding both in the deteriorating individuals themselves, and in the history of the species. After the demise (long since secretly ratified) of the objective religions which promised to remove death's sting, death has today become something wholly alien as a result of the socially determined demise of continuous experience as such.

The less subjects live, the more abrupt and terrible is death. In that death literally turns subjects into things, the subjects become aware of their permanent death, of objectification, of the form of the relationships in which they are implicated. The civilizing integration of death, which cosmetically covers death up, which is without power over death and which is laughable in the face of it, is the formation which reacts to this social situation, the clumsy attempt of exchange-society to stop up the last gaps left open by the world of commodities. Death and history, especially the collective history of the category of 'the individual', form a constellation. If the individual, Hamlet, once deduced his own absolute substantiveness from a dawning consciousness of the irreversibility of death, then the collapse of the individual pulls the whole construction of bourgeois existence in on itself. What is annihilated is something which is in itself, and perhaps even already for itself, nothing-like. Hence the permanent panic in the face of death. This panic can no longer be pacified in any other way than by repressing the thought of death. Death as such, or as a biological primal phenomenon, can no longer be extracted from its social entanglements; the individual which endures the experience of death is much too much of a historical category for that. The proposition that death is always the same is as abstract as it is untrue; consciousness comes to terms with death in ways which vary as do the concrete conditions in which someone is dying, including the physical conditions. Death took on a new horror in the camps: since Auschwitz, fearing death means fearing worse than death. What death does to those who are condemned by society can be anticipated biologically by considering the very old people whom we love; not only their bodies, but their selves, everything which defined them as people, crumbles without any illness or violent attack. The remnant of confidence in their transcendent duration vanishes, as it were, during their earthly life: what in them might there be that is not dying? The credulous consolation that even in such disintegration, or in madness, the core of the person survives, has, in its indifference to that experience, something foolish and cynical. It perpetuates the pearl of sneering bourgeois wisdom: you are what you are, for ever. Anyone who turns away from what negates the fulfilment of his metaphysical need, sneers at that need itself.

Nonetheless, the thought that death is simply the end of everything is not fully thinkable. The efforts of language to express death are in vain, right the way through to logic; who would be the subject of whom it could be predicated that it is, here and now, dead? It is not only the pleasure that wants eternity, as Nietzsche's luminous expression has it, which resists passing away. If death is that absolute which philosophy, in vain, invoked positively, everything is just nothing, even any given thought is thought into the void, no thought can be thought with any truth. For it is an element of truth that it last, together with its temporal core; were there no duration there could be no truth; the very last trace of truth would be consumed by absolute death. The idea of death defies thought hardly less than that of immortality. But the unthinkable aspect of death does not render thought proof against the unreliability of a given metaphysical experience. The context of delusion which surrounds all human beings has part even in that which they dream of using to tear the veil away. Instead of Kant's epistemological question as to how metaphysics is possible comes a question from the philosophy of history: whether metaphysical experience is at all possible any longer. Such experience was never beyond what is temporal in the way that the academic usage of the word metaphysics suggested. It has been remarked that mysticism, whose name hopes to rescue the immediacy of metaphysical experience from being lost in institutional structures, forms for its own part a social tradition, and descends from tradition, lying across the lines of demarcation of religions which regard each other as heresies. The name of the corpus of Jewish mysticism, kabbalah, means tradition. Where metaphysical immediacy has ventured furthest, it has not denied how mediated it is. Yet if it appeals to tradition, it must also confess its own dependence upon the historical situation of spirit. Kant segregated the metaphysical ideas from existential judgements made by an experience which remained to be filled up with material; yet despite the antinomies, the metaphysical ideas were supposed, in consistency, to be open to pure reason; today the metaphysical ideas would be as absurd as are called (with zealous defensiveness) ideas which express their own absence. The consciousness which, however, refuses to deny the philosophical-historical demise of the metaphysical ideas, and yet which cannot endure this demise if it is not to deny itself as consciousness at the same time, tends, in what is more than merely a semantic error, to elevate the very fate of the metaphysical ideas into something metaphysical. Despair over the world, a

despair which indeed has its foundation in the matter itself, which has its truth, and which is neither aesthetic world-weariness nor a despicable false consciousness, already guarantees the existence (thus it is secretly and falsely concluded) of what is hopelessly lacked, whilst in fact existence has become a universal context of guilt. Of all the ignominies which theology (with good reason) has suffered, the worst has been the cries of delight which the positive religions have emitted over the despair of unbelievers. They have come to intone their *te deum* wherever God's existence is denied, because at least his name has been mentioned. Just as, in the ideology which has been swallowed by all the populations of the earth, means usurp ends, so, in the resurrected metaphysics of today, the need usurps that which it lacks. The truth-content of what is absent becomes a matter of indifference; they assert it, because it is good for humanity. The advocates of metaphysics argue only against the pragmatism which they scorn, a pragmatism which dissolves metaphysics *a priori*. Just thus is despair the last ideology, historically and socially conditioned, as is the course of that knowledge which has been eating away at the metaphysical ideas and which cannot be stopped by any *cui bono*.

4~ Happiness and waiting in vain

What metaphysical experience might be could, for whoever scorns to extract it from supposedly primal religious experiences, most readily be imagined as Proust imagined it, in the happiness which is promised by the names of villages such as Otterbach, Watterbach, Reuenthal, Monbrunn. One thinks that going there would bring fulfilment, as if there were such a thing. When one is really there, what has been promised recedes like the rainbow. Yet one is not disappointed; rather one feels as though one were too near, and for that reason does not see it. In this connection the difference between the landscapes and regions which determine the visual world of a childhood can be presumed not to be a great one. Many other children of the same social stratum were probably granted in other places what occurred to Proust in Illiers. But in order that this universal element, the authentic element in Proust's account, develop, one must be

captivated by this one place, without keeping an eye on the universal. To the child it goes without saying that what enchants him about his favourite little town is only to be found there alone and nowhere else; the child is wrong, but his mistake provides the model for experience, the model for a concept which might at last be that of the thing itself, not that impoverished concept which has been abstracted from the thing. The wedding at which Proust's narrator, as a child, first catches sight of the Duchesse de Guermantes, could have taken place, in just this way and with the same impact on later life, in another place and in another age. Only in the face of the absolutely and indissolubly individuated can it be hoped that precisely this once was, and will be; only the realization of this hope would fulfil the concept of the concept. Yet whilst the concept clings to the promise of happiness, the world which refuses to realize that promise is the world of the ruling universality, the world against which Proust's reconstruction of experience obstinately fought. Happiness, the only thing in metaphysical experience which is more than impotent longing, gives us the inside of objects as something which has at once been removed from the objects. Whoever, meanwhile, relishes this kind of experience naively, as though he held in his hands what it suggests, succumbs to the conditions of the empirical world which he wants to escape and yet which alone affords him the possibility of so doing. The concept of metaphysical experience is antinomical in a still other way than that expounded in Kant's transcendental dialectic. That which, in the metaphysical, is promulgated without recourse to subjective experience, without the subject's immediately being there, is helpless in the face of the autonomous subject's insistence that nothing shall be imposed upon it which is not transparent to the subject itself. Yet everything which is immediately evident to the subject suffers from fallibility and relativity.

That the category of objectification, a category inspired by the wishful image of an uninterrupted subjective immediacy, no longer merits that key importance which it was over-eagerly accorded by an apologetic thinking glad to absorb materialist thinking, has consequences for everything which falls under the concept of metaphysical experience. The objective theological categories which philosophy has since the young Hegel

attacked as objectifications, are much more than mere residues which dialectic has supposedly disposed of. They stand in a complementary relation to the weakness of idealist dialectic which, as an identity-thinking, lays claim to whatever does not fall within thinking, but which, as soon as the latter is contrasted with thinking as what is merely other to it, loses any possible determinacy. In the objectivity of the theological categories was precipitated not only (as existentialism wished to think) a hardened society, but also the priority of the object as a moment of dialectic. The liquefaction of everything thing-like, without a remnant, would regress to the subjectivism of the pure act, would hypostasize mediation as immediacy. Pure immediacy and fetishism are equally untrue. The insistence upon pure immediacy against objectification is, as Hegel's institutionalism understood, just as arbitrary, in its relinquishment of the moment of otherness in dialectic as, conversely, is the later Hegel's own attempt to corral dialectic in something fixed beyond dialectic. The overshooting beyond the subject, which subjective metaphysical experience does not want to let itself be argued out of, and the moment of truth in what is thing-like, are, however, extremes which meet in the idea of truth. For the idea of truth could as little exist without the subject, which wrests itself free from illusion, as it could exist without that which is not the subject and upon which truth is originally modelled. – Pure metaphysical experience becomes paler and more desultory to the point of unrecognizability in the course of the process of secularization, and this weakens the substantiality of the older kind of experience. It survives negatively, in the “so is that all?”, which is most readily realized in waiting in vain. Art has registered this; of his *Wozzeck*, Alban Berg valued most highly those bars which express waiting in vain as only music can, and quoted their harmony in the decisive caesuras and at the conclusion of *Lulu*. No such innervation, however, nothing of what Bloch called symbolic intentionality is immune from contamination with mere life. Waiting in vain does not guarantee that what we are anticipating will come, but reflects the situation which is measured by the refusal of that arrival. The less of life remains, the more seductive it is for consciousness to take the bare harsh remnants of the living for the appearance of the Absolute. But nothing which does not promise something which transcends even life can be experienced as truly alive; no labour of the concept can escape from this. This ‘something’ is and is not. Despair over what is spills over into the transcendental ideas which once restrained

despair. The idea that the finite world of infinite torment is contained within a divine plan for the world, becomes, for everyone who is not solicitous for the world's business, that lunacy which gets on so well with positive normal consciousness. That the theological conception of the paradoxical -- a last, famished bastion -- cannot be saved is ratified by the course of the world, which translates the scandal which held Kierkegaard's gaze into overt profanity.

5~ “Nihilism”

Secularized, the metaphysical categories survive in what the mob of vulgar highbrows call the question of the meaning of life. That expression, with its tone of an “outlook on the world” condemns the question itself. It is almost irresistibly accompanied by the answer that the meaning of life is the meaning given to it by the person who is asking the question. Even that Marxism which has been degraded into an official *credo* will speak – as in the late Lukács – in a way which differs little. The answer is wrong. The concept of meaning involves objectivity beyond any making. As something made, meaning is already a fiction: it duplicates the subject, even when it is a collective subject, and robs it of that which it appears to protect. Metaphysics treats of something objective, yet without being able to dispense itself from subjective reflection. Subjects are embedded in themselves, in their constitution: metaphysics has the task of considering how far subjects may none the less look out beyond themselves. Philosophemes which relieve themselves of this task, disqualify themselves, as edification. The activity of one connected to this sphere was characterized decades ago: ‘he travels around giving lectures on meaning to the workforce’. Anyone who sighs with relief when life for once shows some similarity to life and is not, following Karl Kraus’s insight, kept going solely for the sake of production and consumption, eagerly and immediately reads the presence of something transcendent out of this. The depravation of speculative idealism into the question of meaning retrospectively condemns speculative idealism itself, which, on its summit, still proclaimed such meaning (even if it did so with rather different words): which proclaimed the mind as an absolute which cannot get free of its origin in the unreliable subject, and which satisfies its need with its own image. That is a primary phenomenon of ideology. The totalized nature of the question itself exerts a spell which, for all its affirmative bustle, becomes non-existent in the face of real disaster. If someone who is in despair and

wants to kill themselves asks whoever is faithfully trying to persuade them not to do so what the meaning of life is, the helpless helper will be unable to provide him with one; as soon as he tries to, it is to be rejected, the echo of a *consensus omnium* which comes down to the dictum that the emperor needs soldiers. Life which had a meaning would not have to ask about it; life runs away from the question. Yet the opposite of this question, abstract nihilism, could only fall silent before the question: “so why do you carry on living yourself?” To go all out here, to calculate the net profit of life, is itself that death which the so-called question of meaning is trying to escape, even where it allows itself, lacking any other way out, to be cheered up by the meaning of death. Whatever might have a claim to the name of meaning without disgracing that name, would be found in openness, not shut up in itself; the thesis that life has no meaning would be, as a positive thesis, as foolish as its opposite is false; the thesis that life has no meaning is true only as a strike against the protestations of meaning. Even Schopenhauer’s inclination to identify the essence of the world, the blind Will, as, to a human eye, the absolutely negative, even this inclination is no longer adequate to the situation of consciousness; the claim to total subsumption is all too analogous to the positive claim made by those contemporaries he so loathed, the idealists. Natural religion flickers up again, the fear of demons, against which the Epicurean enlightenment once depicted the melancholy idea of disinterestedly spectating deities as a preferable alternative. Monotheism, which Schopenhauer attacked in the spirit of the enlightenment, has its truth against Schopenhauer’s irrationalism. Schopenhauer’s metaphysics regresses to a phase, in which the genius had not yet awoken in the midst of the silent world. It denies the motif of freedom, which human beings once recalled, and perhaps still do in the phase of completed unfreedom. Schopenhauer sees straight through the illusory aspect of individuation, but his directions for freedom in the fourth book [of *The World as Will and Representation*], to deny the will to live, are equally illusory: as though the ephemeral individuated element could have the least power over its negative absolute, the will as thing-in-itself; as though it could step outside its spell in any other way than self-deceivingly, without the whole metaphysics of the will disappearing through the gap. Total determinism is no less mythical than the totalizing nature of Hegelian logic. Schopenhauer was an idealist despite himself, a spokesman for the spell. The *totum* is the totem. Consciousness could not even despair over the

grey, did it not harbour the concept of a different colour, whose scattered traces are not absent from the negative whole. They spring still from what is past, hope from its opposite reflection, from what had to pass or from what was condemned; this would be the right way of interpreting the last sentence of Benjamin's text on *Elective Affinities*, "Hope is given us only for the sake of the hopeless". It is nevertheless seductive to look for meaning not in life as such but in moments of fulfilment. Such moments compensate us for the fact that existence in this world no longer tolerates anything outside itself. Incomparable power emanates from the metaphysician Proust because he delivered himself as no other, with unbridled longing for happiness, without wishing to withhold his ego, to this seduction. Yet, unerringly, he also managed the development of his novel in such a way that even that plenitude, the moment rescued through recollection, should not be the answer. However close Proust was to Bergson's sphere of experience, which elevated the idea of the meaningfulness of life in its concretion into a theory, he was at the same time to the same degree, as an inheritor of the French novel of disillusionment, a critic of Bergsonism. The talk of the plenitude of life, a *lucus a non lucendo* even where it shines, becomes vain through its immoderate misrelation to death. If death is irrevocable, even the assertion of a meaning dissolved into the lustre of fragmentary but genuine experience is ideological. Hence at one of the central points of his work, Bergotte's death, Proust, against all *Lebensphilosophie* [philosophy of life], but also without sheltering beneath the positive religions, helped to give tentative expression to the hope for resurrection. The idea of a plenitude of life, even that promised by socialist conceptions of humanity, is thus not the utopia for which it mistakes itself, since such a plenitude cannot be separated from curiosity, from what *art nouveau* called living life to the full, a longing which has acts of coercion and subjugation written into it. If there is no hope without a satiation of desire, then desire is, conversely, harnessed to the maleficent context of like for like, of hopelessness itself. Plenitude is always showing off its physique. Thanks to its consciousness of nothingness, theology is in the right against the true believers-in-this-world. So much of the jeremiads on the emptiness of existence is true. Only this emptiness could not be cured from inside, by human beings adopting a different attitude, but through the elimination of the principle of renunciation. With that the cycle of appropriation and

satisfaction would itself disappear at last: so far are metaphysics and the organization of life entangled with each other.

To the keywords *emptiness* and *meaninglessness* is associated that of *nihilism*. Nietzsche probably adopted the expression (which was first applied philosophically by Jacobi) from newspapers reporting on Russian assassinations. With an irony which ears have in the meantime become too dull to detect, he used it to denounce the opposite of what the word meant amongst conspirators: Christianity as the institutionalized denial of the will to live. Philosophy is no longer able to do without the word. In conformist fashion it has turned the word round in the opposite direction from Nietzsche, to serve as the epitome of a situation which is lamented or which laments itself as nothing-like. To the usual way of thinking, for which nihilism is always a bad thing, that situation is waiting for an injection of meaning, regardless of whether the critique of such meaning ascribed to nihilism is justified or not. Such talk of nihilism is, despite its lack of stringency, well adapted for harangues. But it demolishes a straw man which it has itself set up. The proposition that *everything is nothing* is as empty as the word *Being*, which Hegel's movement of the concept identified with nothing, not in order to keep the identification of the two fixed, but so as, reaching back progressively and repeatedly behind abstract nihility [*Nihilität*], to posit something determinate in both instances, something which by virtue of its determinacy alone would already be more than nothing. That people wanted the Nothing, as Nietzsche occasionally suggests, would be for any determinate individual will laughable hubris, even if organized society should succeed in making the earth uninhabitable or in blowing it up. To believe in the Nothing – it is hardly easier to conceive anything according to this idea than it is to think Nothing itself; the Something which, legitimately or not, is meant by the word belief, is, according to its very meaning, no Nothing. Devotion to nothing would be as fatuous as devotion to being, a sedative for the mind which proudly finds it sufficient to see through the swindle. Since the indignation over nihilism which has today once again been set going hardly applies to that mysticism which still finds in nothing, as the *nihil privativum*, that something which is negated there, and which proceeds to the dialectic released by the word nothing itself, the mobilization of this most detested of terms, incompatible as it is with universal cheerfulness, is intended simply morally to defame

anyone who refuses to participate in the western heritage of positivity, and who does not sign up to any meaning for things as they stand. If they chatter about value-nihilism, however, about the fact that there's nothing to hold on to, this cries out for the appropriate "overcoming" appropriate to the same subaltern sphere of language. What is plastered over in this is the perspective as to whether the situation in which there was nothing to hold on to any more might not be the only situation worthy of humanity; a situation which would allow thinking at last to conduct itself as autonomously as philosophy has always merely demanded of it, only to prevent it in the same breath from doing so. Overcomings, even those of nihilism, including Nietzsche's, who meant something different and who yet provided fascism with slogans, are always worse than what has been overcome. The medieval *nihil privativum*, which recognized the concept of nothing as a negation of something rather than as an auto-semantic concept, has as much the better of the assiduous overcomings of it as does the imago of Nirvana, of Nothing as Something. People to whom despair is not a technical term might ask whether it would be better that there should be nothing rather than something. But the question resists a comprehensive answer. For a person in a concentration camp it would have been better, if one who escaped at the right time may be allowed to judge, if he had never been born. Despite this, the ideal of Nothing evaporates before the way an eye lights up, evaporates, even, in the face of the slight wagging of the tail of a dog to whom one has given a small treat which he immediately forgets. A thinking person might truthfully respond to the question as to whether he were a nihilist with the answer: not enough of one, perhaps out of coldness, because his sympathy with what is suffering were too small. In the Nothing culminates abstraction, and the abstract is the abominable. Beckett reacted to the situation of the concentration camp – which he does not mention, as though it lay under a ban on images – in the only fitting way. What is, is like the concentration camp. He once speaks of a lifelong death penalty. The only glimmer of hope is that nothing should exist any longer. Out of the chink of inconsistency which thereby opens up, emerges the image-world of Nothing as Something, which his compositions hold on to. In the legacy of action in that, in the apparently stoical going-on, it is, however, noiselessly screamed that things should be otherwise. Such a nihilism implies the opposite of identification with the Nothing. In gnostic fashion, the created world is for it what is radically evil, and the negation of that

world the possibility of another world which does not yet exist. For so long as the world is as it is, all images of reconciliation, peace, and rest resemble an image of death. The smallest difference between death and what has arrived at rest would be the refuge of hope, a no-man's-land between Being and Nothing. That zone would need, instead of overcoming, to wrest consciousness of that over which the alternative between Being and Nothing has no power. Those who hold out their ever more eroded positivities against nihilism are the nihilists; through those positivities they become complicit with all the existing meanness and finally with the destructive principle itself. It is the honour of thought to take sides with what nihilism is scolded for.

6 ~ Kant's resignation

The antinomical structure of the Kantian system expressed more than the contradictions into which speculation upon metaphysical objects necessarily falls: it expressed something of relevance to the philosophy of history. The powerful influence of the critique of reason, far beyond its epistemological content, is to be attributed to the fidelity with which the work registered the situation of the experience of consciousness. The historiography of philosophy regards the achievement of Kant's text as lying in the binding partition between valid knowledge and metaphysics. It did indeed at first appear as a theory of scientific judgements and no more. Epistemology, and logic in the broader sense, are allocated to the exploration of the empirical world according to laws. Kant, however, intends more than this. To the so-called metaphysical questions, he imparts, through the medium of epistemological reflection, the in no way metaphysically neutral answer that these questions may not really be asked. To this extent the critique of pure reason preforms the Hegelian doctrine that logic and metaphysics are the same, as well as the positivistic doctrine, which gets around the questions upon which everything depends by doing away with them, and thus, indirectly, decides them in the negative. German idealism extrapolated its metaphysics from the fundamental claim of epistemology, which offers to support the Whole. The

critique of reason, which contests the possibility of objectively valid knowledge of the absolute, does precisely in this, when thought through to the end, itself judge something absolute. Idealism emphasized that fact. Nevertheless idealism's consistency bends that motif into its opposite, and into untruth. Kant's objectively much more modest doctrines, which concern the theory of science, are underlaid with a thesis against which, despite its inescapability, those doctrines with good reason guarded. The idealists expand Kant against his intention beyond the theory of science, by means of consequences stringently drawn from his work. As a result of its consistency, idealism violates Kant's metaphysical proviso; pure consistency turns irresistibly into its own absolute. Kant's admission that reason necessarily falls into those antinomies which he then solves with reason, was an antipositivistic one. None the less, he does not scorn the positivistic consolation, that one may make the most of the narrow domain which the critique of the capacity of reason leaves free for the latter, happy to have firm ground beneath one's feet. He falls in with the eminently bourgeois affirmation of one's own small plot. For Hegel's critique of Kant, allowing reason to judge whether it has transgressed the boundaries of the possibility of experience, and to judge whether it may do so, already presupposes a position beyond the domain marked out on Kant's map, as it were a final court of appeal. Kant's enthusiasm for topology, it is claimed, implies as a possibility of making a decision -- though without accounting for this implication -- just that transcendence, with respect to the domain of understanding, which Kant disapproves of making a positive judgement about. For German idealism this court of appeal came to be found in the absolute subject, "spirit", which is claimed to produce the subject-object dichotomy and thereby the boundary of finite knowledge in the first place. But if this metaphysical view of spirit is once deprived of its elevation to a higher power, then the intention to set boundaries confines only the knowing agent, the subject, itself. The critical subject becomes a renouncing subject. No longer trusting to the infinity of an essence which it itself inspires, it anchors itself, against its own essence, in its own finitude and in the finite. The subject wishes to remain undisturbed all the way through to metaphysical sublimation; the absolute becomes a laborious burden to it. That is the repressive side of Criticism; the idealists who succeeded Kant were in advance of their class to the extent that they contested this repressive side. At the origin of that which even Nietzsche praised as intellectual honesty, lurks the self-

hatred of spirit, an internalized protestant rage against the whore of Reason. A rationality which excludes that imagination [*Phantasie*] which still ranked high for the partisans of enlightenment and for Saint-Simon, and which, complementarily, dries out from inside, is irrationalistically corrupted. Even Criticism alters its function: in it is repeated the transformation of the bourgeoisie from the revolutionary into the conservative class. The echo of this philosophical state of affairs is that malicious healthy good sense, proud of its own limitedness, which today fills the world. The fact of that malice makes a case *e contrario* that the limits, in worshipping which almost everyone agrees, are not to be attended to. It is a “positive” malice, marked by the same arbitrariness of subjective arrangement of which the *common sense* embodied in Babbitt accuses speculative thinking. Kant’s simile for the land of truth, the island in the ocean, objectively characterizes intellectual felicity as a happy nook, a Crusoe’s island: just as the dynamic of productive forces rapidly enough destroyed the idyll in which the petit-bourgeois, rightly mistrustful of that dynamic, would gladly have lingered. Kant’s pathos of the infinite is bluntly contradicted by the home-baked aspect of his doctrine. If practical reason takes precedence over theoretical reason, then theoretical reason -- itself a mode of behaviour – would be obliged to extend as far as that which the practical reason ranked above it is supposed to be capable of reaching: if reason’s very concept is not to become invalid as a result of the split between understanding and reason. Yet Kant is impelled in just this direction by his idea of scientificity. He may not say so and yet he must say so: the discrepancy, which is so easily taken in the history of ideas as a remnant of an older metaphysics, is occasioned by the matter at hand itself. The island of knowledge, which Kant prides himself on having surveyed, becomes for its part, through self-applauding narrowness, that untruth, which Kant projects upon knowledge of the unbounded. It is impossible to grant to knowledge of the finite a truth which would itself be derived from an absolute (in Kant’s idiom: from reason) which knowledge itself cannot reach. The ocean in Kant’s metaphor threatens at every moment to engulf the island.

7 ~ The desire for rescue and the block

That metaphysical philosophy, as it, historically, essentially coincides with the great systems, earns more lustre than empiricist and positivistic philosophy, is not, as the foolish expression conceptual poetry would lead us to believe, a merely aesthetic, nor is it a psychological, wish-fulfilment. The immanent quality of a practice of thinking -- what of strength, resistance, imagination [*Phantasie*] is manifested there as the unity of criticism with its opposite -- is, if not an *index veri*, then at least an indication. It could not be the truth that Carnap and Mises are truer than Kant and Hegel, even if it were the case. In the doctrine of Ideas, the Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* pronounced that without metaphysics theory would be impossible. Since theory is, however, possible, this implies a justification for metaphysics; a justification set down by the same Kant who smashed metaphysics through the influence of his work. Kant's rescue of the intelligible sphere is not only, as everyone knows, protestant apologetics, but would also intervene in the dialectic of enlightenment at that point where it terminates in the abolition of reason itself. The construction of immortality as a postulate of practical reason bears witness to the fact that Kant's desire to rescue the intelligible sphere is grounded in something much deeper than a mere pious wish to hold on to something of the traditional ideas, in the midst of, and against, nominalism. It condemns existing circumstances as intolerable, and reinforces the spirit which recognizes that. That no intra-mundane amelioration could suffice to allow the dead to receive justice; that no such amelioration could affect the injustice of death, moves Kantian reason to hope against reason. The secret of Kant's philosophy is the impossibility of fully conceiving despair. Driven by the convergence of all thinking towards an absolute, he did not leave matters at the absolute boundary between the absolute and the existent, a boundary which he was no less driven to draw. He held fast to the metaphysical Ideas, yet prohibited the leap from thoughts of the absolute which might one day be realized, such as perpetual peace, to the conclusion that the absolute therefore exists. His philosophy circles, as for that matter do many others, around the ontological proof of God. With magnanimous ambiguity, he left his own position open;

against the motif of “there must dwell an eternal father” [>>Muß ein ewiger Vater wohnen<<] (which Beethoven’s setting of the Kantianizing hymn to joy rendered with the accent on the “Muß” [must]) stand the passages in which Kant, in this as close to Schopenhauer as the latter later claimed, rejected the metaphysical Ideas, in particular that of immortality, as caught up in representations of time and space, and therefore themselves restricted. He scorned the transition to affirmation.

Kant’s block, the theory of the limits of possible positive knowledge, derives, even according to Hegel’s critique of it, from the form-content dualism. It is argued, in anthropologizing fashion, that human consciousness is as it were condemned to an eternal split in the forms of knowledge which happen to have been given to it; that that which affects those forms escapes all determination, that it only receives determinacy from the forms of consciousness. But the forms are not that Ultimate which Kant described them as. Thanks to the reciprocity between them and the existing content they themselves also develop. This thought is incompatible with the conception of the indestructible block. If the forms are moments of a dynamic, as would in truth already be appropriate to the conception of the subject as original apperception, it is just as impossible to stipulate their positive form for all future cognition as it is so to stipulate any of the contents of cognition – contents without which the forms do not exist, and with which the forms change. Only if the dichotomy of form and content were absolute would Kant be permitted to assert that the dichotomy prohibits any content which comes from the forms, rather than a being material content. If this material moment itself appropriates the forms, the block is shown to be created by the very subject which it shuts in. Whenever the limit is transferred into the subject, into its transcendental-logical organization, the subject is both elevated and degraded. The naïve consciousness to which even Goethe inclined: we do not yet know, but perhaps the riddle will none the less one day be solved, is closer to metaphysical truth than Kant’s *ignoramus*. His anti-idealist doctrine of the absolute restriction, and the idealist doctrine of absolute knowing, are not so mutually inimical as both sides intended them to be; even the latter ends up, according to the path of thought in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, in the claim that absolute knowing is nothing but the path of thought of the *Phenomenology* itself, that is, that it is in no way transcendent.

Kant, who disapproves of flights of fancy into intelligible worlds, equates Newtonian science, on its subjective side, with knowledge, on its objective side, with truth. The question as to how metaphysics is possible as science, is therefore to be taken as a concise way of asking whether metaphysics can measure up to the criteria of a cognition orientated with respect to the ideal of mathematics and so-called classical physics. Mindful of his assumption that metaphysics is a natural disposition, Kant formulates the problem with reference to the How of universally valid and necessarily presupposed cognition, but means its What, its very possibility. He denies this possibility according to the measure of that ideal. That science which, because of its imposing results, he dispenses from further examination, is, however, the product of bourgeois society. The rigidly dualistic basic structure of Kant's critique-of-reason model duplicates that of a relation of production in which commodities drop out of the machines as his phenomena do from the cognitive mechanism; in which the material and its particularity is as indifferent with respect to profit as it is in Kant's thought, which arranges for the material to be stamped. The exchange-value end-product is like the Kantian objects [*Gegenständen*], which are subjectively produced and accepted as objectivity. The permanent *reductio ad hominem* of all appearance directs cognition according to ends of inner and outer domination; its highest expression is the principle of unity, borrowed from a production divided into partial acts. Kant's theory of reason is dominative in that it is only really interested in the sphere of influence of scientific judgements. The fact that the way Kant poses his questions is restricted to organized natural-scientific experience, and the orientation to validity and to epistemological subjectivism, are entangled with each other in such a way that neither could be without the other. So long as subjective inquiry is supposed to be a test of validity, scientifically unsanctioned, that is, non-necessary and non-universal cognitions are of lower value; for this reason all efforts to emancipate Kant's epistemology from the natural-scientific domain had to founder. That which has been eliminated from the identificatory approach by virtue of the very essence of that approach, cannot be brought back in as a complement to it; at best, the approach is to be altered from the knowledge of its own unreliability. That it is however so little able to do justice to the living experience which knowledge is, is an index of its falsity, its incapacity to do what it proposes: that is, to ground experience. For such a grounding, in something rigidly invariant, contradicts

what experience knows of itself, that the more open experience is and the more it is actualized, the more its own forms change. The incapacity for such change is the incapacity for experience itself. One cannot add to Kant cognitive theorems which are not elaborated in his work, because their exclusion is central to his epistemology; the systematic claim of the doctrine of pure reason gives notice of this unmistakably enough. Kant's system is one of STOP signs. The subjectively organized analysis of constitutive principles does not change the world as it is given to naïve bourgeois consciousness, but is proud of its "empirical realism". The elevation of its claim to validity is, however, at one with its level of abstraction. Obsessed with the apriority of its synthetic judgements it tendentiously eradicates from cognition everything which does not fit into the rules of its game. The social division of labour is respected without consideration, together with the defect which in the two centuries since then has become striking: that the sciences, organized according to a division of labour, illegitimately seized for themselves a monopoly upon truth. The paralogisms of Kant's epistemology are, to speak in bourgeois and in very Kantian fashion, the cheques which bounced in protest at the development of science into a mechanical operation. The authority of Kant's concept of truth became terroristic with the prohibition on thinking the absolute. This tends irresistibly towards a prohibition on thinking as such. The Kantian block projects on to truth the self-silencing of reason, which reason inflicted on itself as a rite of initiation into scientificity. This is why what passes for knowledge in Kant's thought is so bare when compared with the experience of living beings, an experience which the idealistic systems wished to grant its rights, even if they did so in the wrong way.

Kant would hardly have disagreed that the idea of truth mocks the scientific ideal. But the misrelation between the two is by no means revealed with respect to the *mundus intelligibilis* alone, but rather in every cognition completed by a consciousness which is free of leading strings. To this extent the Kantian block is an illusion which reviles the presence in spirit of that element in the hymns of the late Hölderlin which, philosophically, gets the better of philosophy. This element was not alien to the idealists, but what was open fell in their work under the same spell which drove Kant to confuse experience with science. Whilst many an impulse of idealism wished for

openness, idealism pursued this openness through an extension of the Kantian principle, and the contents became for idealism even less free than in Kant. This in turn lends Kant's block its moment of truth: it acted as a prophylactic against the mythology of the concept. There is good reason for the social suspicion that the block, the restriction upon the absolute, is one with the need to work, which really holds men under the same spell which Kant transfigured into philosophy. The imprisonment in immanence to which Kant, as honest as he is cruel, condemns spirit, is the imprisonment in self-preservation, as it is imposed upon human beings by a society which conserves nothing but that renunciation of which it no longer has any need. If this beetle-like natural-historical care were once broken through, the position of consciousness with respect to truth would be changed. The present position is dictated by the objectivity which keeps humankind in their current situation. If the Kantian doctrine of the block was a piece of social illusion, that doctrine is nevertheless grounded to the extent that illusion really does dominate humankind. The separation between sensibility and understanding, the vital nerve of the argumentation in favour of the block, is itself a social product; sensibility is designated by means of that chorismos as the victim of understanding because, despite all the arrangements designed to produce the contrary effect, the world is not organized so as to satisfy sensibility. Were its social condition to disappear, that separation might do so too, whereas the idealists are ideologues, because they glorify reconciliation as having already been delivered in the midst of what is unreconciled, or attribute reconciliation to the totality of what is unreconciled. With as much consistency as futility, they laboured to explicate spirit as the unity of itself with what is non-identical to it. Such self-reflection overtakes even the thesis of the primacy of practical reason, which reaches from Kant beyond the idealists straight on to Marx. The dialectic of praxis would also demand that praxis as production for production's sake, the universal cover for a false praxis, should be abolished. This is the materialist basis for those traits in negative dialectic which rebel against the official doctrinal concept of materialism. The moment of self-sufficiency, of irreducibility to the object might indeed tell in favour of the priority of the object. Wherever spirit, here and now, becomes self-sufficient, once it names the bonds into which it has fallen in binding what is other to it, spirit, rather than entangled praxis, anticipates freedom. The idealists worshipped spirit – but woe betide anyone who *had* spirit.

8~ Mundus intelligibilis

In Kant's thought, the construction of the block stands opposite the positive construction of metaphysics in practical reason. He did not attempt to conceal the despairing aspect of the construction: "Even if a transcendental faculty of freedom could assist in initiating changes in the world, this faculty would at least have to be solely external the world (although it always remains a bold presumption to assume the existence of an object outside the totality of all possible intuitions, an object which cannot be given in any possible perception."¹ The parenthetical reference to a "bold presumption" indicates Kant's scepticism towards his own *mundus intelligibilis*. This formulation from the note to the antithesis of the third antinomy comes very close to atheism. That which is later zealously demanded is here regarded as theoretical presumption; Kant's desperate reluctance to confirm the idea that the postulate might be an existential judgement is then diligently evaded. According to this passage, whatever must be thought as separate from any particular intuition, must at least be conceivable as an object of possible experience. If it were the case that reason had, through the hubris of prescribing limits to itself, irrationally restricted its own sphere of validity, yet without being objectively, as reason, bound to that limit, then reason would have to capitulate in the face of this contradiction. If, however, intuition too is assimilated by infinite reason, as it is in the idealists and also in the work of the neo-Kantians, transcendence would be virtually swallowed up by immanence. – What Kant allows us to glimpse with respect to freedom, would only really be true of God and immortality. For these words refer to no pure possibility of behaviour, but are, according to their own concept, postulates of a being, however this being is fashioned. It requires a "matter" and depends completely in Kant's work upon that intuition whose possibility he excludes from the transcendent ideas. The pathos of Kant's intelligible sphere is a complement of the difficulty in being certain of anything, even in the

¹ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2nd edn., *Works* (III), Akademie-Ausgabe, p. 313.

medium of self-sufficing thinking, that the word intelligible might designate. It cannot name anything actual. The movement of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, meanwhile, progresses to a positivity of the *mundus intelligibilis*, which was not to be foreseen in Kant's intention. As soon as the what-ought-to-be, [*das Seinsollende*] which is emphatically separated from what-is, is constituted as a domain with its own essence and furnished with absolute authority, it takes on, even if involuntarily, through this procedure, the character of a second existence. The thought which thinks no Something is not a thought. The Ideas, the content of metaphysics, are no more permitted to be mere mirages of thinking than they are permitted to be intuited; otherwise they would be robbed of any objectivity. The intelligible would be devoured by just that subject which the intelligible was supposed to transcend. A century after Kant the levelling down of the intelligible into the imaginary became a cardinal sin of neo-Romanticism and of *art nouveau* and the philosophy which was made for them: phenomenology. The concept of the intelligible is neither a concept of something real nor a concept of something imaginary. Rather it is an aporetic concept. Nothing on earth and nothing in empty heaven can be rescued simply by being defended. The "yes, but" against the critical argument, the refusal to have anything wrested from one, has the form of an obstinate retention of what remains, a clinging on, irreconcilable with the idea of rescue, an idea in which the constraint of such prolonged self-preservation would be undone. Nothing can be saved unchanged; nothing can be saved that has not stepped across the threshold of its own death. If salvation is the inmost impulse of every spirit, there is no hope but that of relinquishment without reservation: relinquishment both of what is hoped for and of the spirit which hopes. The gesture of hope is to hold on to nothing of that which the subject wants to hold on to, that of which the subject promises itself that it will last. The intelligible, in the spirit of Kant's setting of limits no less than in that of Hegel's method, would be to go beyond what the subject wants to hold on to, to think negatively alone. Paradoxically, the intelligible sphere envisaged by Kant would once again be "appearance": that which turns what is hidden from finite spirit towards that spirit, that which finite spirit is compelled to think and which, because of its own finitude, it deforms. The concept of the intelligible is the self-negation of finite spirit. In spirit that which merely is becomes aware of its lack; the farewell to an existence which has become obdurate is the origin of that in spirit through which it

separates itself from the nature-dominating principle in itself. This turn wants not to become something existent itself: otherwise the self-identical would endlessly repeat itself. That in spirit which is inimical to life would be nothing but wickedness, did it not culminate in its own self-awareness. The ascesis which it demands of what is other to it is false; the ascesis which it demands of itself is true: in its self-negation it surpasses itself; Kant's later metaphysics of morals was not so far from this point as might be expected. In order to be spirit, spirit must know that it is not exhausted in that to which it extends; that it is not exhausted in the finitude which it resembles. Hence it thinks what would be removed from it. Such metaphysical experience inspires Kant's philosophy, once that philosophy is freed from the armour of its method. Consideration of whether metaphysics is still at all possible must reflect the negation of the finite demanded by finitude. The riddle-image of that negation breathes life into the word "intelligible". To conceive the meaning of that word is not altogether without motivation thanks to that moment of self-sufficiency, which spirit forfeited thanks to its absolutization, and which, as something which is also not identical with what exists, spirit attains, as soon as it admits the non-identical, as soon as not all existence evaporates into spirit. For all its mediations spirit participates in that existence which its supposed transcendental purity replaced. The possibility of metaphysics has its inconspicuous site in spirit's moment of transcendent objectivity, however little that moment can be split off and ontologized. The concept of the intelligible domain would be a concept of something which is not, and yet something which not only is not. According to the rules of the sphere which which is negated in the intelligible sphere, the intelligible sphere ought to be rejected without resistance. Nowhere is truth so fragile as here. It can be distorted into the hypostasis of something which has been groundlessly thought up, and in which thought imagines that it possesses what has been lost; the effort to seize it easily becomes confused with elements of the existent. Thinking which confuses what has been thought with something actual – as in the ontological proof of God which Kant demolished -- is null. It would be false, however, to conclude with an immediate elevation of negativity, the critique of the merely existent, into something positive, as though the insufficiency of that which is could guarantee that that which is were free of such insufficiency. Even at the extreme, the negation of the negation is no positivity. Kant called the transcendental dialectic a logic

of illusion: the doctrine of the contradictions into which any treatment of something transcendent as positively knowable would necessarily fall. His verdict is not rendered obsolete by Hegel's effort to vindicate the logic of illusion as that of truth. But reflection does not stop at the verdict on illusion. Aware of itself, illusion is no longer the same. What finite beings say about transcendence is the illusion of transcendence; but, as Kant well knew, it is a necessary illusion. Hence the incomparable metaphysical relevance of the rescue of illusion, the object of aesthetics.

9~ Neutralization

In Anglo-Saxon countries Kant is often, euphemistically, called an agnostic. However little of the richness of his philosophy remains in that expression, the horrible simplification is not a sheer nonsense. The antinomical structure of Kant's doctrine, which survives the dissolution of the antinomies, can crudely be translated into an instruction to thinking to refrain from asking pointless questions. It intensifies the vulgar form of bourgeois scepticism, for whose solidity only what is held in the hands is serious. Kant was not completely free of such an attitude. It certainly strengthened Kant's authority in Germany, well beyond the impact of his thinking, that in the categorical imperative and even in the Ideas of the *Critique of Pure Reason* he presented with raised forefinger that disdained higher element – a bonus with which the bourgeoisie is as reluctant to part as its Sunday, that parody of freedom from labour. The moment of unstringent conciliation in rigorism fitted in well with the tendency to neutralize everything spiritual into décor, a tendency which, after the victory of the revolution, or, where this failed to happen, by means of imperceptibly advancing embourgeoisification, won control of the entire scenery of spirit, won control even of the theorems which bourgeois emancipation had previously employed as weapons. Once the interests of the victorious class no longer had need of them, they became, as Spengler shrewdly enough noticed in Rousseau, uninteresting in a double sense. The function of spirit is subordinated in society, although society, ideologically, prizes spirit. The Kantian *non liquet* contributed to the transformation of the critique of a religion which was connected with feudalism into that indifference, which, with the name “tolerance”, draped a mantle of humanity around itself. Spirit – as metaphysics no less than as art – becomes neutralized, the more it loses a relation to any possible practice – a loss of which society was proud, as it was proud of its culture. In Kant's metaphysical Ideas that relation to practice was still unmistakable. In those ideas bourgeois society wishes to go beyond its own restrictive principle, wished, as it were, to sublimate itself. Such spirit becomes unacceptable, and culture becomes a compromise between its utilizable bourgeois form and what recent German locutions call its

“intolerable” form, which projects culture into an unattainable distance. Material circumstances add something extra here. Under the drive to expand its investments, capital takes possession of spirit, whose objective manifestations, thanks to their own unavoidable objectification, entice capital to turn them into possessions, commodities. The disinterested delight of aesthetics, for which it is enough to contemplate, to marvel, over everything that has been created and thought, and, in the end, blindly to revere it, without any relation to it, both transfigures and debases spirit. The advancing commodity character of culture aestheticizes culture for the sake of utility; this is, objectively, a mockery. Philosophy becomes a manifestation of spirit as showpiece. What Bernard Groethuysen traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in religion – that there is no reason to fear the devil and none to hope for God any more – spreads to metaphysics, in which the memory of God and the devil survives, even where it reflects critically upon that fear and hope. What ought to be the of the most pressing concern to human beings, in an eminently unideological sense, is disappearing; objectively it has become problematic; subjectively, the social fabric, with its permanent overtaxing through the pressure to adapt, leaves them with neither the time nor the strength to reflect upon it. The questions have not been solved; nor has their insolubility even been demonstrated. They have been forgotten, and where they are talked of they are only sung the more deeply into their bad sleep. Goethe’s fatal dictum that Eckermann did not need to read Kant because the latter’s philosophy had had its impact, had become part of universal consciousness, triumphed in the socialization of metaphysical indifference.

The indifference of consciousness towards metaphysical questions, which have in no way been settled by satisfaction in this world, is, however, hardly indifferent for metaphysics itself. A horror is concealed within it which, did human beings not repress it, would take their breath away. One might be tempted into making anthropological speculations about this, speculations as to whether the evolutionary turn which gave the human species an open consciousness, and thus a consciousness of death, -- whether this turn contradict a no less persisting animal constitution which does not permit the species to bear the consciousness of death. Then the price to be paid for the possibility of surviving would be a restriction of consciousness which protects consciousness from

what it yet *is* itself, the consciousness of death. No consolation can be found in the perspective which says that the restrictedness of all ideology derives, as it were biologically, from a necessity of self-preservation, and that that restrictedness could never disappear given fair social arrangements, even though the possibility of living aright could only emerge in a fair society. The present society still lies to the effect that death is not to be feared, and sabotages reflection about death. Schopenhauer's pessimism noticed how little human beings are accustomed to worry about death *media in vita*. Like Heidegger a hundred years later, he read this indifference out of the essence of humanity, instead of out of human beings as the product of history. The lack of metaphysical meaning becomes for both a *metaphysicum*. This at least is a measure of the depth to which neutralization, an *existentiale* of bourgeois consciousness, has penetrated. That depth awakens a doubt as to whether, as is drummed into the mind by a romantic tradition which has survived Romanticism itself, things were all that different in the epochs the young Lukács called *sinnerfüllten* [filled with meaning], epochs which were supposedly sheltered by metaphysics. Tradition drags a paralogism along with it. The closedness of cultures, the collective obligatoriness of metaphysical intuitions, their power over life, does not guarantee their truth. Rather, the possibility of metaphysical experience is twinned with freedom, and only that developed subject which has torn itself free from the very ties which are understood as auspicious is capable of it. The one who is dimly imprisoned in the socially sanctioned intuition of supposedly blessed ages, on the other hand, is related to the positivistic worshipper of facts. The I requires historical reinforcement, in order to conceive the idea of something more than the existent, beyond the immediacy of the reality principle. Order, which meaningfully shuts itself up in itself, also fortifies itself against the possibility beyond order. Considered with respect to theology, metaphysics is not merely, following positivistic dogma, a later stage; it is not merely the secularization of theology in the concept. It preserves theology in the critique of theology, whilst it opens to human beings as a possibility that to which theology compels them, and which theology thereby damages. The cosmos of spirit was opened up by the forces which that cosmos fettered; it underwent what it deserved to undergo. The autonomous Beethoven is more metaphysical than Bach's *ordo*, and hence truer. Subjectively emancipated and metaphysical experience converge in humanity. Any given expression of hope, as it

emanates more powerfully from great works of art even in the epoch of their falling silent than it does from the theological texts which have been handed down, is configured with the hope of the human; nowhere more unequivocally than in moments of Beethoven. That which signifies, that not everything is in vain, is through sympathy with the human, the self-awareness of nature in subjects; only in the experience of its own nature-like aspect does genius extend beyond nature. What remains admirable in Kant is that he like no other philosopher indicated the constellation of the human and the transcendent, in the doctrine of the intelligible. Before humanity opened its eyes, human beings, under the objective pressure of the need to live, could do no more than harm their neighbours, and the immanence of meaning in life is the cover for human beings' imprisonment in necessity. Ever since there has been anything like organized society at all, in the sense of a firmly structured, autarkic context, the drive to leave it has been only weak. To any child who had not been prepared in advance, that part of his Protestant hymn book which bore the superscription "the last things" must have struck him as poor and thin, compared with all those exercises on what the faithful are to believe and how they are to behave. The other side of the old suspicion that magic and superstition were still proliferating in the religions is that the core of the positive religions, the hope of a beyond, was hardly ever as important as the concepts of those religions demanded. Metaphysical speculation combines with speculation in the philosophy of history: both will trust only to a future without need for a correct awareness even of those last things. The curse of speculation is that instead of striving beyond mere existence, it glosses over existence and confirms existence as itself a metaphysical authority. The All with which the great theologians since Solomon have considered immanence is vanity; it is too abstract to lead beyond immanence. Wherever human beings are certain of the indifference of their existence, they raise no objection; for so long as they do not change their stance towards existence, the Other is also vanity for them. Whoever draws the existent together with that which is nothing-like, without making any distinction and without any perspective on the possible, offers assistance to torpid activity. The brutalization towards which such total practice tends is worse than actual animality: it becomes its own principle. The Capuchin sermon on the vanity of immanence secretly liquidates transcendence too, which is nourished only by experiences within immanence. Neutralization, however, deeply sworn to that

indifference, has survived even those catastrophes which, according to the clarion calls of the apologists were supposed to have thrown men back upon what radically concerns them. For the basic constitution of society has not changed. It condemns the theology and metaphysics which were resurrected out of necessity, despite much valiant Protestant resistance, to become opinion-passports for conformism. No rebellion of mere consciousness could escape from this. Even in the consciousness of the subjects bourgeois society would rather choose total demise, something of which it is objectively capable, than to be brought to reflections which would threaten its basis. The metaphysical interests of human beings would require the undiminished perception of their material interests. For so long as these are veiled from human beings, they live beneath the veil of Maya. Only if that which is may change, is that which is not *all* there is.

10~ >>Nur ein Gleichnis<<

In a commentary made decades later on his setting of Stefan George's "Entrückung" ["Rapture"] Arnold Schoenberg praised the poem as a prophetic anticipation of the feelings of astronauts. He thus naïvely reduced one of his most significant pieces to the level of science fiction, acting unwillingly from the need for metaphysics. The subject matter in that neo-romantic poem, the face of the one who sets foot on "another planet" is, without doubt, a figure for something interior, the ecstasy and elevation in Maximin's contemplation. The ecstasy is not one that takes place within space, even that of cosmic experience, although it must borrow its images from the latter. But just that betrays the objective basis of the all-too earthly interpretation. It would be as barbaric as that to take theology's promise literally. It is only historically accumulated respect which keeps us from being aware of this point. And poetical elevation is purloined from the theological realm like the symbolic language of that cycle as a whole. Religion *à la lettre* would itself already be like science fiction; space travel would take us to the real promised heaven. The theologians were unable to escape from childish considerations of the consequences of rocket trips for their Christology, whilst, conversely, the infantilism of the interest in spaceship travel brings the latent interest in

messages of salvation to light. If the latter, however, were purged of all substantive content, fully sublimated, they would face the most acute difficulty in saying what they stood for. If every symbol symbolizes only another symbol, something once more conceptual, its core remains empty, and thereby religion remains empty too. That is the antinomy of theological consciousness today. An anachronistic Tolstoyan primal Christianity might still be the best way of coming to terms with this antinomy, the imitation of Christ here and now without any self-consciousness, with one's eyes closed. Something of the antinomy is already hidden in the construction of Faust. With the verse "I hear the message indeed, only faith do I lack" he interprets the way in which he has himself been moved, an experience which protects him from suicide, as a return of deceptively consoling traditions from childhood. Nevertheless he is carried up saved into the Marian heaven. The composition does not decide whether its gradual progress refutes the scepticism of the adult thinker or whether its final expression be in its turn a symbol – "only a likeness" – and transcendence in approximately Hegelian fashion secularized into the image of the totality of fulfilled immanence. Whoever makes transcendence into a fixed entity can with justice be accused (as Karl Kraus did) of lacking imagination, hostility to spirit and, in this, of betraying transcendence. If, on the other hand, the possibility, however distant and weak, of redemption in the existent is altogether cut off, spirit would become an illusion, and, at last the finite, conditioned, merely existent subject apotheosized as the bearer of spirit. Rimbaud's vision of a humanity freed from oppression as the true divinity responded to this paradox of the transcendent. Later the old-Kantian Mynona openly mythologized the subject and allowed idealism to become manifest as hubris. With these kinds of speculative arguments, science fiction and the fuss made about rockets found it easy to agree with each other. If it were really the case that of all stars only the earth were inhabited by rational beings, that would be a *metaphysicum* whose idiocy would denounce metaphysics; in the end human beings would indeed be gods, only under a spell which prevents them from knowing it; and what gods! – admittedly without any mastery over the cosmos, and since this was the case, these speculations, happily, came to grief.

All metaphysical speculations, however, are fatally pushed into the apocryphal. The ideological untruth in the conception of transcendence is the division of body and soul,

a reflection of the division of labour. It leads to the idolization of the *res cogitans* as the principle which dominates nature, and to a material renunciation which would founder upon the concept of a transcendence beyond the context of guilt. Hope clings, though, as in Mignon's song, to the transfigured body. Metaphysics will hear nothing of it, will not demean itself with the material. For this reason it steps over the boundary separating it from an inferior belief in spirits. There is no distinction between the hypothesis of a disembodied and yet individuated spirit – and without that what would theology have left – and the lying assertion of an existing pure spiritual essence in spiritism, other than the historical dignity in which the concept of spirit is clad. Social success and power become through such dignity the criterion of metaphysical truth. Spiritualism [*Spiritualismus*], -- put in a German idiom, the doctrine of the spirit as the substantial-individual principle, is, without the final letters, the English expression for spiritism [*Spiritismus*]. The equivocation derives from the epistemological need which one pushed the idealists beyond the analysis of the individual consciousness towards the construction of a transcendental or absolute. Individual consciousness is part of the spatio-temporal world, without a prerogative over that world, and not representable by human powers in dissociation from the world of bodies. The idealist construction, however, which proposes to cut out the earthly remnant, becomes substanceless, as soon as it completely expunges that egoity which was the model for the concept of spirit. Hence the assumption of a non-sensory egoity, which nevertheless as existence, against its own definition, is supposed to be manifested in space and time. From the standpoint of cosmology heaven and hell as something existing in space are mere archaisms. This would relegate immortality to an immortality of spirits, would lend immortality a ghostly and unreal aspect, which mocks the very concept of immortality. Christian dogmatics, which conceived the awakening of souls together with the resurrection of the flesh, was more metaphysically consistent, or, if you like, more enlightened than speculative metaphysics; just as hope intends bodily resurrection and knows that in the spiritualization of resurrection it is deprived of the best part of resurrection. With that, though, the expectations of speculative metaphysics mount intolerably. Cognition comes down heavily on the side of absolute mortality, that which is intolerable to speculation, and in the face of which it would become something absolutely indifferent to itself. The idea of truth, the highest amongst the metaphysical

ideas, impels towards this point. Whoever believes in God can for that reason not believe in him. The possibility for which the divine name stands is held to by the one who does not believe. If the prohibition on graven images once extended to the naming of that name, it has in that form itself become liable to suspicions of superstition. The prohibition has sharpened: even to think hope offends and works against it. To such an extent is history embedded in metaphysical truth – which, none the less, denies history, denies progressive demythologization. The latter, however, consumes itself as the mythical gods liked to do their children. Leaving nothing remaining but the merely existent, it recoils into myth. For it is nothing other than the closed context of immanence of that which is. Metaphysics today has contracted to this contradiction. Thinking which attempts to put an end to that contradiction is threatened by untruth on every side.

11~ The illusion of the other

The ontological proof of God was resurrected in Hegel's dialectic, despite Kant's critique, which the former as it were sucked into itself. But in vain. As Hegel, with logical consistency, dissolves the non-identical into pure identity, the concept become the guarantor of the non-conceptual, while transcendence is imprisoned by the immanence of spirit and as good as abolished in spirit's totality. The more enlightenment collapses transcendence into spirit and into the world, the more transcendence becomes something hidden, as though it were concentrated at an extremity beyond all mediation. To this extent the anti-historical theology of the absolutely different has its historical index. The question of metaphysics is sharpened into the question as to whether this entirely thin, abstract, indeterminate element be metaphysics' last and already lost defensive position, or whether metaphysics survive only in the least and meanest things, in what is in a situation of complete inconspicuousness and what might bring reason, self-assured and lacking resistance or reflection as it is, to reason. Positivism's thesis is that even a metaphysics which has fled into profanity is null. Even the idea of truth for whose sake positivism is initiated is sacrificed. It is Wittgenstein's merit to have made this quite clear, just as, moreover, his injunction to silence fits in well with a falsely resurrected dogmatic metaphysics – one which can no longer be distinguished from a silently enraptured worship of Being. It is not argument which might escape demythologization without placing itself in the service of apologia – for argument's sphere is the antinomical as such – but the experience that any thinking which does not decapitate itself culminates in transcendence, to the extent of conceiving of a world in which not only is existing suffering done away with, but that suffering which is irrevocably past would be revoked. The convergence of all thinking in the concept of something which would be other than the unutterably existent, the world, is not the same as the principle of infinitesimals, with which Kant and Leibniz thought to make the idea of transcendence

commensurable with a science whose own fallibility, its confusion of the mastery of nature with how things are in themselves, first motivated the corrective experience of convergence. The world is worse and better than hell. Worse, because not even nihilism could be that absolute as which it still, at last, in conciliatory fashion, appears in Schopenhauer's Nirvana. The exitless closed context of immanence refuses even that meaning which the Indian philosopheme of the world as the dream of an evil demon sees in it; Schopenhauer's thought errs, because he transfigures that law which holds immanence in its own spell into that essentiality which is blocked off by immanence and which cannot be represented other than as transcendent. The world, however, is better than hell, because the absolute closedness which Schopenhauer confers upon the world is borrowed in turn from idealism. It is a pure identity principle, and as deceptive as any such. The disturbed and damaged course of the world is, as in Kafka, incommensurable even with the meaning of being purely blind and meaningless; it cannot be stringently construed according to such a principle. The course of the world contradicts the attempt of despairing consciousness to posit despair as an absolute. The course of the world is not absolutely closed, not even as absolute despair; the latter is, rather, such closure. However contingent all traces of the other in the world are; however much all happiness is disfigured by the fact that it can be removed, what exists is nevertheless interspersed, in the breaks which give the lie to identity, with the ever and again broken promises of that other. Any happiness is a fragment of the whole happiness which refuses itself to human beings, and which they renounce. Convergence, the humanly premised other of history, points unerringly to that which ontology illegitimately establishes before history or exempts from history. The concept is not actual, as the ontological proof wished it to be, but it could not be thought, were there not something in the matter which did not press towards it. Kraus, who, armoured against any ready-to-hand, fantasizing and imaginationless assertion of transcendence, preferred longingly to read transcendence out of longing than to cross it out, was no romantic liberal metaphorician. Metaphysics can indeed not be resurrected – the concept of resurrection belongs to creatures, not to products, and is in spiritual creations an index of their untruth – but perhaps it arises only when what is thought under its sign is realized. Art anticipates something of this. Nietzsche's work overflows with invectives against metaphysics. But no formula describes metaphysics better than

Zarathustra's – only a poet, only a fool. The thinking artist understood unthought art. The thought which does not capitulate before the miserable ontic becomes nothing in the face of ontic criteria: truth turns into untruth, philosophy into folly. Nevertheless philosophy cannot abdicate, if stupidity is not to triumph in realized unreason. *Aux sots je préfère les fous*. Folly is truth in the form in which it strikes human beings whenever, in the midst of untruth, they will not let truth go. Even in its highest elevations art is illusion; but it receives illusion, that which is irresistible in it, from the illusionless. In refraining from judgement art, especially that art decried as being nihilistic, says: everything is not just nothing. Otherwise whatever is would be colourless, indifferent. No light falls on human beings or on things in which transcendence does not shine back. In the resistance to the fungible world of exchange, the resistance of the eye is ineradicable: the eye that does not want the colours of the world to fade. Illusion promises the absence of illusion.

12~ Self-reflection of dialectic

It needs to be asked whether metaphysics, as the knowledge of the absolute, be at all possible without the construction of absolute knowing, that idealism which gives the final chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology* its title. Does not whoever treats of the absolute necessarily say of the thinking organ which makes itself master of the absolute is, thereby, itself the absolute; does not dialectic, in the transition to a metaphysics not simply identical with dialectics, itself transgress against its own strict concept of negativity? Dialectic, the epitome of negative knowledge, wishes to have nothing else beside itself; even as negative it drags the command of exclusivity along with it from positive dialectic, from the system. According to such reasoning dialectic would be obliged to negate non-dialectical consciousness as finite and fallible. In all its historical forms dialectic prohibited the step outside of dialectic. Dialectic mediated

conceptually, voluntarily or involuntarily, between the unconditioned and finite spirit; that made theology intermittently and recurrently its enemy. Although dialectic thinks the absolute, the absolute remains, as something mediated by dialectic, something belonging to conditioned thinking. If Hegel's absolute was a secularization of divinity, it was none the less its secularization; as the totality of spirit that absolute remains chained to its finite human model. If thought, however, gropes beyond itself in such a way that it names the other as something simply incommensurable with it, which it yet thinks, it will find no shelter but in the dogmatic tradition. In such a thought thinking is alien to its content, unreconciled with it, and finds itself once again condemned to two separate kinds of truth, which would be irreconcilable with the idea of truth itself. Metaphysics rests on whether it be possible to escape from this aporia without any sleight of hand. To this end, dialectic, at once the impression of the universal context of delusion and its critique, must in one final movement turn even against itself. A critique of all particulars which posit themselves as absolute, is a critique of the shadow which absoluteness casts upon critique, in that even critique, against its own character, must remain in the medium of the concept. Such critique destroys the claim to identity, as it honours that claim by testing it. For that reason such critique stretches only as far as the claim to identity itself. That claim stamps critique with the illusion of absolute knowledge. It is for critique's self-reflection to erase that illusion, and just in this it is a negation of the negation which does not go over into a positing. Dialectic is the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion, not something which has already escaped that context. To break out of that context from within is objectively its goal. The strength for the breakout accrues to it from the context of immanence; to that context should be applied Hegel's dictum that dialectic absorbs the strength of its opponent and turns it against him; not only in the individual dialectical case but at last with respect to the whole. Dialectic grasps by means of logic the coercive character of logic, hoping that that coercion might give way. For that coercion is itself the mythical illusion, the extorted identity. The absolute, however, which hovers in front of metaphysics, would be the non-identical that would first emerge once the compulsion to identity had collapsed. Without the thesis of identity dialectic is not the whole; but then it is no cardinal sin to leave dialectic in a dialectical step. It lies in the definition of negative dialectic that it does not rest in itself, as though it were total; that is its form of

hope. Kant indicated something of this in the doctrine of the transcendent thing in itself beyond the mechanisms of identification. To the extent that Kant's successors stringently criticized that doctrine, to that extent they reinforced the spell, regressively, like the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie as a whole: the hypostatized the compulsion to identify itself as an absolute. Admittedly Kant for his part in the definition of the thing in itself as an intelligible essence conceived transcendence as something non-identical indeed, yet equated with the absolute subject, and thus still bent beneath the principle of identity. The process of cognition which is supposed asymptotically to approximate to the transcendent thing, equally pushes it ahead of itself and distances it from consciousness. The identifications of the absolute transpose it on to human beings, from whom the principle of identity derives; such identifications are, as they occasionally admit, and as enlightenment can on every occasion strikingly point out to them, anthropomorphisms. Thus the absolute flees from the spirit which approaches it: its approach is a mirroring. The successful elimination of a given anthropomorphism, however, an elimination in which the context of delusion would be overcome, probably in the end coincides with the latter, with absolute identity. To deny the mystery by identification, in tearing ever more pieces from it, does not solve the mystery. Rather the mystery, as though at play, gives the lie to the domination of nature, through a memento of the impotence of its power. Enlightenment leaves as good as nothing remaining of the metaphysical concept of truth – to use as modern musical term, *presque rien*. What recedes becomes ever smaller, as Goethe depicted it in a parable which names an extreme point, that of the little casket of the New Melusine; ever more indiscernible; this is the epistemological reason, as well as the reason from the philosophy of history, that metaphysics migrates into micrology. This is the place of metaphysics as a refuge in the face of totality. No absolute can be otherwise expressed than in materials and categories of immanence, whilst, however, neither immanence in its conditionedness nor its total epitome is to be apotheosized. Metaphysics, by its very concept, is not possible as a deductive series of judgements about what exists. As little can it be thought according to the pattern of an absolute and fearfully thought-mocking difference. Accordingly metaphysics would be possible only as the legible constellation of existent things. From the latter metaphysics is to receive the materials, without which it could not exist; it is not to transfigure the existence of these elements, but to bring

them to a configuration, in which the elements enter into a writing. For this reason metaphysics must understand what it is wishing for. That the wish is a bad father to the thought, has since Xenophanes been one of the general theses of European enlightenment, and it is still undilutedly valid against ontological attempts at restoration. Yet thinking, itself a mode of behaviour, contains need – and first of all the need to survive – inside itself. Thinking proceeds from need even where *wishful thinking* is rejected. The motor of need is that of the labour which thinking, as doing, involves. The object of critique is therefore not the need in thinking but the relation between the two. The need in thinking wishes for thought. It demands its own negation through thinking, must disappear in thinking, if it is to be satisfied in reality, and in this negation it persists, it represents in the innermost cell of thought, that which is not the same as thought. The smallest feature of the world would be relevant to the absolute, for the micrological gaze shatters the shell of what has been helplessly individuated according to the measure of the subsumptive cover-concept and explodes its identity, the deception that it is merely an example. Such thinking is in solidarity with metaphysics at the moment of the demise of metaphysics.

