

SYNOPSIS

While philosophy has retreated in large part to a specialist science of cognitive modalities, and is organised on this basis into formal codes of ethical conduct for the professional and business classes, critical reflection upon the concept's claim to self-sufficient truth and its ideological role in society has all but evaporated. Otherwise distracted by still prevalent concerns with transcendent meaning and epistemological methods based on mathematical principles of noncontradiction, the student of philosophy remains diverted from the question of the concept's own determination by the nonconceptual other to which it gives expressive form. This question raises a seemingly unresolvable dilemma, since it is only through the concept that such determination may be expressed. For this very reason such a problematic and the logic to which it gives rise has been virtually ignored. The absolute constituting form of the concept has been either implicitly or explicitly upheld throughout the history of philosophy. As a result the privileged concept from which all others are deduced, invariantly discloses its own immanent contradiction; a contradiction which is then covered over by the claim to indubitable certainty, to the absolute truth inherent in that concept's transcendental status.

Within the history of philosophy there have been various attempts to understand the immanent contradiction in the concept's constituting form. The name generally given to those philosophies, and the logics of contradiction which they have developed, is dialectics. Now the concept of dialectics, as this essay presents it, has its own dialectical, indeed historical mediation in the tradition of knowledge. The presentation of this mediated development no longer follows, however, the trajectory of the Hegelian laws of Essence, i.e. identity, difference, antithesis, to resolved contradiction, but reveals a somewhat inverted procedure from difference, identity, antithesis, to determined contradiction. Moreover, in contrast to the closed circle with which Hegel portrays his system of knowledge, the geometrical form which best illustrates the history of dialectics, as we understand it, is the open-ended bell shaped curve, the apex of which may be envisaged as the critical opposition of Hegel and

Marx.

The earliest form of dialectical thought is present in the philosophy of Heraclitus. The ambivalence for which he is renowned and the fragmented presentation of his aphorisms, we would argue, are a critical response to the narrative style of Parmenides and his concept of the one universal Being. Parmenides too, as our discussion points out, sought to discredit the contradictory relations of Fire and Logos. The Eleatic reaction to Heraclitus is now recognized as the origin of traditional philosophy, extending all the way to the philosophies of Hegel and Heidegger. Hegel nevertheless claimed to have integrated the Heraclitean notion of Becoming in his own concept of Being. Traditional philosophy is characterized, however, by the supreme value accorded identity and the apparent truth therein. Traditional philosophy negates contradiction either by the exclusion of what is other or, what is the same, the formal identity of opposites; for contradiction, it claims, cannot be the measure of truth. What is implied in this position, as Hegel makes abundantly clear, is that contradiction is a moment posited by and then resolved in the positive identity of thought's apparent absoluteness. The materialist dialectic which Marx opposes to Hegel's idealism asserts, however, that what is contradictory is not simply a moment within thought. It is a law which governs the real process of historical development in which thought is both a determined and determining particular. While our knowledge of this process implicates the necessity of conceptual mediation, itself mediated by the traditional concepts of knowledge, this does not mean, as Hegel maintains, that the concept determines absolutely that development. For as Marx quite justly objects, the very presence of thought depends on a desire to overcome an existing form of socio-economic relations. Knowledge of these historical relations, Marx argues, is a necessary prerequisite for the projection of a less alienating social condition. Hence the current socio-economic situation itself determines the purpose, the 'telos' of thought. Equally, as he points out in later writings, an unreflective consciousness will remain the reified reflection of contemporary social relations, conforming to the ideological demands of that society. In either case the concept is shown to be the mediated appearance, a determined moment within the more essential determining context of socio-economic relations.

The problem nevertheless remains how the conceptual presentation of this nonconceptual determination may be presented without implicitly regressing to the identity of thought and its object inherent in Hegel's determining Spirit of reason. Sartre's existential nominalism attempts to resolve this difficulty by demonstrating the necessary mediation of the conceiving subject's presentation of historical knowledge by the historically determined project of individual existence. This position, Adorno insists, remains flawed by the ontological form, the absolute priority given to the subject's existential freedom of decision. Adorno's solution, which rejects the priority of a constituting subject, whether in idealist or instrumental form, and yet does not relinquish the moment of conceptual mediation, is heralded in his notion of mimetic reaction - a subjective response to the object which at once reveals the subject's determination by the object, and, at the same time, preserves their nonidentity in the nonrepresentational transformation of the object into linguistic expression. The subject's conceptual reconstruction of the object and its historical relations is thenceforth mediated by the persistent nonidentity of the object brought out in the mimetic reaction. For this reason the conceptual mediation of the object no longer results in a final identity, an absolute cover concept, whether in the form of Hegel's conceptual realism or the ontological nominalism advocated by Sartre. The concepts' organised presentation is now governed by rhetorical emphasis, and takes the form of a discontinuous constellation of concepts revolving about the object in the hope of revealing its essential identity. Such identity, however, may be determined henceforth only negatively; that is to say, in view of the object's continuing nonidentity to those concepts which otherwise reveal its determining inner history. The purpose of Adorno's critique is to disclose the untruth inherent in the concept's traditional claim to truth and positive identity; to explicate the concept's incontrovertible dependence on that which it is not. In so doing, Adorno argues, we may repel the false claim to an already existing state of freedom. For this, he maintains, is but an ideological disguise for the still repressive determination of the individual and thought by the contemporary historical relations of production. For example, the reconciliation of contradiction in the Hegelian Absolute is but the ideological reflection of a society still unaware of the

historical antagonisms which determine it. Nevertheless the redeeming insight of Hegel's philosophy, Adorno insists, - made possible through its immanent critique of the indeterminate cognitive principles pertaining to Kant's and Fichte's empirical and transcendental subjects - is the necessity of substantive thinking, of a universal determining essence underlying individual consciousness.

In view of the necessity of conceptual mediation and the concept's ineluctable propensity to identify as itself that which is other, by the very nature of its universal form, 'Contradiction', in the words of Adorno, 'is nonidentity under the aspect of identity; the dialectical primacy of the principle of contradiction makes the thought of unity the measure of heterogeneity.'¹ Dialectics sets forth the law of immanent contradiction in the concept's coercive call to identity. What is revealed as thought's immanent contradiction points to the concept's insufficiency in its attempt to think the nonidentical other. Contradiction '...indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.'² Hence the concept of dialectics, as Adorno presents it, allows for the resistance which an object offers to the synthetic inclusion of its otherness in the conceptual form. It is just this difference, the nonidentity between the concept and its object, which produces the immanent contradiction in thought's inherent claim to their identity. Moreover it is just this difference which allows Adorno's concept of negative dialectics to critically reflect on its own apparent absoluteness.

The critique of identity preserves the hope of identity evinced by the constellation's attempt to rectify the nonidentity brought out in the mimetic reaction. The identity inherent in conceptual mediation is not thereby dispensed with, nor the subject-object relation which underlies it. In so doing, the result would be something like Derrida's notion of 'differance'; a difference whose absolute indeterminateness has strong affinities with the sophist Gorgias' notion of Nothing. Certainly Adorno, like Derrida, now insists on language and rhetorical emphasis as the essential medium of mediation between things in the world. With Adorno, however, the concept, in conjunction with the mimetic impulse, retains the

¹ T.W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. Ashton, New York, 1990, p.5.

² ibid.

discriminating capacity to reveal what is untrue in the tradition of knowledge, and upon whose texts such critique ultimately depends. As Adorno puts it,

Philosophy rests on the texts it criticizes. They are brought to it by the tradition they embody, and it is in dealing with them that the conduct of philosophy becomes commensurable with tradition. This justifies the move from philosophy to exegesis, which exalts neither the interpretation nor the symbol into an absolute but seeks the truth where thinking secularizes the irretrievable archetype of sacred texts.³

³ ibid., p.55.

A. THE HERACLITEAN CONTRADICTION : THE NEGATIVE UNITY OF FIRE AND LOGOS.

Our interpretation of Heraclitus is not founded on new philological argument, but is explicated for the most part on the basis of translations provided by Kirk and Raven in their text The Presocratic Philosophers. To a lesser extent we shall refer also to Warrington and Haldane's respective translations of Aristotle's Metaphysics and Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy. Contrary to Hegel we shall argue that the unity of Fire and Logos is not a positive identity of opposites in which the Logos takes a determining precedence over Fire. Nor, as Aristotle presents it, shall we interpret the Heraclitean Fire as an all-determining monism where the role of Logos remains altogether neglected. These identitarian interpretations in favour either of Fire or Logos as the principle force driving the cosmos, simplify what we shall otherwise present as their persistent contradictory interdependence. Far from postulating an absolute identity of Fire and Logos, Heraclitus presents their relations, we maintain, as a never ending determination the one of the other; an entwinement more accurately interpreted as a negative unity, whose oneness is in constant dissolution. In order to highlight this negative unity, and the notion of becoming implicit therein, we shall briefly discuss by way of 'addendum' Aristotle and Hegel's denial of this unceasing movement. For Aristotle argues that underlying or implicit within all movement there is a point of transcendent stability from which this movement emanates, and this, he contends, is lacking in the Heraclitean understanding of change. Hegel insists that such a notion is indeed present in Heraclitus' philosophy as the universal principle of becoming, and that this constitutes the transcendent identity of Fire and Logos in accordance with the Aristotelian demand. Kirk and Raven, for their part, speak of a coextension of Fire and Logos, however, like most commentators, are content to follow Hegel by opting for the positive, transcendent identity of opposites which itself produces and so resolves all contradiction within its own absolute stasis.

What remains of the text of Heraclitus is made up of a

collection of aphorisms reputed for their apparent obscurity. Kirk and Raven translate the first two fragments, which concern the Logos, in the following manner:

Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos men are like people of no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain, when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is; but the rest of men fail to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep.¹ (Fr. 1).

Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the Logos is common the many live as though they had a private understanding.² (Fr. 2).

The Logos is purported to be a common and thereby universal form of reason present within the thoughts and actions of particular individuals. Nevertheless this Logos remains for the most part incomprehensible even after it has been shown to be the measure and rhythm of all that occurs. There is thus a certain ambivalence between the universal truth of the Logos as common to all, and the untruth to which it is subject when given over to the 'private understanding' of individuals. This ambivalence reverberates further in the distinction between the Logos as that which is and is not universal or common to all human beings. In direct contrast to the universal Logos which purportedly governs all things, Heraclitus also presents the process or activity of a natural element, namely Fire, as the universal force sustaining and directing the cosmos. Heraclitus says,

This world-order did none of gods or men make, but it always was and is and shall be: an everlasting fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures.³ (Fr. 3).

Further propositions suggest this same element of nature, although in somewhat different guise, as the driving force of the universe. For

¹ G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers, Cambridge, 1976, p.187.

² ibid., p.188.

³ ibid., p.199.

example,

Thunderbolt steers all things.⁴ (Fr. 64).

War is the father of all and king of all, and some
he shows as gods, others as men; some he makes
slaves, others free.⁵ (Fr. 53).

Or again,

It is necessary to know that war is common and
right is strife and that all things happen by strife
and necessity.⁶ (Fr. 80).

Despite these variations in name Fire remains the central metaphor which the Logos employs to present the notion of necessary change or becoming in the natural cosmos.

This ambivalence between the Logos and Fire, each constituted as the universal driving force of all that is, is made explicit in the fragment which states,

One thing, the only truly wise does not and does
consent to be called by the name of Zeus.⁷ (Fr. 32).

Among the gods of Greek mythology Zeus represents the divine law, the Logos ruling the cosmos and the destiny of mortal humans; it was he who held the thunderbolt as the sign of this supreme power. In this sense Zeus does consent to be called 'the only truly wise' in his capacity as law-giver and holder of divine retribution. This determining role of the Logos over the natural forces of Fire is at once evident in the fragment which states,

Sun will not overstep his measures; otherwise the
Erinyes, ministers of justice, will find him out.⁸ (Fr. 94).

Equally, however, the Logos is considered dependent on the natural force of Fire, whether presented in the form of thunderous lightening, the conflagration of war, or the flames of the sun and stars. For without the becoming of the cosmic universe through fire, as the earlier cited fragment 30 intimates, the Logos would be nothing. It would have no reference and hence no meaning. In this sense Zeus cannot be identified as 'truly wise' since the divine laws he

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*, p.195.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*, p.204.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.203.

formulates are themselves dependent on that equally essential movement of the fiery cosmos itself. What is in question here is the determined or inter-related opposition of the Logos and Fire, between thought as a universal principle and that action or cosmic movement which is not thought, and to which thought nevertheless seeks to give expression. Heraclitus outlines the form of this relationship when he says,

Things taken together are whole and not whole,
something which is being brought together and
brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune;
out of all things there comes a unity, and out of
a unity all things.⁹ (Fr. 10).

Here the unity of which Heraclitus speaks, we argue, is not so much a positive, harmonious identity of Fire and Logos as most commentators seem content to report. This unity is more adequately conceived as a negative unity; that is, as an ongoing, unresolved struggle between what is 'in tune and out of tune', between the identity and difference of both.

Now while the Logos describes the process of cosmic change no differently in form from that of the antithetical relations between itself and Fire, we have the appearance of their positive correspondence or identity. In describing the process of cosmic becoming, the Logos outlines a cyclic movement taking place through the alternating movement of death and regeneration.

For souls it is death to become water, for water
it is death to become earth; from earth water
comes to be, and from water, soul.¹⁰ (Fr. 36).

The ethereal substance of soul, a metaphor for Fire as Aristotle points out, is extinguished by water, and water evaporates to leave earth. Earth disappears under water, and water dries up beside the heat of fire. However we interpret these transpositions what remains is the notion of cyclic becoming. The principle of such becoming seems evident in the following fragment,

The path up and the path down is one and the same.¹¹ (Fr. 60).

⁹ *ibid.*, p.191.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.205.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.189.

Here there is an obvious ambivalence between what is different, indeed opposite, being at once 'one and the same', i.e. identical. Now since, in the preceding fragment, water does not immediately return into fire, there is some evidence to suggest that we are not dealing with the simple identity of opposites. Indeed the stasis of such an identity would undermine the very process of movement which the Logos is attempting to communicate. Hence what is 'one and the same' would seem more appropriately interpreted as the unresolved unity of opposites. This same ambivalence between identity and difference is evident in the statement concerning the various conditions of human existence.

And as the same thing, there exists in us living
and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old:
for these things having changed round are those
and those having changed round are these. ¹²(Fr. 88).

Here the notion of becoming through a transposition of opposites is beyond doubt. What is the same is just this process of change. It is not only the cosmic universe of natural forces and the biological conditions of human existence, however, which reveal this principle. Heraclitus also refers to the social process of exchange when he says,

All things are an equal exchange for fire and
fire for all things, as goods are for gold and
gold for goods.¹³ (Fr. 90).

Like fire, gold contains an ambivalence between its material singular existence and its abstract universality as the measure of value pertaining to all commodities. As a natural substance the difference between fire, or gold, and all other things is immediately evident, while as a universal measure of value fire, like gold, also forms an identity with all other goods. The process of exchange is hence also revealed as a negative unity between the identity and difference of fire/gold and those things against which it is exchanged. This ambivalence between identity and difference is again present in Plato's statement concerning Heraclitus in his Cratylus.

Heraclitus somewhere says that all things are in
process and nothing stays still, and likening
existing things to the stream of a river he says

¹² ibid., pp.189,190.

¹³ ibid., p.199.

that you would not step twice into the same
river.¹⁴

The ambivalence here concerns on the one hand the sameness of the river in relation to we who step into it and who are ever changing, and on the other to the different flow or dispersion of the waters of the river in relation to we who are always identifiable as the same we. The sense of this ambivalence is certainly, as Aristotle indicates when he refers to Heraclitus in his *Physics*, '...that all things are in motion all the time.'¹⁵ In fragment 67 Heraclitus states,

God is day night, winter summer, war peace,
satiety hunger; he undergoes alteration in the
way that fire when it is mixed with spices, is
named according to the scent of each of them.¹⁶ (Fr. 67).

While stressing the unity, the oneness of cosmic becoming through the name 'God', the Logos also communicates this unity as no more nor less than a transposition of opposites. In other words such unity does not exist as something apart from this process in which the antithetical form of opposites is resolved. This unity of becoming is nothing more than the ongoing struggle of conflicting forces. There is an unceasing movement which harbours no point of transcendent stability or rest.

What is by now clearly an intended ambivalence does not seek to intentionally obscure and mystify. For as Heraclitus points out,

The real constitution of things is accustomed
to hide itself. ¹⁷(Fr. 123).

The 'real constitution of things', Heraclitus keeps telling us, is their transition through destruction and renewal into that which is their opposite. When such becoming is given expression in the Logos, however, it appears to reveal a positive identity of Fire and Logos. Indeed Heraclitus says,

Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.197.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.188.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.193.

to agree that all things are one.¹⁸ (Fr. 50).

What is 'one', however, is once again more precisely interpreted as that very ambivalence between the identity and difference of the individual speaker Heraclitus and the universal Logos. What is 'one' is that very strife between opposing but inseparable aspects of what is and is not the Logos. The 'real constitution of things', the determining interdependence of Fire and Logos, thus hides under the appearance of 'oneness' in the Logos. For, as Heraclitus then makes clear in the following fragment,

They do not apprehend how being at variance
it agrees with itself: there is a back-stretched
connection as in the bow and the lyre.¹⁹ (Fr. 51).

What is in agreement is yet 'at variance'. What is in unity is yet opposed. Not only does the 'back-stretched connection' form the unifying link between essentially opposite ends of the bow and the lyre, each straining further apart, but in the related identity and difference of the bow and the lyre as instruments of violence and harmony respectively, the 'back-stretched connection' metaphorically represents the negative unity of Fire and Logos. This negative or 'back-stretched' relation is conveyed by way of the Heraclitean ambivalence. For the more direct or simple expression of difference between Fire and Logos is quickly repulsed as a determination originating in the Logos, as a naive realism which refuses to acknowledge its conceptual mediation. If the difference between thought and what it is not is nothing but a conceptual mediation, as Hegel argues, then this difference is quite simply overcome through their identity as negative determinations the one of the other. Difference, here, is no more than a logical form already governed by the Logos, and thereby resolved in its own self-determining identity. In failing to apprehend the manner in which the Logos is also determined by Fire, Hegel succeeds only in distorting the Heraclitean dialectic. For the only way such determination can find expression in the Logos, without falling into the equally limited and self-contradictory forms of metaphysical or naive realism, is through the ambivalence of their mutually determining identity and difference. In other words it is just this

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.191.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.193.

qualitative difference between Fire and Logos which determines the ambivalence or contradictory form of their relationship when presented in thought. Certainly what is apparent in the Logos is just a simple identity of opposites; and yet as Heraclitus points out,

An unapparent connection is stronger than
an apparent one.²⁰ (Fr. 54).

What is unapparent is just this determination of the Logos by what it is not. This is the 'back-stretched connection' which results in the ambivalence of Logos, and which in turn reveals the relationship of Fire and Logos as a negative unity.

It is from this perspective that we may now understand the otherwise seemingly banal proposition which says,

The sun ... is new each day.²¹ (Fr. 6).

Heraclitus plays on the ambivalence between what is always the same, what is named every day as 'the sun', and that process which occurs outside the Logos, where the sun 'goes out in measures' only to be rekindled in a perpetually renewed and so different form each day. By means of this intended ambivalence the Logos critically unmasks thought's otherwise persistent obfuscation of the irreducible qualitative difference between itself and that other to which it gives conceptual expression.

When Aristotle objects to the Heraclitean philosophy, summed up for him in the contradictory proposition: '... that the same thing can be and not be'²², Aristotle's grounds for doing so stem from his assertion that the so-called monists, among whom he included Heraclitus, those who postulate a material cause, are concerned merely with the sensuous appearance of things in nature. True philosophy, Aristotle argues, studies these things from a more essential viewpoint - that of uncovering a primary principle from the existence of things 'qua being'. Aristotle refers to this principle as the essence of being, or what he otherwise calls the form of all that which is not yet actual. Now this principle or law which constitutes the essence of being is this, '...that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect.'²³ This law, the truth of which, says Aristotle, is beyond any

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*, p.202.

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. J. Warrington, London, 1970, p.123.

possible doubt, is called by him the law of contradiction; and this, since only in the distinction between potential and actual being is it possible to concede that 'the same thing is and is not at the same time'. That is to say, only in the distinction between the appearance of sensuous being and the idea which gives it actuality can it be said that something is in a state of becoming. In not observing this distinction, Heraclitus, in the proposition that 'the same thing can be and not be', is, according to Aristotle, clearly self-contradictory: '... for if all things already possess all attributes, there remains nothing into which they can change.'²⁴ In other words, for Aristotle, Heraclitus' notion of movement involves no movement at all.

What Aristotle fails to perceive in the Heraclitean proposition is the ambivalence between something determined as identical with thought and which is not identical at the same time. Aristotle restricts the reference of the Heraclitean proposition to objects or events in the sensuous world, and ignores the fact that it refers more precisely to thought's differentiated relation between itself and what exists outside it. The Heraclitean proposition, as we have indicated previously, necessarily takes on a contradictory form on the determining basis of this qualitative difference. Aristotle's distinction between potential and actual being serves merely to eliminate the otherwise contradictory implications between thought and what it is not. For sensuous matter is in no way considered a determining factor in the expression of thought, but as already a category of thought which depends for its actuality on the universal predication of further thought. Hence the relationship between potential and actual being is but the tautological identity of thought with itself. Aristotle acknowledges this self-determining identity in the following passage,

Thought which is independent of lower faculties must be thought of what is best in itself; i.e. that which is thought in the fullest sense must be occupied with that which is best in the fullest sense. Now thought does think itself, because it shares in the intelligibility of the object. It becomes intelligible by contact with the intelligible, so that

²³ ibid.

²⁴ ibid., p.137.

thought and the object of thought are one. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought; and it is active when it possesses this object. therefore activity rather than potentiality is the divine element in thought - actual contemplation, the most pleasant and best of all things. ²⁵

Aristotle further argues that if potential existence is prior to that which is actual then it is not necessary that anything in effect exists, since all things may always remain only potentially what they might otherwise become. Thus it would need be that some actual existence is prior to potential being if the latter is to be given form and motion and so realize its own particular actuality. If this is the case then what is already actual, Aristotle contends, must transcend the sensuous world of nature and remain eternally unmoved - outside or above possible change and destruction. This eternal, actual substance Aristotle calls God, whose nature is further proclaimed as the absolute identity between what is good and the thought that desires this good. God is hence viewed as the noncontradictory identity of thought and its object. Without what is clearly this 'higher third' as the pure activity of thought, Aristotle is left with an apparently indeterminable difference between what is and is not. Not only does Aristotle controvert his 'law of the excluded middle', where the role of any intermediate third term is precisely excluded in the interests of maintaining a clear distinction between the two terms originally in question; but his so-called 'law of contradiction' denies contradiction, since it disqualifies the difference between thought and what it is not. The Aristotelian philosophy gives no satisfactory explanation of this difference other than to interpret both as already moments of thought within a positive unifying principle of divine self-reflection.

Now Hegel argues that Aristotle has not fully understood the implications of Heraclitus' philosophy. For what is in a constant process of change is by virtue of this constancy always the same. Hegel thus attributes to Heraclitus the Aristotelian notion of universal permanence, the absolute identity which Hegel himself

²⁵ ibid., p.346.

adopts with his own metaphysical concept of absolute Reason. Hegel states,

...there is only one thing wanting to the [Heraclitean] process, which is that its simple principle should be recognized as universal Notion. The permanence and rest which Aristotle gives, may be missed. Heraclitus, indeed, says that everything flows on, that nothing is existent and only the one remains; but that is the Notion of the unity which only exists in opposition and not of that reflected within itself. This one, in its unity with the movement of the individuals, is the genus, or in its infinitude the simple Notion as thought; as such the Idea has still to be determined, and we shall thus find it again as the 'nous' of Anaxagoras. The universal is the immediate simple unity in opposition which goes back into itself as a process of differences, but this is also found in Heraclitus; he called this unity in opposition Fate or Necessity. And the notion of necessity is none other than this, that determinateness constitutes the principle of the existent as individual, but in that very way relates it to its opposite: this is the absolute 'connection (Logos) that permeates the Being of the whole'. He calls this 'the ethereal body, the seed of the Becoming of everything'; that to him is the Idea, the universal as reality, as process at rest.²⁶

Hegel is certainly correct when he speaks of the Heraclitean unity of Fire and Logos as that 'which only exists in opposition'. To assert, furthermore, that this opposition is resolved in the determining self-reflection or absolute identity of the Logos remains a one-sided and thereby misleading interpretation. What is reflected in the Heraclitean Logos is rather the persistent ambivalence between the identity and difference of itself and Fire. If we are content, like Hegel and so many other commentators, to simply identify the Logos with the natural force of Fire, then certainly Hegel has reason. Indeed

²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 3vols., Vol.1, trans. E. Haldane and F. Simson, New York, 1974, pp.292,293.

Hegel's adoption of the Aristotelian position that 'thought and the object of thought are both one as thought' would seem to validate this identity. If, however, the Heraclitean negation is not simply a self-determining negation within thought, if Heraclitus is pointing to a natural power which itself also determines the Logos, and the ambivalence we have indicated is evidence of just this determination, then Hegel's interpretation, not to mention that of Aristotle, is highly doubtful.

What is true, for Heraclitus, is given expression only in the intended ambivalence between the identity and difference of thought and what it is not. For only in this way is the determining and determined relationship of thought to its other fully acknowledged. Put simply truth only finds expression as contradiction. Thought is and is not true at the same time, or equally, what is not thought is at the same time thought and this nonidentical other.

B. THE IDEALIST TRADITION : THE AFFIRMATION OF IDENTITY.

i) THE INDETERMINED BECOMING OF BEING AND NOTHING, SUBJECT AND OBJECT.

The Eleatic philosophers, in particular Parmenides and Zeno, contemporary with Heraclitus, opposed what they considered the confusion arising from the contradictory form of the Heraclitean propositions concerning movement and change in the cosmos. Zeno's paradoxes set out to demonstrate the contradiction implicit in any consideration of sensuous movement, whether considered from the perspective of ultimately indivisible units of space and time or their infinite divisibility. All such propositions the Eleatics regarded as untrue for they necessarily involve the error of appearance and opinion. While not denying the movement of sensuous being they nevertheless considered it unreal, as that Nothing of which true Being cannot be predicated. For what is real, what alone can demonstrate its own truth and necessity, is that universal Being from which nothing is excluded. Parmenides it was who first postulated the all inclusive oneness, the non-contradictory truth of Being. This ontological concept became the central motif of western philosophy, evident still in Heidegger's pervasive influence throughout the twentieth century.

The sophist Gorgias discovers the most pure and extreme contradiction in the Eleatic position. He says,

If anything is,...it is either the existent or the non-existent, or else existence and non-existence. It is evident of these three that they are not.¹

In other words if 'what is' must either be the reality of the one absolute Being or the existence of sensuous being, then we are immediately confronted with a nonsense. For if Being is, and is absolute, then it must also be what it is not, namely sensuous being. Just as conversely, if sensuous being alone is, then it too must be what it is not, namely absolute Being. Since both positions are controverted by the other, Gorgias concludes that what 'is' cannot be the one or the other, or both together, for they are held to be mutually exclusive. Hence any positive expression of existence involves contradiction. As a result of such considerations Gorgias is ready to proclaim that 'what is' is Nothing. Whether things are

¹ Sextus Empiricus, adv. Math. VII.66, quoted by G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 3 vols., Vol. 1, trans. E. Haldane and F. Simson, New York, 1974, p.380.

seen, heard, or experienced in some other way, this does not substantiate their existence, Gorgias argues, for existence cannot be known or communicated.

Speech by which the existent has to be expressed,
is not the existent; what is imparted is thus not
the existent, but only words.²

Hence, Gorgias maintains, all that is, is Nothing - the rhetoric of spoken words which is language. Despite his critique of the Eleatic notion of absolute Being, Gorgias' notion of Nothing reaffirms a position no less absolutist than that which he undermines.

Socrates seeks to give the ambiguity of rhetorical expression, a more definite foundation in the self-certainty of individual consciousness. While maintaining the discursive form of spoken argument - this moreover being the original form of dialectics - Socrates nevertheless speaks on behalf of a more quantitative rationale where the need for objective definition is made paramount. The dialectic of question and answer is given over to the pursuit of this claim. The grounds upon which any definition is made, Socrates argues, is the authentic self-reflection or self-knowledge of a particular speaker. Only in the light of such self-certainty, he contends, may the Sophists' indiscriminate, and so unethical use of rhetoric be brought to ground. The definition gives an ostensibly objective foundation to what nevertheless remains an ultimately subjective form of truth. The principle of self-identity now defines the idea to which language is made to conform. Gorgias' Nothing, the rhetorical form of spoken language, is subjected to the coercive principle of conceptual definition.

With Plato the 'idea' is now posited as a universal objective form independent of the particular individual who expresses it. That is to say, the ideas of the Good, the Just, the Beautiful etc., are attributed with their own objective existence as self-reflected non-contradictory truths. Moreover the ideas are now considered the objective goal of the sensuous world. They are that in which the sensuous world participates, and towards which the sensuous world is directed, in the sense of a potential realisation of truth. For what is visible as an image, or audible as spoken word, is viewed as the shadowy illusion or echo of a world which otherwise remains imprisoned in the ceaseless contradictions of sensuous movement. In the political ideal of Plato's Republic the otherwise opposed realms are brought together. The ideas become those laws to which the sensuous

² Sextus Empiricus, *ibid.*, pp.83,84, quoted by *ibid.*, pp.383,384.

world is made to conform. The sensuous implications of individual existence are sacrificed for the moral and political well-being of the State. Here the Eleatic notion of Being has been transformed into the political ideal of Plato's Republic. Moreover the opposition of Being and Nothing evident in the Eleatic and Gorgian positions has been inverted. It now reads as the antithesis between the self-certainty of Socrates subjective ethics and the objective morality of the laws, the universal ideas which govern Plato's Republic.

Aristotle objects to what he regards as the inadequate mediation of sensuous existence and the universal forms in Plato's philosophy.

The main difficulty...is this: What do the Forms
contribute either to the eternal or transient sensibles?
For (1) they cause no motion or change in them,
and (2) since they are not in them, they are not
their substances, and therefore contribute nothing
either to the knowledge of them or to their being.³

If the world is eternally in motion and this movement is the ultimate cause of all things, Aristotle argues, there must be a principle or substance outside and yet immanent to the sensuous world and the universal forms, which moves them. A substance which in itself remains eternally fixed and which at the same time acts as the prime mover of all that is - the principle of 'pure activity', that which Aristotle also names God. This substance is equally the supreme form of Good, the rational end or goal which propels sensuous existence towards it. Now the universal forms, the ideas, all involve reference to the category of substance, to that without which they would have no meaning. They are like the numbers, Aristotle argues, which all depend for their articulation on the primary number One. Furthermore, the ideas are said to be that which give form or actuality to particular sensuous objects. Without the defining essence of the ideas sensuous matter remains in an indeterminate flux of potentiality; it just as well may as may not exist. Aristotle describes the relations between potential and actual being, between matter and form, in terms of the propositional synthesis of subject and predicate. The Nothing which Gorgias names as the language of the spoken word is recast in the Socratic mould, where speech indicates at best merely the subjective expression of matter in the speaker's mind. That which the Eleatics called Being is now,

³ Aristotle, Metaphysics, trans. J. Warrington, London, 1970, p.261.

after Plato, interpreted as the universal form of the concept, indeed the predicated essence through which the subject matter of a proposition gains objective actuality. The opposition of matter and form claims to have been resolved, since matter, or what is more precisely the appearance of matter, is immanently determined by the universal non-contradictory form of the idea. Both are likewise determined by the immanent 'efficient cause' of all being, the pure activity of the one absolute Substance, God.

Not until the seventeenth century is the Aristotelian influence seriously undermined with Descartes' Metaphysical Meditations. As evidenced in Descartes' first meditation, the emphasis of enquiry now shifts from scholastic reflections on the one transcendental Substance of all being, reappropriated by Augustine and Aquinas as a specifically Christian theology, to those concerning the individual subject's knowledge of objects in the natural world. Here the 'idea' becomes the tool of a finite thinking subject, whose thoughts on the natural world nevertheless depend for their certainty on the activity of an undeceiving infinite and universal God. Despite this 'rational' dependence, Descartes' method of doubt declares the indubitable clarity of the proposition 'I think therefore I am' as the first truth in this new order. Not only does this introduce a radical separation of mind and body, but it sets up an ambiguity between the now independent forces of a self-determining, self-knowing finite subject and the determining absolutism of the one universal God. For while the clarity of ideas, the 'mathematical' knowledge of nature, in the finite subject is said to be ultimately dependent on God, the self-reflecting process of doubt is due to the finite subject's own independent capacity to think.

While Descartes' rationalism had already made explicit the immanent presence of God in nature, Spinoza takes up this identity and secularizes it in a pantheist concept of Nature. In Spinoza's system, however, all finite determinations, including Descartes' 'cogito', are considered negative modes of that which alone is true and real. This is what is understood when Spinoza states, '...all determination implies negation.'⁴ This duality between what is and is not real is nevertheless somewhat mysteriously resolved through the logic of inclusion in the one indeterminate being of Nature. Spinoza's philosophy, like that of Parmenides, Hegel points out, is hence one of pure affirmation and identity.

It is Kant who then presents the most extreme opposition to

⁴ Hegel, op.cit., Vol. 3, pp.285,286.

Spinoza's rationalism in asserting for the first time in modern philosophy that existence cannot be truly predicated of Being, and who develops, in contrast to Spinoza, that other aspect of Descartes' ambiguity, the finite presence of the individual thinking subject. Like Gorgias, Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason, denies any possible conditions in thought which might support a definite knowledge of the existence of an absolute Being or Creator. Unlike Gorgias, however, who situates what is known in the spoken word, Kant makes it dependent on sensuous intuition and so-called a priori categories of the understanding present in the individual subject. The correspondence we have drawn between Kant's absolute empiricism and Gorgias' absolute Nothing is limited to the negative positional value each respectively assumes towards Parmenides notion of Being and Spinoza's pantheist concept of Nature. Here the resemblance ends.

Kant's argument against possible knowledge of an absolute Being or Nature can be stated in the following manner. The a priori principles of understanding which supposedly give an objective determination to the sensuous intuition of space and time cannot also serve as the foundation of those laws relating to the interactions of nature with itself (i.e. of the objects among themselves), since it is not we who are the ultimate cause of these relations. Nevertheless, in order to understand these relations, says Kant, we employ, by way of analogy, a concept of causal purpose, which, as the teleological ground of nature, allows us to reflect upon the laws of nature in a regulative and ordered manner, without, however, bringing them to any determinate or necessary conclusion. This reflective judgement must serve as its own subjective principle, since there are no objective grounds in our cognitive faculties or in the principles of transcendental apperception which would permit the concept of a possible '...intelligent original Being.'⁵ In other words, despite the apparent necessity of postulating the existence of a purposeful God for the sake of moral order, this teleological concept of nature can be apprehended neither through the sensuous intuition nor the a priori categories of the understanding. This Absolute, as unknowable, can thus be related to the knowing subject only in an apparently external manner, just as the object existing in itself is supposedly wholly outside or external to the 'phenomenal' representation of those objects in consciousness.

What interests us at this juncture, however, is more particularly Kant's philosophical relations to the empirical philosophy of Locke and

⁵ I. Kant, Critique of Judgement, trans. J. Bernard, New York, 1951, p.247.

Hume. These philosophers also placed in question the 'causal necessity' of Being which Descartes had so meticulously affirmed as the mediating agency of the individual thinking subject and the object of its representation. The relation of cause and effect cannot be deduced through the presence of an absolute Being, maintain the Empiricists, but may only be deduced through the experiential observations of a perceiving subject. The inability, however of this new epistemological method to ascertain any necessary truth, other than one which at best remained relative or probable, subsequently led Kant to question the conditions of possibility of all perceptual experience. These conditions of possibility are present, he says, in the synthesis of the manifold of sensuous intuition, i.e. firstly of space and time, and of certain a priori categories of the understanding which govern the former. This synthesis occurs, Kant argues, in the pure consciousness of imagination, or what he otherwise refers to as the transcendental unity of apperception. This transcendental synthesis is indeed what Hegel calls the spirit or principle of speculative philosophy but which in this form limits its experience to the phenomenal appearance of natural objects and sets itself up in absolute opposition to those objects as they exist in themselves, that which Kant calls the unknowable 'noumenal' existence of these objects. It is precisely this limitation which, according to Hegel, constitutes the absolute empiricism of Kant's philosophy. Kant's position nevertheless differs from that of Locke and Hume principally in his explicit consideration of the inherent role played by the conscious subject in its experience of the natural world.

Fichte now attempts to resolve this phenomenal/noumenal dichotomy by making more explicit what he claims is only partially so in Kant's concept of transcendental apperception. What underlies this concept, says Fichte, is the absolute activity of a self-reflecting consciousness, and it is this which forms the ultimate condition of possibility of all that is felt and perceived. This unconditioned activity of the self-reflecting Ego Fichte calls intellectual intuition, and is that which constitutes the subject's inherent freedom. Since the Ego does arrive at certain synthetic unities of consciousness, evidenced in its ability to subsequently distinguish them in their particular manifestations, this is reason enough, Fichte argues, to infer that there is an intellectual intuition already at work. If the Ego were limited to 'sensory consciousness' then consciousness would be no more than a temporal sequence of particular representations without any determining unity in which some sense may be made of their possible

relationships. Once the necessity of this intuitive activity is perceived as the very condition of possibility and truth of consciousness, the concept of the so-called thing-in-itself disappears; for what supposedly exists in-itself in nature, exists, in effect, only for us, or for the Ego, such that the immediate object of consciousness is but the reflected appearance of the Ego in the guise of this other. A second vital consequence of this act of intellectual intuition is that it is no longer necessary, according to Fichte, to speak of an opposition between pure and practical reason. Moreover, there is no further need for a causal analogy with respect to some teleological purposiveness in nature, since this unknowable Absolute, or categorical imperative, is also no more than the intellectual activity of the self-reflecting Ego. The individual subject thus no longer depends on an application of moral law determined in some manner from without, but itself constitutes the moral law in its own inner act of self-reflection. Fichte thus orchestrates a unity between what he refers to as 'pure' transcendental self-consciousness, i.e. intellectual intuition, and consciousness proper, i.e. sensory intuition, where the former is presupposed or included within the latter as its necessary determination. This unity he refers to as the concept of self-consciousness without which the presentation of sensory consciousness would be impossible.

Fichte describes his system of knowledge in the following way:

the essence of transcendental idealism in general, and of its presentation in the Science of Knowledge in particular, consists in the fact that the concept of existence is by no means regarded as a 'primary' and 'original' concept, but is viewed merely as a 'derivative', as a concept derived, at that, through opposition to activity, and hence as a merely 'negative' concept. To the idealist, the only positive thing is freedom; existence, for him, is a mere negation of the latter.⁶

Nevertheless the freedom of the transcendental Ego is not to be conceived as an infinite and indetermined self-positing action. Fichte explains how the very act of positing oneself presupposes also a certain restrictedness or condition in view of which the self is posited. A particular restrictedness is indeed determined through what is presented in sensory consciousness but restrictedness in general is not, since it is the primary condition of the Ego

⁶ J.G. Fichte, The Science of Knowledge, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs, Cambridge, 1982, p.69.

itself. This restrictedness is attributable to what Fichte calls an 'original feeling' concerning the finitude of the intuiting Ego. This feeling of the Ego's own finitude is viewed by the self-conscious transcendental subject as something which, according to Fichte, it is obliged to accept if it does not wish to fall into extreme exaggerations regarding its own nature. This finitude, although supposedly wholly indeterminate nevertheless echoes the inability of self-consciousness to ever arrive at that ultimate idea of itself as '...the natural, albeit fully cultivated man.'⁷ Indeed, continues Fichte, he '...cannot be determinately conceived, and will never be actualised, for we are merely to approximate ourselves to this Idea [of the natural albeit fully cultivated man] ad infinitum.'⁸

In the practical faculty of consciousness the activity of intellectual intuition inevitably takes the form then of a subject which ought to equal itself in the object, of an ideal which strives to actualise itself as reality. Freedom is here no more than an 'ought to be free,' essentially negative in character. Ego, says Hegel can never attain the desired identity so long as the idea of freedom remains an object of thought. For while thought persists in reflecting upon this unity, the idea will not escape the antinomial presentation as at once idea and intuition. The idea which persists in opposition to intellectual intuition simply reveals, as Hegel again points out, an infinite progression of temporal moments, and cannot transform itself back into the timeless infinitude of the original intuition. In Hegel's own words,

... the intellect has succeeded in fixing the rational as an absolute opposite in the form of an Idea. For Reason itself nothing is left but the importance of self-suspending requirements and the semblance of a formal mediation of nature and freedom by the intellect through the mere 'Idea' of the suspension of the antithesis, the 'Idea' of the independence of the Ego and of the absolute determinacy of nature which is posited as something to be negated, something absolutely dependent. But the antithesis itself has not vanished. On the contrary, it has been made infinite; for as long as one of its terms

⁷ *ibid.*, p.83.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.84.

has standing the other has too.⁹

Freedom and nature are thus no longer in a state of mutual reciprocity but rather now in a relation of causal dependence where self-conscious reflection, the 'ought to be free' dictates to its other more servile partner, the natural drive of the empirical non-Ego. Nature in Fichte's philosophy is thus, says Hegel, deprived of all living content; it has been reduced to an empty form of non-determining objectivity. Their relation remains antithetical and so external in form. The supposed identity of freedom and nature, of 'intellectual intuition' and the idea is thus a merely formal one at best; for the idea of self cannot determine itself as altogether immanent in the 'intellectual intuition' and so return into itself from its other as an absolute and necessary identity.

In delineating the limitations which prevent the transcendental subject from determining absolute Being, argues Hegel, both Kant and Fichte have nevertheless posited the presence of this individual thinking subject as the very essence of any such possible determination. What obstructs the philosophies of Kant and Fichte from overcoming their respective antitheses of phenomena/noumena, and of intuition/idea, Hegel continues, is their similar inability to account for the empirical domain other than from the point of view of finite self-consciousness, the intellect; with the result that

the only a priori principle discovered is a merely
subjective maxim of the faculty of reflexive judgement.
That is to say, nonidentity is raised to an absolute
principle.¹⁰

Contrary to Fichte, Schelling now posits not only the determination of empirical consciousness through the self-consciousness of intellectual intuition but also the explicit determination of the latter through the empirical laws of nature. This reciprocal determination of what Schelling now calls the sciences of transcendental and natural philosophy is described in the following terms,

Ordinary thinking is a mechanism governed by concepts,
though they are not distinguished as concepts; whereas
transcendental thinking suspends this mechanism, and
in becoming aware of the concept as an act, attains to

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy, trans. H. Harris and W. Cerf, Albany, N.Y., 1977, p.140.

¹⁰ ibid., p.81.

the concept of a concept. In ordinary action, the acting itself is lost sight of in the object of action; philosophising is likewise an action, yet not only an action but also at the same time a continuous scrutiny of the self so engaged. The nature of the transcendental mode of apprehension must therefore consist essentially in this, that even that which in all other thinking, knowing, or acting escapes consciousness and is absolutely non-objective, is therein brought to consciousness and becomes objective; it consists, in short, of a constant objectifying-to-itself of the subjective.

The transcendental artifice will thus consist in the ability to maintain oneself constantly in this duality of acting and thinking.¹¹

Hence rather than attempting to overcome the antithesis of nature and thought through an apparently necessary exclusion of the one or the other, evident in the opposing philosophies of Spinoza and Kant, Schelling now proclaims this very opposition as the essential moment in a yet more developed concept of Being. The preservation of this duality in some form of higher transcendental identity is necessary, continues Schelling, if philosophy, as the unity and ground of all knowledge, is to remain intact. For this to be possible, however, it will be necessary to uncover a principle common to both. This would involve, says Schelling, a 'pre-determined harmony' where that which creates the world of nature is somehow identical with our subjective will. Now the real world of nature, he adds, is at once the result of both a blind non-conscious irrationalism and a consciously produced rationale which together form the teleological principle of all being. This principle of identity will nevertheless also have to be present within self-consciousness itself if transcendental philosophy is to fully justify itself. This principle, Schelling maintains, can be found in 'aesthetic activity' since here there is both the non-conscious production of a natural object and at the same time a conscious theoretical activity in the contemplation of this object as a work of art.

... this coming-to-be-reflected of the absolutely non-conscious and non-objective is possible only through an aesthetic act of the imagination, ... this is why the philosophy of art

¹¹ F.W.J. Schelling, System of Transcendental Idealism, trans. P. Heath, Virginia, 1978, p.9.

is the true organon of philosophy.¹²

Now since this principle of identity, 'the aesthetic act of imagination', maintains the antithesis of the natural and transcendental sciences as its very essence it must thereby posit the development of these two sciences in a form of continuing and developed opposition. Philosophy becomes no less than a history of their systematic interaction; or more precisely, '... consists in presenting every part of philosophy in a single continuum, and the whole of philosophy as what in fact it is, namely a progressive history of self-consciousness.'¹³ It is this history of self-consciousness which Schelling then raises to the status of an objective absolute beyond any form of individual self-reflected identity, but which in itself '...is not otherwise reflected by anything.'¹⁴

Having adopted Schelling's principle of identity in his 'Difference' essay, Hegel does not make an explicit critique of Schelling's absolute until some years later in his 'Preface' to The Phenomenology of Mind. Here he states that Schelling's history of self-consciousness has in effect revealed itself as a mere diversity of unconnected phenomena; and this as a result of Schelling's 'aesthetic Absolute' which, since it is not reflected by anything, cannot manifest itself as that very force which overcomes the contradiction of the transcendental and natural sciences. Schelling's Absolute, maintains Hegel, is thus nothing but an abstract formalism, which, while at least positing the negative reciprocity of thought and nature, is no more potent or alive than Spinoza's concept of Nature.

B. ii) HEGEL'S ABSOLUTE IDENTITY OF SPIRIT AND NATURE.

Opposing what he thus considers Schelling's 'absolute abstraction', Hegel now sets out to present the identity of thought and nature, of subject and object, as the very living Spirit which negates and yet preserves within itself all opposition and difference. He says in this regard,

The living substance ... is that being which is truly
subject, or, what is the same thing, is truly realised
and actual solely in the process of positing itself, or

¹² ibid., pp.13,14.

¹³ ibid., p.2.

¹⁴ ibid., p.13.

in mediating with its own self its transitions from one state or position to the opposite. As subject it is pure and simple negativity, and just on that account a process of splitting up what is simple and undifferentiated, a process of duplicating and setting factors in opposition, which in turn is the negation of this indifferent diversity and of the opposition of factors it entails. True reality is merely this process of reinstating self-identity, of reflecting into its own self in and from its other, and is not an original and formal unity as such, not an immediate unity as such. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle which presupposes its end as its purpose and has its end for its beginning; it becomes concrete and actual only by being carried out, and by the end it involves.¹⁵

In Hegel's view the true living Subject is here revealed as that which is not simply an external unity of thought and nature, as some unreflected abstraction distinct from this relationship, but as the very 'included third' which itself determines their opposition and which at the same time reunites them in its own universal Being. In their state of dissolution the subject which is the individual self-consciousness situates its object, the natural world, over against itself as the object of its own thought, of its own contemplation, and in the negation of this object acknowledges it as the internal necessity of its own being. In returning into itself from this other, in a second reflection, the individual subject, Hegel argues, preserves this other within itself, and realises at once their complete identity in the universal freedom of a now infinite self-consciousness. In its own self-reflecting action Spirit is thus said to carry out the becoming of its own truth as absolute Knowledge.

Hegel thereby claims to have resolved the Cartesian ambiguity of the individual 'cogito' and the absolute God. Furthermore the absolute dichotomy of Spinoza's pantheist concept of Nature and Kant's finite transcendental subject has been resolved. The 'Infinite without the finite' and the 'Finite without the infinite' are now the mediated reflection of each other in Hegel's concept of absolute Spirit. The fundamental consideration which allows Hegel to make such an advance on his predecessors is that he

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J. Baillie, New York, 1967, pp.80,81.

no longer considers logic as a tool of philosophy but rather as Philosophy's very own self-reflected content. Logic is thus no longer situated outside Knowledge as the means to an end, as it had been since Aristotle, but is itself the very realisation of Knowledge and Truth. What Hegel understands by this is described in the following passage:

The one and only thing for securing scientific progress ... is knowledge of the logical precept that Negation is just as much Affirmation as Negation, or that what is self-contradictory resolves itself not into nullity, into abstract Nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, that such negation is not an all-embracing Negation, but is the negation of a definite somewhat which abolishes itself, and thus is a definite negation; and that thus the result contains in essence that from which it results ... Since what results, the negation, is a definite negation, it has a content. It is a new concept, but a higher, richer concept than that which preceded; for it has been enriched by the negation or opposite of that preceding concept, and thus contains it but contains also more than it, and is the unity of it and its opposite.¹⁶

The fundamental trajectory of this double negation is what Hegel calls 'Becoming' or what may otherwise be referred to as the dialectical rhythm of the 'Logos'. Hence the very nature of logic itself undergoes a substantial change and now takes on the reconciling form of an absolute Spirit.

The phenomenological form of this Becoming is set forth, not then in a purely epistemological sense, but rather as a contradictory experience within consciousness itself. This experience consists in considering those presuppositions which consciousness had considered true but which in effect obstruct the realisation of what is true. The self-reflecting subject thus situates itself within these presuppositions as their very 'reasoned negation' and observes from this position of interiority how they have come about from what they were not. In this way knowledge is now the experience of a movement within thought which turns back upon itself and in so doing discovers the untruth of its earlier presuppositions. The Becoming of Knowledge thus presents itself as the systematic genesis

¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 2vols., Vol.1, trans. W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers, London, 1952, pp.64,65.

of self-consciousness, as the circular or spiral trajectory of self-reflection. The culmination of this experience is reached once individual self-consciousness becomes aware of itself as the very essence of this developing process. At this point its individuality is sublated in absolute Spirit since self-consciousness now realises itself as the very ground and truth of the relationship between itself and consciousness in general. As the synthetic reflection of both, absolute Spirit manifests itself as that which is eternally present in their coming to be and passing away.

In the light of these remarks we shall examine firstly Hegel's chapter on 'Force and Understanding' in The Phenomenology of Mind, for here he presents the phenomenological experience through which consciousness arrives at an understanding of its own essential universality. Secondly the more abstract logical form of this experience and the laws which pertain to it we shall find in Hegel's Science of Logic with specific reference to his chapters on 'Being' and 'Determined Being' in the first part of 'The Objective Logic', and to certain remarks contained in the chapter on 'Reflection-determinations' in the second part of 'The Objective Logic', viz. Essence. We shall conclude our presentation of Hegel's dialectic with the transition to absolute Reason and its concrete manifestation as world Spirit evident in the final paragraphs of the Philosophy of Right.

The chapter on 'Force and Understanding' in The Phenomenology of Mind presents for the first time in this text the universal principle of Becoming. Consciousness views this immediate indetermined movement as something outside itself which nevertheless somehow determines the objects of the natural world in their apparent diversity and separation. To the multiplicity of the objects perceived Hegel gives the term 'expression of force', while that very unity which consciousness feels to be outside itself he calls 'Force proper'. In other words consciousness now confronts the difference between Force as an apparently external and fixed unity, and the continual process of passing to and fro between its implicit unity and the diversity of the objects perceived. Consciousness apprehends the contradiction between the static unity of 'Force proper' and the unceasing movement between the 'expressions of force'; it no sooner perceives the one than the other now exclusively claims its attention. In this opposition 'Force proper' itself remains indeterminate and without expression. Nevertheless this unconditioned unity is incited to such expression by the going over of the

'expressions of force' the one into the other. Their reciprocal disappearance is, in effect nothing but 'Force proper' returning into itself as the implicit unity of both. What consciousness had not perceived is that this apparently external unity is that very medium through which itself and the object opposed to it, themselves find expression. That is to say, the unity of 'Force proper' is also just that interplay of the 'expressions of force' inciting each to take the form of the other. This is what Hegel understands by the self-reflecting unity of Force, or what he otherwise refers to as the notion of Force 'qua notion', the now determined expression of self-consciousness. We cannot thus persist in the empirical understanding of an opposition between the unity of Force and those 'expressions of force' apparently outside it. Force now constitutes, says Hegel, that rational unity in which the opposition of empirical consciousness and its object is overcome. Hegel draws our attention to the fact that the preceding development has taken place from the external vantage point of the onlooking philosopher. He now returns to the perspective of consciousness itself in order to trace how it may, if it so desires, traverse this same path to rational self-determination.

The universal moment of 'Force proper', which appears only to disappear in the transposition of objects the one into the other, now takes on the form of Appearance. Consciousness attributes this Appearance to the inner being of those objects it perceives. That is to say, Appearance is viewed as their particular objective truth, while remaining distinguished from thought's own perceptual certainty of self. Appearance thus gives rise to a 'beyond' of supersensible dimensions which it determines as universal truth. In effect consciousness is faced with an unknowable void or nothingness which somehow holds the laws of the universe within it. Nevertheless consciousness determines the supersensible 'beyond' of Appearance as the 'kingdom of laws' governing its relationship with the objects in the world of nature. Appearance, as the simple disappearing unity of the objects of nature and their laws, is the law of Force in general; and this law of Force is no less than the immobile reflection of that otherwise infinite diversity in the objects of nature themselves. Now while in one sense this law has been revealed as the inner objective truth of the natural world, in another, the law of Force still remains independent and external to nature; and this since the unity expressed by the law of Force in general is itself still undetermined, or a 'beyond' empty of content. In other words consciousness is still faced with a plurality of laws of force as

regards the diverse relationships of those objects, and yet, at the same time, it demands knowledge of the one universal law of Force, which will provide it with the simple necessary truth of all being. Hegel points out that this law and its necessity cannot be known through the objects of nature themselves. In order to illustrate this he takes firstly the example of electricity as a simple force whose determinate laws are those of positive and negative electricity. The necessity of these laws cannot be found in the force of electricity in general since this is indifferent to its laws. Their necessity can only be ascertained through their relationship as positive and negative determinations of each other. In a second inverse example he considers the law of motion and the simple elements of space and time, of distance and velocity, into which it may be divided. Here the necessity of the parts depends neither on the law of motion in general, since this law is already expressed as the differential relationship of these parts, nor on themselves as determining aspects of one another, since each can be expressed independently of the other. The distinction between an indeterminated universal law and the plurality of diverse determinate laws is then one which, if it does not derive from the objects themselves, must take place in the self-reflecting activity of consciousness itself. In so perceiving its own inner and necessary role in the above distinction consciousness, or what may now be called self-consciousness, implicitly absolves the distinction between the diverse laws of force and that of Force in general. This realisation of self within consciousness, within Appearance, gives rise to what Hegel now calls 'Explanation'. Here, for example, the universal force of lightning and the laws of electricity pertaining to it are 'explained' as one and the same; the one is explained as the other. In other words consciousness has now claimed the supersensible 'beyond' as its own process of Explanation. For what supposedly fell outside consciousness as a universal law in general governing the natural world has now been recognized as the internal reflection of this world within what Hegel now terms the law of Understanding.

Here we have the pivotal moment of the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness, from empiricism to the first simple immediate proposition of a self-conscious rationalist identity. The law of Force has given way to that of Understanding where what had formerly been perceived as an external relation has now been revealed as an internal process of reflection. Appearance is thus no longer considered distinct from consciousness, but consciousness is now that which constitutes the

very nature of Appearance. Indeed, Hegel argues, when the Understanding now considers its relationship to the law of Force, to 'Appearance', it becomes aware of the latter as merely the repulsion of the conscious self from itself. A repulsion, he continues, which is more essentially attraction and whose opposition is more essentially identity; for what was repelled and distinguished was only itself in another guise. Both are the negation of the other, and as negatives they are both identical. Hegel describes this process when he says:

The notion demands of the unreflective mind to bring both laws together, and become conscious of their opposition. Of course the second is also a law, an inner self-identical being; but it is rather a self-sameness of the unlike, a contrary of inconstancy. In the play of forces this law proved to be just this absolute transition and pure change; the self-same, force, split into an opposition, that in the first instance appeared as a substantial independent distinction, which, however, in point of fact proved to be none. For it is the self-same which repels itself from itself, and this element repelled is in consequence essentially self-attracted, for it is the same; the distinctions made, since it is more, thus cancels itself again. The distinction is set forth as a distinction on the part of the fact itself, or as an absolute (objective) distinction; and this distinction on the part of the fact, is thus nothing but the self-same, that which has repelled itself from itself, and consequently only set up an opposition which is none.¹⁷

The antithesis of these two laws does not retain then a form of external discordance where at one moment the one is in force and in the next the other. The law of Understanding has, in effect, completed the sphere of Appearance by raising consciousness to the self-conscious understanding of its own universality as the unity of itself and its object as appearance. Their antithesis was nothing but an inner distinction within self-consciousness whose self-reflected identity now has the immediate universal form of Infinity; an infinite, however, which, according to Hegel, is abstract and individual in so far as it remains an object for others.

¹⁷ Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, op.cit., pp.202,203.

Our concern at this juncture is to delineate the logical categories which underlie the phenomenological form of self-conscious becoming just now elaborated in The Phenomenology of Mind. In turning to the chapters on 'Being' and 'Determined Being' in the Science of Logic we now confront the pure essence, as Hegel describes it in his Preface to the first edition, of this Becoming in complete abstraction from the perceived phenomena. Indeed that to which The Phenomenology leads, and that which is given systematic expression in The Logic, is the Idea as pure Knowledge. It is this which Hegel considers the science of Philosophy proper.

Now despite Hegel's claim in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy to have adopted the Heraclitean principle of Becoming, and so, according to Hegel's own reasoning, as that with which Philosophy must begin, Hegel nevertheless takes as his beginning the Eleatic concept of pure Being. For it is this, he now argues, which is the most immediate and universal category of pure Knowledge. The pure immediacy and indeterminateness of Being is however no more than Nothing. The indeterminateness which thus transforms Being into Nothing is considered the reflexive determination or immanent quality of Being. Nothing too is altogether without determination and yet to think the Nothing, argues Hegel, supposes that the Nothing is, that it has Being. Nothing then is also reflexively determined through the immanent quality of what it is not, namely Being, and so returns into Being. This dual passage of 'passing away' and 'coming to be' is now conceived as their indetermined Becoming. This third category forms the unity or identity of Being and Nothing while at the same time purportedly preserving their difference, since without this there is no Becoming. Here we have the entire Hegelian philosophy expressed in its most simple form. The 'indetermined difference' of Being and Nothing results, however, in nothing but simple tautology. Indeed this is just what Hegel acknowledges regarding the relations of consciousness and self-consciousness in 'Force and Understanding'.

This....simple infinity, or the absolute notion
[of self-consciousness] ... is self-identical, for
the distinctions are tautological; they are distinctions
which are none.¹⁸

¹⁸ ibid., p.208.

In tracing Hegel's further deduction of Determined Being from Becoming not only does Becoming cease to become in the empty indeterminated sameness of Being and Nothing, in their tautological identity, but this very identity then somehow acquires determinedness by virtue of its own passing away. Hegel supports this procedure by arguing that with the disappearance of Becoming we cannot fall back into one of the indeterminated categories of Being or Nothing, since to do so would entail the ceaseless indeterminated passage back and forth between them both. We remember, however, from the prior deduction of Becoming from Being, that the indeterminateness of Nothing as empty thought is just that which constitutes the very quality or determinedness of Being. The passage back from Nothing to Being must hence lead to a Being which is now determined, albeit only as the pure thought of determinedness. In Hegel's deduction, however, it is only with the disappearance of Becoming that we arrive for the first time at Determined Being; in other words, at that which has already become, at that which is already inherent, albeit implicitly, in pure Becoming. Hegel's concept of Becoming thus involves a regression or a coming to rest in that which is already implicitly at hand, namely Determined Being.

In 'Determined Being in general' the determinedness of Being, maintains Hegel, is that whereby Being is what it is and so cannot be separated from it. Such determinedness is the very Quality of its Being, and Quality as simple determinedness, already within Being, is said to constitute the reality of this Being. Moreover, in keeping with Spinoza's principle, 'all determination is negation', the determinedness or Quality of Being is revealed only through the negation of those qualities inherent in other determined beings. Quality is thus revealed as the exclusion or negation of these realities in the original being. What this amounts to, claims Hegel, is that the negative aspect of Quality is itself negated, whereby Quality finally comes to form the immanent determination of a real Something.

The determined relation of Something and Other is further adduced in the category of Limit. The Limit of Something may be considered, says Hegel, either as the 'not-Being of Other', i.e. as the inner border of the Something itself, or as that very Other altogether outside the former. This Other is, however, just as much a determined Something whose Limit is conceived in the same double perspective as that just

outlined for the original Something. Since Something and Other may thus transmute the one into the other, the apparent external determination of Limit is thus revealed more specifically as an internal relation. That is to say in this inter-change each remains constricted by the limit of the other, which is none other than itself, and so cannot go beyond itself in its other. Limit thus shows itself to be more essentially the Something's immanent determination as Finitude. The Other is now that Barrier beyond which the finite Something cannot go and yet beyond which it 'ought' to go if it is to escape its own reciprocal negation as a finite Other. In the separation of Something and Other, expressed in the proposition of impossibility, 'you *cannot*, just because you should', Ought forms the immanent quality of Barrier where the finite Something is fixed in a position which allows of no movement beyond its own finite limitations. In the unity of Something and Other, expressed in the proposition of possibility, 'you can, because you should', Barrier is now negated and the Something passes over into its Other as that which it ought to be, viz. the Infinite. Barrier, expressed in the word 'should', nevertheless remains the destiny of Ought such that the Other into which the Something passes, the Infinite, is itself also constrained by this quality of finitude. What results then is an external progression of going over from one finite Something to another; an infinite process, which, claims Hegel, since it indicates an unlimited beyond, is altogether spurious.

What arises from the line of infinite progress is the double and contradictory result of each of the moments being conceived either as a 'finite Infinite', since it does not escape the determining finitude of the other - or as an 'infinite Finite', since it indicates a perpetual process of transmuting finite categories. As foreshadowed in the relations of Barrier and Ought, each in isolation is considered inadequate as a concept of true Infinity. Nevertheless what is common to both, Hegel continues, is that they have sublated their Other through the same process of determined negation. In this way they are identical; and so, Hegel argues, their determined identity is established. It is this identity, he maintains, which constitutes the affirmative, concrete reality of the true Infinite.

In this Being ... the contradiction has not vanished abstractly, but it is resolved and reconciled, and the thoughts are not only complete but combined. The nature of speculative thought shows its characteristic method in this example just worked out: it consists

solely in seizing the opposed moments in their unity.
 Here each in fact shows that it contains its opposite
 and coincides with it: and thus the affirmative truth
 of both is this unity which moves itself within itself,
 the compacting of the two thoughts, their self-relation,
 not immediate, but infinite.¹⁹

Here we are no longer dealing with just the simple unity of finite and infinite, for this only returns to difference and finitude, but rather, says Hegel, with the further consciousness '...that the unity and separation are themselves inseparable.'²⁰ The concept of the true Infinite is thus said to contain the contradiction of itself, the mock Infinite, as a determining moment within its own self-determined identity. Becoming, in effect, appears only to disappear in the true Infinite which is Being. The true Infinite is determined Being only in the disappearance of the mock Infinite. We have already encountered the same disappearance of Becoming as regards the indetermined relations of Being and Nothing in the notion of 'determined Being in general'.

The immediate positive unity of Being, of the true Infinite, is now mediated by the opposing negative unity of Essence. The logic of Essence sublates Being within itself as the Appearance of Being and stands this Appearance over against itself as that which is inessential but at the same time as that upon which it ultimately depends. In phenomenological terms the conscious subject sets itself up as the mediated object of its own self-reflection, mediated, that is, by the Appearance of Being. The logic of Essence, as the abstract form of self-conscious reflection, now presents those laws of the Understanding which underlie the Appearance of Being. These laws, that of Identity, Difference, and Contradiction develop as an inter-related sequence of propositions which contradict and mutually sublate each other in the unity of Essence.

The first law of self-conscious reason takes the form $A=A$ and is known as the proposition of Identity. Hegel argues that, in this form, Identity dispenses with all difference and is hence without content. In this tautological immediacy, Identity, as a proposition of Truth, remains incomplete. When those who support such a proposition appeal to experience as their authority, as for example in the proposition 'a Rose is a Rose', or 'God is God' what they presuppose is that a Rose is not a Lily or

¹⁹ Hegel, Science of Logic, op.cit., p.165.

²⁰ ibid.

some other flower, and that God is not finite. Only in differentiation from this other, does the proposition of the Rose or of God attain any significance. The proposition in this tautological form says nothing. Indeed it contradicts itself since it is essentially one of difference. There is a more appropriate form for the expression of Identity, Hegel argues, which he takes directly from Aristotle, and which the latter had called the proposition of Contradiction: that 'A cannot be A and non-A at the same time'. This proposition now explicitly includes the form of the Other within itself. Once again, however, the non-A immediately disappears in its appearing; and it does this, Hegel explains, since difference is no more than the internal self-reflection of Identity with itself. Both propositions thus carry within themselves, the first implicitly, the second explicitly, the difference which allows the intended identity to retain its significance. Nevertheless, Hegel maintains, the second proposition is indeed one of Contradiction, since it involves a double negation; the negation which is non-A is itself negated in order to achieve identity. Here we perceive most clearly the Hegelian and Aristotelian sense of contradiction. It is more precisely an identity which resolves difference; an identity which forms the unity of itself and its self-reflected difference. Now if this is the law which supposedly underlies the indetermined relations of Being and Nothing, then their Becoming is confirmed as altogether static, since it consists in the simple identity of Being with its self-reflected difference. Becoming, as the positive expression of difference, disappears in the identity of Determined Being.

In making explicit the moment of difference concealed within the proposition of Identity, Hegel then proceeds to analyse in its own right what he, in the first instance, calls the proposition of Diversity, or of Difference in general. This proposition states, 'All things are diverse', or 'there are no two things which are equal to one another'. Here we have an indetermined multiplicity of things, that is to say, where two things, e.g. a rose and a log, are altogether unlike and have no identifiable relation between them. Nevertheless, as Hegel argues, this multiplicity is merely a sameness in what is multiple, or a unified oneness in all that is plural. In other words if two or more things are supposedly unequal then they must already have implicitly within them some form of determining likeness or equality. With this in mind Hegel reformulates the proposition of Diversity such that 'there are no two things which are fully equal to one another'. In this way the proposition now expresses more particularly a

determined difference where two things may be like and unlike, equal and unequal to each other at the same time. This implies that the apparent external difference presented in the proposition of Diversity is in truth an internal reflection of one and the same relation, for there cannot be unlike without like, or inequality without equality. This proposition, just as the proposition of Identity, leads then to its own self-contradiction, since Diversity is shown to have its foundation in Identity.

In the proposition of Diversity we recognize the essential law of what we have discussed earlier with respect to the development from Determined Being in general through its determinedness as Quality to the particular determination of Something. For the Quality of Something is what it is only through it not being that of any other diverse Something, and yet without their underlying identity as real Somethings each could not determine its Quality as properly its own. What thereafter becomes the more determined opposition of the finite Something and Other now finds its governing law in the proposition of the Excluded Third, or what Hegel could more appropriately have called the proposition of Antithesis.

In the proposition of the Excluded Third the self-contradictory laws of Identity and Diversity are brought together in a determining antithesis which now also constitutes the more developed expression of determination not yet evident in the proposition of Diversity. In deference to Aristotle, who is again the source of this law, Hegel refers to it as the proposition of the Excluded Third, which states: 'Something is either A or not A; there is no third possibility'. Hegel again reformulates this law to distinguish it more clearly from Aristotle's so-called law of Contradiction, such that 'there is not Something which is neither A or non-A, that there is not a Third which is indifferent towards the Antithesis'. What is involved here, argues Hegel, is a relationship which opposes positive and negative; a relationship where in fact there *is* a third already *included* in the proposition as it now stands. This third is the A which is neither +A or -A, or which may just as well be either of these two. Moreover it is this third which enables the passage of the one into the other, and is that moment of identity on which the antithesis is founded. This law, Hegel maintains, signals the passing over of Identity into Diversity, and of Diversity into Identity in the unity of Reflection which is Essence in its own unreflected simplicity. It would seem then that Hegel has overturned the sense of the Aristotelian proposition, for we remember that Aristotle denies the very possibility of an excluded third. Hegel's proposition, in

this sense, is conceived no differently. What Hegel does rather, is to make explicit the included presence of a finite self-conscious subject, which in the abstract form of the Logic is unreflected Essence; and which, as the simple identity of thought and its object, of reflection and appearance, Aristotle and the scholastics did not elucidate. The proposition of Antithesis thus too reveals its self-contradictory nature since it is essentially one of identity. It is this law which governs that some movement of Something and Other, of Finite and Infinite, which Hegel calls the mock Infinite where what is common to both sides of the antithesis is their very negation of each other. The finite self-reflecting subject constitutes the incomplete identity, the unreflected Essence of the antithetical relations between itself and Being as Appearance.

The truth or ground of each of these propositions, of Identity, Diversity, and Antithesis is now presented in the proposition of Contradiction: 'that all things are contradictory in themselves'. Here we are dealing with the self-reflected mediation of Essence in itself which forms the law of the true Infinite as we encountered it in 'Determined Being'. We remember that the independent Reflection-determinations of Identity and Difference, (the proposition of Antithesis being only a more explicit development of the proposition of Diversity), are mediated through the not-Being of their Other, or what is the same, are mediated through the very exclusion of this Other. They are mediated through this mutual exclusion since each nevertheless remains implicitly dependent on the other, and each goes over into its Other as the very expression of this dependence. With this in mind the exclusion of the Other is no less an exclusion of their own independence from each other. The independent unity of each can be affirmed thereafter no longer through the exclusion of its Other, but only through the negation of what is now more precisely a self-exclusion. It is just this procedure which Hegel otherwise describes as 'the negation of negation'. This going together of the negative with itself, of the excluded with the self-excluding, of the contradictory with the self-contradictory, Hegel refers to as the self-reflected unity of Essence, the 'One Reflection' in which difference and identity are identical.

Now the thing, the subject, or the concept, is itself
just this negative unity; it is contradiction in itself, but
also it is resolved contradiction; it is the Ground which
contains and supports its determinations.²¹

²¹ ibid., Vol.2, p.70.

As self-reflecting negativity, the proposition of Contradiction so reveals itself as the identical ground, the included third, of the propositions of Identity and Difference. Indeed, as has once again become evident, the proposition of Contradiction is essentially one of self-mediated Identity; the self-determining identity of the individual thinking subject. Hence the law of contradiction constitutes the underlying essence of what Hegel earlier referred to as the still abstract notion of infinite Being.

The unity of Being and Essence is now deduced according to that same method evident in 'Determined Being' and 'the Reflection-determinations' respectively. We are already at that point where Being and Essence pass over into their other. In so doing they reveal the reciprocal dependency of the antithetical notions of subject and object presented in 'the Subjective Logic'. Essence here passes into the 'mediated' notion of Subjectivity, mediated in its own self-conscious interiority by the external reflection of the object. Being passes into the mediated notion of Objectivity, where, in the immediacy of the perceived object, the subject had previously remained altogether covert or inapparent. This dialectical transformation of Being and Essence into the notions of Subject and Object constitutes the still implicit development made by early modern philosophy in respect of ancient Greek and medieval thought. In 'the Subjective Notion' the previously unconnected Aristotelian categories of formal logic are now deduced one from the other to form the unity of the self-conscious rational subject. In 'the Objective Notion' the diverse relations of the things in the natural world find their objective unity only in the teleology of a self-conscious purpose or goal; and such purpose, Hegel maintains, can only be the prerogative of a universal, all knowing Subject. This universal Subject is, Hegel argues, already present in an implicit manner within the individual subject/object relations, for the latter are nothing but this Subject's own inner self-determination. The making explicit of this identity where the absolute Subject returns out of the individual, out of its necessary otherness, into itself, is the further determination of what has become, according to Hegel, the free concrete Subject, otherwise referred to as the reality of the absolute Idea.

In this result we have returned to the beginning, to the rational presupposition underlying the entire development of the Logic, the Idea as pure Knowledge. For each of those categories, deduced from Being, is already implicitly contained within it: the Absolute Idea within Essence,

Essence within Being, just as Identity is concealed within Difference, and the Infinite within the Finite. In this sense the Becoming or movement forward through the categories is more essentially a return through the inward spiral of infinite self-consciousness, or a going back into that which is already a determining moment of Being. Becoming disappears in a Being which remains determined only by what it already is, namely Reason. It thus appears confined within its own tautological principle of self-reflection, within a recollection of itself as that which has already passed. The reason for this can be found in the nature of Hegel's idealism generally, where what is real is real only in so far as it is rational or ideal. In other words, what apparently exists as nature, as external to thought, is real only through having already been posited in the individual consciousness by the Spirit of absolute Reason.

On account of such thinking Hegel proceeds to interpret the course of world history as the external manifestation of the absolute Idea, or what, in this now temporal context, he refers to as the universal world Spirit. The decisive stages of historical development are those stages through which Spirit passes in becoming conscious of itself as the self-determining act of universal mind. Hence this development, Hegel maintains, is not due to the blind fatality of natural forces, but rather to the self-reflection of Spirit moving consciously, and so necessarily, towards the rational realisation of freedom. The various forms of statehood, their institutions, and the individuals of which they are composed, are all said to be subject to the determining principle which characterizes the world Spirit at a given stage of its self-conscious development. That is to say, while their conscious activities are directed towards achieving their individual goals, they nevertheless remain unconscious agents of the universal Spirit immanent within them. Furthermore, the principle governing each moment of the self-conscious development of Spirit, Hegel argues, is carried through pre-eminently by the particular state which dominates that period of historical activity. Hegel speaks here of four primary moments which he ascribes respectively to the realm of the Orient, the Greek and Roman worlds, and finally to the Germanic order. Each of these realms is represented as corresponding in logical form to that of the four propositions of Identity, Diversity, Antithesis, and Contradiction. The development from one historical phase to another is again conceived no differently from that rational development of the above mentioned propositions presented in the book of 'Essence'.

What is of significance here is not so much the way in which Hegel presents this correspondence, but that history, as the inner reflection of Spirit, is now made commensurable with a process of natural growth. For Hegel states,

History is mind clothing itself with the form of events
or the immediate actuality of nature. The stages of its
development are therefore presented as immediate
natural principles.²²

What, in the Logic, are the mediated negation of nature's appearance, the self-conscious principles of Essence, are here affirmed as immediate principles of nature. The positive, self-determining identity of Spirit, which resolves the antithetical notions of a non-rational contingent 'nature' and a self-determining rational history, is now presented as the determining positivity of natural forces. Spirit, somewhat ambiguously, takes on the attributes of a 'second nature', which, in negating 'first nature' nevertheless serves to glorify the latter as that which characterizes its own absolute Being. This ambiguity is equally evident in the self-determining and determined relations of the particular and universal subjects, since the latter, having negated the former, assumes those same individual attributes. What is left is the hypostatized disappearance of history's becoming in the timeless presence of the constitutional monarchy of Prussia, the external manifestation of Spirit.

²² G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, trans. T. Knox, Oxford, 1969, p.217.

C. THE MATERIALIST ANTITHESIS :

SENSUOUS ACTION AND THOUGHT.

**i) MARX'S IDENTITY AND NONIDENTITY OF HISTORICAL
SELF-DETERMINATION AND DETERMINISM.**

The mediation of nature and thought, Marx argues, takes place through just that which is excluded from the Hegelian concept of Spirit, through that which constitutes its very negation, namely human sensuous action. The truth of history and human life, Marx contends, lies not in the absolute identity of Hegel's Reason, but in that sensuous action without which reason itself has no meaning. That is to say the meaning of human existence is evident more essentially in those actions from which reason derives its necessity. In his 'Second Thesis on Feuerbach', which is as much directed against Hegel as Feuerbach, Marx states,

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.¹

In his criticism of Feuerbach and the eighteenth century materialists, who interpret nature only as an object of thought, Marx indicates that nature is more properly conceived as an object of human sensuous action within which lies the self-conscious purpose of a human subject. Idealism, while acknowledging the active role of the subject in respect of nature, nevertheless limits this activity to the reflective processes of thought. Idealism, Marx continues, thus fails to recognize the subject as a sensuously active human being.

The necessity of Marx's revaluation of the notions of subject and object is set forth in the 1844 manuscript entitled 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole'. Here Marx makes known his accord with Hegel that the individual subject realises objective being only in an active relationship with nature. When Hegel, however, interprets nature as

¹ K. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in R. Tucker (ed.), The Marx-Engels Reader, New York, 1978, p.144.

but the form of its appearance in consciousness, and the human individual as the pure reflection of self-consciousness, their relationship, Marx maintains, is no more than a pure abstraction. The realisation of the human subject's objective potential is severely curtailed, for '...knowing is [the subject's] sole objective relation.'² The reason for this inadequacy, Marx continues, may be attributed to the Hegelian view that the very sensuousness or externality of nature from thought constitutes a defect in nature itself. Hence nature is posited by thought as something whose alienation from thought is already potentially overcome, i.e. as an internal moment of what only appears to be external to it. In negating this appearance, or what is only a moment of its own self-reflection, thought not only overcomes its self-determined alienation, but, Marx adds, annuls all claim to being objective. The self-conscious subject is no more than 'an abstract ego' elevated to the realm of ethereal spirit. In reappropriating the alienated reflection of itself the subject merely confirms its very real alienation from the objective sensuous world. It is just for this reason, argues Marx, that in knowing its own process of becoming as nothing but an estranged abstraction, the absolute Idea of Hegel's Logic, in his Encyclopaedia, later abandons its own nothingness for the intuitive immediacy of nature. Indeed, says Marx, the central concepts of Hegel's Logic are no less than the reflected result of this estrangement. That is to say, they '...are nothing else but abstractions from characteristics of nature.'³ From here Marx goes on to assert that the human individual has a body subject to somatic impulses and needs. For this reason, Marx states, the human subject is a natural being. Moreover to be a natural suffering being is to be an objective being. For these needs may be satisfied only through the sensuously active appropriation of a nature which also exists independently of the subject. The ability to appease such needs depends on the surrounding natural conditions. Hence not only does the individual transform, or recreate the objects of nature, but is equally determined by them as a limited being in need. It is just by virtue of this antithetical relation, Marx argues, that the human subject is a natural, sensuous, and objective being.

[The human subject] creates or establishes only objects,
because he is established by objects - because at bottom
he is nature.⁴

² K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', ibid., p.117.

³ ibid., p.124.

⁴ ibid., p.115.

This materialist critique of idealism may seem to imply that the meaning of nature is to be found in nature itself, in isolation from the self-reflecting practice of thought. Nevertheless it is clear from Marx's discussion of the labour process in Capital that the meaning of nature is determined precisely through the teleological activity of the human subject; through the purposeful projection in thought of a desired transformation of nature. It is only through such purposive activity, Marx argues, that the laws of nature become known.

A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it.⁵

Marx considers this teleological activity as the primary characteristic of the labour process, and as that which distinguishes the human species from all other animal species. Moreover, as he argues in his 'Critique of Hegel', the human individual is not simply a natural being whose activity cannot otherwise be distinguished from that of an animal, but is at once a 'human' natural being. This means that unlike the animal the human individual may be conscious of his or her activity as at once implicating the human species as a whole. Through such consciousness the individual subject is able to reflect on the past and present conditions of human existence, and project a future in which the limitations, the alienating restrictions pertaining to those conditions are overcome. Indeed, Marx argues, the transformation of nature through human sensuous activity is no less than the subject's

...act of coming-to-be -history- which, however, is
for him a known history, and hence as an act of

⁵ K. Marx, Capital, 3 vols., Vol. 1, trans. B. Fowkes, Penguin, 1976, p.284.

coming-to-be it is a conscious self-transcending act
of coming-to-be. History is the true natural history
of man.⁶

It is principally this historical mediation, the transforming act of human sensuous activity, which obviates those attempts to misrepresent Marx's concept of nature as some form of transcendent signifier.

Nevertheless this concept of history clashes with Marx's later interpretations of historical change as a process of natural growth in large measure beyond conscious human control. The reason for this difference may be attributed to Marx's early infatuation with the self-determining teleology apparent in Hegel's concept of Spirit; no doubt due in part to his assessment of the then contemporary revolutionary climate. Despite his rejection of Hegel's philosophical idealism Marx nevertheless explicitly adopts in the 1844 Manuscripts the dialectical structure of Hegel's 'negation of negation', transferring its positive result to the projected self-determining identity of the proletarian class and history.

...by grasping the 'positive' meaning of self-referred
negation (if even again in estranged fashion) Hegel
grasps man's self-estrangement, the alienation of man's
essence, man's loss of objectivity and his loss of
realness as finding of self, change of his nature, his
objectification and realisation.⁷

The self-conscious overcoming of estrangement in Hegel's concept of universal Spirit implies no less, Marx continues, than the subject's abstract consciousness of the species or social character inherent in human sensuous activity. In other words when considered in abstraction from the natural world of human sensuous activity the species act of becoming, as Hegel portrays it, is but the self-estranged history of universal self-consciousness, viz. absolute Knowledge. In identifying absolute Knowledge with what is 'truly human life' Hegel thereby confirms its history as the 'divine' and so estranged history of humanity. Marx outlines the estranged social relations of nineteenth century industrial capitalism and their projected resolution, implicit in the self-determining aspect of Hegel's dialectic, in the 1844 Manuscripts 'Estranged Labour' and 'Private Property and Communism'. In his later work, notably Capital, Marx discards the resolved identity of

⁶ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', op.cit., pp.116,117.

⁷ ibid., p.121.

sensuous action and thought, and concentrates more particularly on the process of historical determinism inherent in the capitalist relations of commodity production and exchange. Unlike Hegel, Marx's concept of history no longer possesses some inherent teleology. It is no longer conceived as a self-conscious subject similar to Hegel's world Spirit. In reference to what are otherwise known as Marx's theory of alienation and his labour theory of value we shall attempt to delineate the antithesis between the historical self-determination and determinism which characterizes his overall position.

The general form of Marx's earlier self-determining dialectic has its most succinct expression in the 'Third Thesis on Feuerbach'. Marx states,

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.⁸

This thesis may be broken down into two fundamental propositions: firstly, that the human individual is historically determined, and secondly that history is itself determined by the self-determining activity of these same human beings. In the light of the second proposition, the former may be interpreted more precisely as the individual's determination through the past and present actions of other individuals or social groups. The more permanently such control is assumed by the same individuals or groups it will lead, Marx argues, to the division of society into two parts - the one ruling dominant class to whom all other human beings are politically subordinate. In order to overcome the condition of social alienation, it will be necessary for the species consciousness to adopt a critical perspective with regard to the actual conditions of social alienation and to form therefrom a plan of revolutionary action.

The more expanded form of historical determinism in Marx's

⁸ Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *op.cit.*, p.144.

early work is presented in the 1844 Manuscript 'Estranged Labour'. The language of Marx is no longer exclusively philosophical in the traditional sense, but now involves for the most part concepts pertaining to human economic and social conditions. Marx immediately draws our attention to an 'economic fact' : that the worker becomes poorer in inverse proportion to the greater wealth of commodities he or she produces.

This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces - labour's product - confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labour. Labour's realisation is its objectification. In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realisation of labour appears as a loss of reality for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and object-bondage, appropriation as estrangement, as alienation.⁹

By way of further explanation Marx points out that the human individual depends on the object of labour in two ways. Firstly it is the essential means whereby human life is given expression; for without this otherwise independent object the realisation of objective being through sensuous action is made impossible. Secondly it constitutes the very source of continued physical survival. In view of the above 'economic fact' not only does the worker face ever greater restrictions in his or her access to the external sensuous world of nature as an object of labour, but equally the very possibility of sensuous existence is made ever more precarious. Hence the worker, in appropriating a particular object of labour through paid employment, remains bound to this object both as a means of subsistence and of objective fulfilment.

The extremity of this bondage is that it is only as a worker that he continues to maintain himself as a physical subject, and that it is only as a physical subject that he is a worker.¹⁰

In the direct relationship of the worker to the object of labour the latter thereby exercises an alienating power over the worker beyond the otherwise natural difference between them.

⁹ Marx, 'Economic and philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', *op.cit.*, pp.71,72.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.73.

Inherent within the worker's alienation from the object of labour, indeed what may be referred to in Hegelian terms as the essence of this alienating relation, is the alienation of the worker from his or her own sensuous activity, that is, the worker's self-estrangement from the very act of production itself. For this activity belongs to and is controlled by another. Under such conditions the worker's activity is not directed to his or her own immediate needs, but is performed in the service of the needs of others. While such work is carried out chiefly as the means to gain subsistence, '[this] labour is...not voluntary but coerced; it is forced labour.'¹¹ The worker who must work for another in this way thereby loses the freedom to determine his or her own actions, and becomes no more than a commodity like any other commodity, the dispensable object of another human being. The worker's objective sensuous activity, Marx continues, has become the property of another. Individual freedom is reduced to the satisfaction of immediate biological functions which characterize the animal.

Furthermore, implicit within the worker's estrangement from the object of labour and sensuous activity is the alienation from the more universal social activity of 'species being'. This species character of human existence is evident, Marx argues, in the species survival itself being a goal or object of individual activity; or what is no different, in the individual consciousness which makes a claim to the individual's own universal and free existence. That is to say, unlike the animal, the human subject is able to make his or her life activity the object of purposive action stretching beyond their own individual life-span. Whereas the species activity of the animal involves no more than providing for itself and its immediate offspring, the human species, through consciously mediated action, is able to provide not only for immediate needs, but also for the ongoing survival of the species as a whole. The freedom of the individual, Marx argues, is evident in just this capacity to produce a multiplicity of objects beyond those needed for individual survival.

It is just in the working-up of the objective world, therefore, that man first really proves himself to be a species being. This production is his active species life. Through and because of this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the objectification of man's

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.74.

species life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created.¹²

Now in this self-estrangement from nature, the object of labour, and from their own sensuous objective forces, the worker's species life is denigrated in an activity which serves merely to support immediate individual survival.

...in degrading spontaneous activity, free activity, to a means, estranged labour makes man's species life a means to his physical existence.¹³

The worker is thus reduced to the level of an animal in this negation of what it is to be human.

The manner in which a human being confronts nature through his or her individual and species activity finds its ultimate expression in the social relations with other species individuals. The estrangement of the worker from his or her species activity demonstrates nothing less than the social alienation of the worker from other human beings. The fact that objectified labour, labour's product, exercises a power over and against the one from whom it results, and that labour is carried out as a coerced activity necessary in respect of a person's physical survival, indicates that the worker's social relations to other human beings are alienated relations. If we now refer this concept of 'estranged, alienated labour' back to the 'economic fact', to the social practice from which it arose, argues Marx, it is clear that the worker's estrangement itself produces the ever more dominant relationship of the capitalist both to the product of labour and to the worker.

Just as he begets his own product as a loss, as a product not belonging to him so he begets the dominion of the one who does not produce over production and over the product. Just as he estranges from himself his own activity, so he confers to the stranger activity which is not his own.¹⁴

This stranger, as the 'master of labour', holds a position outside the relations of labour to its object. It is from this vantage point that he or she

¹² *ibid.*, p.76.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp.78,79.

appropriates the act of labour and its product as his or her private property, and it is thus this individual from whom the worker is most emphatically estranged. For private property is not simply the result of estranged labour, its objective realisation, it is at once the means by which this alienation is perpetuated.

The positive resolution of this individual and social alienation through revolutionary self-determination is presented in the 1844 Manuscript 'Private Property and Communism'. In keeping with his explicit adherence at this time to the structural form of Hegel's dialectic, Marx states,

The antithesis of propertylessness and property so long as it is not comprehended as the antithesis of labour and capital, still remains an antithesis of indifference, not grasped in its active connection, its internal relation - an antithesis not yet grasped as contradiction.¹⁵

The now determined difference, the contradiction between capital and labour, between the objective and subjective forms of private property, may only be overcome, Marx insists, through the abolition of private property in its present historical form. This can be achieved, Marx continues, only through a political act of emancipation on the part of the workers as a whole; that is, through what he refers to as the 'revolutionary practice' of the proletarian class. This liberation of the working class is at once projected as the universal liberation of humanity, since all forms of alienation derive ultimately from that of the worker; they are but variations of the worker's alienated relations to the product of labour. Hegel's self-determining Spirit is here supplanted by the universal self-determining proletarian class.

The self-determining aspect of Marx's dialectic is often referred to as the projected utopia of the individual's identity with history, where this subject becomes a truly historical being no longer subject to the dictates of social and political forces beyond his or her control. In this projection Marx indicates three phases of Communism characterised by the gradual negation of private property and capital. In the first, private property is appropriated by the state as a universal capital and all human beings are identified as a community of labourers paid by the state. The second involves the negation of the state as a universal power, while still subject to the lingering forces of private property and the alienating relations implicit

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.81.

therein. Marx considers both these phases as steps towards the 'positive transcendence of private property'. It is not until the third phase, however, that the essence of private property is grasped. Marx describes the communist essence of private property

...as the return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being ... This communism as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved and it knows itself to be this solution.¹⁶

With Communism, Marx argues, nature is now recognized as the social product of human activity, the objective realisation of the species social relations, while humanity is itself perceived as the social essence of nature. Consciousness is now the true reflection of the social relations between individuals and is no longer an ideological distortion dependent on religious dogma or its atheistic denial. Consciousness now knows itself to be determined by the social labour of others. Conversely the human subject knows his or her objective activity to be the social determination of other human beings. The objective activity of the individual now coincides with his or her objectification as a non-alienated species being. In this identity of individual and species activity the subject nevertheless retains his or her particularity as an individual, an individual no longer in conflict with society in general, but an individual who constitutes the very mediation of subjective thought and the objective social environment.

Thinking and being are thus no doubt distinct, but at the same time they are in unity with each other.¹⁷

In this identity of thought and nature, or what is more precisely the projected identity of thought and sensuous activity, Communism knows itself to be the result of all preceding history, and claims this understanding of its own historical becoming to be the natural science of humanity. With the advent of Communism, the distinction, characteristic of the capitalist phase of social development, between the natural sciences and the natural science of humanity, viz. history, will, claims Marx, disappear. For on the

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.84.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.86.

one hand, since the natural sciences have brought great advances to the technology of human sensuous activity, ie. to industry, and since industry is no less than '...the actual historical relation of nature ... to man'¹⁸, then the natural sciences indicate, albeit implicitly, the very essence of what it is to be human. Equally, on the other hand, since the natural science of humanity, history, reveals a consciousness of human sensuous nature, of human needs as natural sensuous needs, then history too 'is a real part of natural history - of nature's coming to be man'¹⁹. In other words the science of nature is the essential foundation of history, while history, the natural science of humanity, is in turn the implicit ground of the natural sciences. Hence, argues Marx, with the realisation of Communism 'there will be one science ... [since] the social reality of nature, and human natural science, or the natural science about man, are identical terms'²⁰. In this going over of the one into the other to form the one universal science we are reminded of Hegel's 'Subjective Logic' where the 'subjective' and 'objective' Notions become the other of themselves in the identity of the absolute Idea. This identity of the natural and human sciences, determined through the concept of the absolute Idea, is nevertheless, according to Marx, a 'chimerical illusion'. For the opposition of the human and natural sciences, otherwise referred to by Marx as that between 'subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism', can only be resolved through the historical act of social revolution. He says in this regard,

it will be seen how the resolution of the theoretical antitheses is only possible in a practical way, by virtue of the practical energy of men. Their resolution is therefore by no means a problem of knowledge, but a real problem of life, which philosophy could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as merely a theoretical one.²¹

While Marx thus criticizes the Hegelian result as a 'false positivism', his own, by implication, true result itself appears as a materialist reflection of that same position of identity, projected now, however, in the consciousness of a universal social subject, the proletarian

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.90.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp.90,91.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.91.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.89.

class. In resolving the social antithesis of humanity and nature in the projected identity of politics and history, in identifying the natural and human sciences in the one science of history, Marx unwittingly undermines the critical implications of his materialist negation of idealism. For the supposed self-determining moment of proletarian class action now appears just as much in the guise of a conceptual determinism. The positive identity which negates the negation which is traditional Philosophy, which negates the ideology of the ruling bourgeois class, ironically preserves ideology in the determinist science of political and historical self-determination. Furthermore Marx conceives the act of political revolution no differently from that of purposive action in relation to the object of nature. In other words, with the aforementioned identity of the individual and species activity, the instrumental mastery of nature is carried over into the political sphere such that the realisation of Communism preserves the results of bourgeois oppression in the now more universal mastery of men by other men. Despite itself society remains divided in two spheres, the political and the social, the former of which has supremacy over the latter.

It must be said, however, that this self-determining absolutism is antithetically undercut in Marx's later writings. In Capital the emphasis shifts decisively away from the consciously projected identity of the proletarian class and history to a more outright determinist concept of history; to what Marx describes as 'a process of natural history' taking place in large measure beyond the conscious control of any class or individual.

My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.²²

Unlike Hegel, however, Marx's concept of natural growth does not finalise itself by acquiescing in the then contemporary legality of bourgeois economic and social relations, but challenges the otherwise previously accepted laws of history. The historically self-determining moment of revolutionary activity is now considered a particular moment within the more extended development of history and its more universal determining influence. History, as Marx now understands it, does not possess some

²² Marx, Capital, op.cit., p.92.

inherent teleology; it is no longer conceived as a self-conscious subject similar to Hegel's world Spirit. Marx interprets the natural law of historical determinism in the mid-nineteenth century as the economic law of value peculiar to the capitalist system of commodity production and exchange. The extrapolation of this law of value may equally well be described as the yet unexplored objective element in the concept of private property, namely capital's relation to the object of labour.

Before proceeding to outline the development of this law of value, disclosed in the first chapter of Capital, we should point out that the form of the Hegelian dialectic now serves to illuminate the 'false' identity of nature, man, and history as it occurs in capitalist society. The critical implication inherent in Hegel's concept of negation is here exploited to reveal what Marx calls the fetish character of the commodity; a fetish arising from the process of exchange, and manifest in the reification of social consciousness. With this critique of commodity fetishism, Marx claims to '...discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell'²³ of the Hegelian dialectic. Moreover, it is only in the light of this critical perspective that the statement in the postface to the second edition of Capital may be adequately interpreted. Marx states,

My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of 'the Idea', is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought.²⁴

It would be misleading to infer from the above that Marx holds thought to be the simple reflection of nature, that nature or history somehow acquire a meaning independent of thought. For it is the very critique of such determinism inherent in the capitalist process of commodity production which is the driving force of Marx's dialectic. Critical reflection grasps this process as the creator of 'false' consciousness, as an enchanting mystification of its own alienating determinism.

²³ ibid., p.103.

²⁴ ibid., p.102.

In order to explicate the law of value Marx begins with the commodity, the object of human sensuous activity. Every product of labour, in so far as it may be of use to humanity through the various physical properties it possesses, has a use-value. These qualitative differences, expressed through their use-value, cannot serve, however, as the basis for their value in exchange, for the latter necessitates a quantitative relation. The quantitative expression of equality is thus determined only in respect of an element common to and yet distinct from the commodities themselves. This element, Marx points out, can be nothing other than human labour, for labour, while qualitatively different from the commodity, is at once that which creates them all. In then abstracting from the qualitative differences of labour objectified in different commodities, Marx arrives at the concept ‘...of human labour power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure’²⁵. In this homogeneous form labour is able to be quantified since it may be divided into simple units of labour time.

As exchange-values, all commodities are merely
definite quantities of congealed labour-time.²⁶

However it is only in respect of the total labour-time congealed in the world of commodities, which is at once dependent on the productive capacity of a given society, that this simple unit of time may be deduced. Value is hence more precisely defined as the labour-time socially necessary to produce a given commodity.

Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time
required to produce any use-value under the
conditions of production normal for a given
society and with the average degree of skill and
intensity of labour prevalent in that society.²⁷

The measure of wealth is, in this instance, dependent on the accumulated quantity of socially necessary labour-time abstractly held within a group of commodities.

Marx goes on to point out a curious relationship between the respective measures of use and exchange value on the basis of what he calls ‘...the dual character of labour embodied in commodities’²⁸. He indicates

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.128.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.130.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.129.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.128.

initially that the use-value of a commodity contains useful or concrete labour, labour which has a definite purpose. Represented in the multiplicity of commodities is a rich variety of specialised useful labour. The qualitative differences between these concrete labours have created ‘...a complex system, a social division of labour’²⁹. In abstracting from these qualitative differences there is but the common property of human labour power in general. Labour power may be simple or complex; the latter, however, in this abstract context, is only a multiple of the simple average unit. Hence the relative proportions in which this common denominator is present in any two commodities forms the basis of their exchange. Such proportions may nevertheless alter in view of a change in the time socially necessary to produce one or other of the commodities. That is to say, a change in productivity, where labour produces more commodities in the same period of time, will correspondingly diminish the time socially necessary for the production of such commodities. Marx draws the following conclusion,

In itself, an increase in the quantity of use-values constitutes an increase in material wealth. Two coats will clothe two men, one coat will only clothe one man, etc. Nevertheless, an increase in the amount of material wealth may correspond to a simultaneous fall in the magnitude of its value. This contradictory movement arises out of the two-fold character of labour....The converse [movement] also holds.³⁰

The problem that remains, Marx announces, is how we arrive at the money-form of value from this understanding of value and its measure as labour and labour-time respectively.

In order to solve this problem Marx proposes to examine more closely the exchange relation itself, to analyse what he otherwise calls the ‘...form of appearance of value’³¹. Firstly he looks at the ‘simple or isolated’ expression of exchange-value. Here one commodity A is said to have a relative value in relation to a second commodity Z, which represents the equivalent value of the former.

The relative form of value and the equivalent form are two inseparable moments, which belong to and mutually condition each other; but, at the same time, they are mutually exclusive or opposed

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.133.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.136,137.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.139.

extremes, i.e. poles of the expression of value.³²

It must be remembered that a commodity in the equivalent form of value cannot become the measure of its own value. In order to determine its value this commodity must take up the relative form in respect of another commodity acting as its equivalent. Now in this 'simple or isolated' exchange the relative value of commodity A finds expression in the natural quality of its equivalent, commodity Z; that is to say, in the use-value of Z. Hence, strange as it may seem, concludes Marx, '...use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite, value'³³. In the same way the concrete labour which has produced commodity Z in the equivalent form here appears to be that measure of value otherwise decided by the units of labour-time congealed in that same commodity. In the words of Marx, 'concrete labour becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite, abstract human labour'³⁴. In so far as labour has been reduced to an homogeneous whole, as units of abstract labour-time, there is yet a further peculiarity inherent in the exchange relation. For what appears in the equivalent form as the labour of a particular individual is more essentially labour with an immediate social significance:

...private labour takes the form of its opposite,
namely labour in its directly social form.³⁵

In the external opposition of two commodities there is thus at the same time, Marx argues, an internal antithesis.

Marx goes on to consider the 'expanded' expression of value where the relative value of commodity A is formed by a variety of other commodities. Not only does this reveal the extent to which the labour congealed in commodity A may be made the equal of any other abstract labour, whatever its concrete form, it also points to a total indifference regarding the particular commodity which is to become its expression of value. In so far as one commodity may now be exchanged for any other on the basis of abstract, homogeneous labour, it is evident that this measure at once prescribes the relative proportions in which commodities may be exchanged. The principal insufficiency of the 'expanded' expression, as Marx points out, is '...that the relative form of value of each commodity is an endless series of expressions of value which are all different from the

³² *ibid.*, pp.139,140.

³³ *ibid.*, p.148.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.150.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.151.

relative form of value of every other commodity'³⁶. At this point the equivalent form remains limited by the endless multiplicity of commodities which may take their place therein. The equivalent form of value cannot thereby represent the universal form of labour's abstract homogeneity. If, however, the 'expanded' expression of value is reversed, then instead of a multiplicity of equivalent forms of value in relation to a single relative form, we have the relative forms of value all expressed in one and the same equivalent. This Marx calls the 'general' expression of value.

In demarcating or excluding one commodity, as that through which the value of all other commodities may be measured, the universal quality of value which this particular commodity thereby attains is at once an expression of each commodity's capacity to reflect the value of every other commodity. This means that the labour congealed in one commodity may be immediately related to that of another, for the labour held in the excluded equivalent form now acts as the direct social mediation of their relations.

The general value-form, in which all the products of labour are presented as mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour, shows by its very structure that it is the social expression of the world of commodities. In this way it is made plain that within this world the general human character of labour forms its specific social character.³⁷

At this point the antithesis between the relative and equivalent positions in the value-form has reached its most acute determination. For there is, in this 'general' expression of value, only one commodity that can be directly exchanged with all the others. The commodity which has historically taken up this position is gold. As the universal equivalent of all commodities gold at once attains an objective social validity, and so becomes the currency of exchange, money. The 'general' expression of value thereby translates into the money or price form.

As part of this same development, which we have traced through from the substance of value, its measure, to the expression of value as money, Marx now draws our attention to what he calls 'the fetishism of the commodity and its secret'. This fetish character of the commodity, however, does not derive from either its use-value or the concrete labour

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.156.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.160.

which produces it, but more particularly, Marx argues, from the value-form itself. More specifically it arises from a failure to recognize the peculiarities already noted by Marx in his analysis of the 'simple' expression of value, and which are altogether disguised in the 'general' and money forms. After reiterating the most crucial of these 'internal antitheses', Marx goes on to point out that the process of determining value, despite all intents and purposes, takes place 'behind the backs of the producers'.

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists...simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers ...It [the commodity form] is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.³⁸

We are dealing here not only with a deception of consciousness on a social scale, but with an economic expression of historical determinism. For once the relative proportion in which commodities are exchanged achieves some measure of stability it would seem to the producers that the value of commodities derives directly from their natural properties. Furthermore, any change in value, and so too in the comparative wealth of the producers, is equally attributed to a change in the natural properties of the commodities themselves. Such thinking, Marx argues, may be traced back to the failure of classical political economy to distinguish between concrete labour and the abstract labour-time congealed in the commodity. In other words there is a failure to differentiate between the natural properties of the commodity in the equivalent form and the labour time socially necessary to produce it. Hence to argue that value derives from the natural form of the commodity in the equivalent position is a mystification brought about by the very form of the exchange relation itself. For this reason Marx refers to the notion of the time socially necessary to produce a

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp.164,165.

commodity as the secret of the commodity; as that which remains hidden beneath its natural properties. It is this 'socially necessary' labour-time which, Marx claims, regulates the determination of value like a law of nature.

The determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time is therefore a secret hidden under the apparent movements in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery destroys the semblance of the merely accidental determination of the magnitude of value of the products of labour, but by no means abolishes that determination's material form.³⁹

The consciousness of the commodity producers is hence revealed as an immediate reified reflection of the social forces beyond their control. Equally the consciousness of the consumer is swayed by the apparently natural form, namely money, which allows labour and its product to be equated as identical. Such thinking uncritically attributes the determination of value to a pre-ordained identity between natural and social forms of labour. The individual thus remains ideologically distracted from the alienating social relations in which he or she is otherwise engaged. The ideologically reified consciousness underwrites in effect the continued social alienation of human beings from each other.

Both sides of the antithesis between the historically self-determining and determinist strands of Marx's work, otherwise presented as the subjective and objective aspects of the concept of private property, presuppose the other in themselves. The scientific projection of historical self-determination in the 'Manuscripts of 1844' has by virtue of its very scientificity a distinct sense of determinism. While the critical unveiling, in Capital, of the historical determinism inherent in the process of commodity production and exchange is at once, by implication, a necessary step toward self-determination. Each moment remains a negative determination of the other. Nature and history, while constantly entwined, no longer result in an ultimate positive identity; their unity is an ongoing, antithetical determination the one of the other. This does not imply, however, a return to Hegel's notion of a mock infinite, for neither moment is primordially posited by a constituting concept; hence, neither are they identical as abstract negativities. Marx's position on the nature of historical change is perhaps best summed up in a statement made in the Grundrisse. He says,

³⁹ ibid., p.168.

Much as the whole of this motion appears as a social process, much as the single moments of this motion take their departure from the conscious will and from particular purposes of individuals - the totality of the process does appear as an objective context arising by natural growth. It is indeed due to the inter-action of conscious individuals, but neither seated in their consciousness nor subsumed under them as a whole.⁴⁰

In view of such a statement the self-determining identity of the individual and history is at best only partial. For what is also determining in the process of historical development is that universal context, the social totality, which does not result from the consciously directed action of any particular individual or class of individuals. From this perspective Marx's dialectic may be said to reveal a persistent antithesis between the self-determining and determinist aspects of human historical relations.

C. ii) ENGELS' AND SARTRE'S REVERSION TO IDEALISM :
THE ANTITHETICAL ONTOLOGIES OF NATURAL
DETERMINISM AND HUMAN FREEDOM.

Despite the antithetical tensions in Marx Engels assumes that historical self-determination and determinism form one and the same identity in the process of historical evolution. This is at once evident in Engels' postulation concerning '...the positive science of Nature and history'⁴¹; a science which is conceived no differently from Darwin's evolutionary theory of natural determinism. The dialectic laws of thought announced by Hegel, Engels maintains, are laws which originate in the process of historical, or more precisely, natural change.

[Hegel's] mistake lies in the fact that these laws are foisted on nature and history as laws of thought, and not deduced from them....the universe, willy-nilly, has to conform to a system of thought which itself is

⁴⁰ K. Marx, Grundrisse der politischen Ökonomie, Berlin, 1953, p.111, quoted by T. Adorno in Negative Dialectics, trans. E. Ashton. New York, 1990, p.355.

⁴¹ F. Engels, 'Socialism : Utopian and Scientific', in Tucker, op.cit., p.699.

only the product of a definite stage of development
of human thought. If we turn the thing round, then
everything becomes simple, and the dialectical laws
that look so extremely mysterious in idealist philosophy
at once become simple and clear as noonday.⁴²

With this inversion, however, Engels has done nothing but substitute Nature for Spirit, and so ideologically repeats the Hegelian ontology with all its abstract, absolutist implications. The mediating role of thought and human sensuous action in the historical process has altogether evaporated in the dogmatic assumption of Nature's all determining sovereignty.

Unable to deal with Marx's 'historical' antithesis other than by absolving it in the fixed identity of a natural determinism, so-called orthodox Marxism, or that school of thought which derives from Engel's Dialectics of Nature and Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-criticism, degenerates, argues J.P. Sartre, into a positivist realism, a metaphysics of nature reminiscent of Spinoza.⁴³ By assigning to the individual the altogether dependent role of that which is conditioned by economic and social circumstances orthodox Marxism absolves the self-determining specificity of the living human being in the absolute determinism of a now supposedly historical nature. Presented in this way history stands outside or above the very individuals who are otherwise supposed to determine it. These individuals and the groups to which they belong have been reduced either to the abstract form of a 'basic personality' or to a passive reflection of this already hypostatized totality called history. Orthodox Marxism thus fails to differentiate between individuals except in the name of social class, choosing rather to suppress their qualitative differences in the interests of quantitative equality, the statistical mean of unmediated identity. All this implies not only that the process of historical totalisation occurs somehow of its own accord, but that such movement, without human activity, has in effect come to a halt. Furthermore the concepts used to explicate this process are nothing but a pre-determined ideological grid to which any new experience is made to conform. In other words individual action or experience is reduced to a replica of the concept's a priori naturalism where knowledge is revealed as an immediate reflection of these same fixed schemata. In order to offset this absolute determinism, argues Sartre,

⁴² F. Engels, 'Dialectics of Nature', in Marx and Engels, Collected Works, Vol.25, London, 1987, p.356.

⁴³ J.P. Sartre, Search for a Method, trans. H. Barnes, New York, 1968, p.57.

Marxist historians also sometimes employ the same reductionist technique but in reverse. The significance of an historical event, for example France's war with Austria and later England during the period of the French Revolution, is interpreted by Guérin solely in terms of the economic intention of Brissot and his followers to improve the wealth of the Bordeaux shipowners. While not averse to an improvement in economic wealth, Sartre points out, Brissot was nevertheless unwilling to endanger the revolutionary gains for the financial benefit of a particular group, to which, in any case, he did not belong.

...if one transforms - without evidence - signification into intention, and result into an objective deliberately aimed at, then the real is lost....Hence that tedious vacillation in Marxist explanations. From one sentence to another the historical enterprise is defined implicitly by goals (which often are only unforeseen results) or reduced to the diffusion of a physical movement across an inert milieu.⁴⁴

Objecting to the inadequate mediation of human life and history set forth by orthodox Marxism, Sartre argues that underlying this oversimplification of Marx's position is the lack of any critical reflection upon the very method of dialectical materialism. In undertaking such a critique Sartre perceives this task as the necessary reconstruction of a philosophical anthropology, at once acknowledging his critique to be of merely ideological significance within what he considers the still progressive force of Marx's materialism.

We shall for the most part confine our interpretation of Sartre's position to the text Search for a Method, for this sufficiently illuminates the existential and methodological dialectics through which Sartre revitalises, in the face of Marxist orthodoxy, the ambiguity of the individual's relationship to history, and, by implication, the manner in which the interpretation of history is said to recover its true meaning. While the existential dialectic derives directly from Marx, at least in terms of the individual's relations to nature and other human beings, Sartre believes that he has brought out the ontological nature of human existence which with Marx, he contends, remains at best implicit. And this, we may add, in deference to Hegel and the philosophical tradition. For despite his critique of the Hegelian Absolute in the introduction to the Critique of Dialectical

⁴⁴ ibid., pp.45,48.

Reason. Sartre refers to the existential/methodological duality of his anthropology by way of the traditional Hegelian terms of Being and Knowing; and, like the early Marx, acknowledges his indebtedness to the Hegelian principle of the 'negation of the negation' and its positive outcome.

Now Sartre sets the philosophical stage for the ideological development of Marx's position, which he claims to be the 'unsurpassable horizon' of all contemporary thinking, with reference to two key principles. The first more properly derives from Kierkegaard's objection to the Hegelian concept of totalisation and its culmination in the Spirit of Absolute Reason. Kierkegaard defends '...the primacy of existence over consciousness'⁴⁵. Since Kierkegaard rejects outright, however, any form of actual or known totalisation, his existential principle, Sartre claims, is an indeterminate and so irrational subjectivism. This same principle, expressed more particularly as '...the priority of action (work and social praxis) over knowledge'⁴⁶, is by Marx, directly implicated with the principle of historical totalisation. It is the determined inter-relationship of both these principles in Marx to which Sartre lends his unqualified support.

He [Marx] makes of it [human existence] the immediate theme of the philosophical totalisation ... it is the concrete man whom he puts at the centre of his research, that man who is defined simultaneously by his needs, by the material conditions of his existence, and by the nature of his work - that is, by his struggle against things and against men.⁴⁷

The concept of totalisation, Sartre claims, refers at once to the dialectical process of historical development and to the dialectical interpretation of this process as the true knowledge of history. The knowledge or truth of history

...is a totalisation which is forever being totalised. Particular facts do not signify anything; they are neither true nor false so long as they are not related, through the mediation of various partial totalities, to the totalisation in process.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ ibid., p.31.

⁴⁶ ibid., p.14.

⁴⁷ ibid.

⁴⁸ ibid., pp.30,31.

In respect of history proper the totalisation here involves a perpetual 'recurrence' of alienation and its overcoming on an ever advancing scale. The incessant 'flight' to freedom of individuals from any form of collective consensus or group integration '...demonstrates that the totalisation is never achieved and that the totality exists at best only in the form of a 'detotalised totality'⁴⁹. For this reason, Sartre argues, the totalisation of history does not result in a metaphysical absolute, but develops along an ever more elaborate continuum of objective (individual and collective) realisations. It is from this perspective that Sartre now accords with Engels' statement that '...it is men themselves who make their history, but within a given environment which conditions them'⁵⁰. What differs in their positions is the respective emphasis each gives to the conflicting aspects of this situation.

In the specifically existential dialectic which Sartre develops according to the principle of 'the priority of action over knowledge' we are immediately confronted with Marx's antithesis of historical determinism and self-determination. After comparing the seemingly contradictory statements made by Marx in the postface to the second edition of Capital and the 'Third Thesis on Feuerbach', Sartre states,

If one wants to grant to Marxist thought its full complexity, one would have to say that man in a period of exploitation is at once both the product of his product and an historical agent who can under no circumstances be taken as a product. This contradiction is not fixed; it must be grasped in the very movement of praxis.⁵¹

In other words, argues Sartre, once the foundation of this relationship is comprehended as 'praxis', as that purposeful activity which constitutes human existence in the world, their contradiction in conceptual terms is revealed more precisely as a very real since 'lived' identity. This identity nevertheless retains within itself a certain difference through which it is mediated. For this identity is dependent on a natural condition of need or scarcity, on the difference between the present historical conditions of life and, says Sartre,

⁴⁹ ibid., p.78.

⁵⁰ ibid., p.31.

⁵¹ ibid., p.87.

‘...a certain object still to come, which it is trying to bring into being. This is what we call the project’⁵².

The project constitutes the conscious mediation between what is and what is not yet. It is at once an implicit critique of existing reality and a projection of what might be on the basis of these prior conditions. It is the internal subjective passage between two moments of objectivity.

In the lived experience, the subjectivity turns back upon itself and wrenches itself from despair by means of objectification. Thus the subjective contains within itself the objective, which it denies and which it surpasses toward a new objectivity; and this new objectivity by virtue of objectification externalises the internality of the project as an objectified subjectivity.⁵³

The project is hence an essential moment of praxis and reflects within itself the movement between thought and sensuous action. While it may be said that the project determines future action it nevertheless remains more essentially dependent on the need for such action, for it is only in view of the latter that thought comes into being.

In order to illustrate the double movement of thought as project within a given situation Sartre takes the example of two men holding a discussion in a closed room. The temperature is rising. The one moves toward a closed window with the intention of opening it. The other perceives this movement not primarily as an effect caused by the stifling heat, but more essentially as an attempt to satisfy the need for air. That is to say, the significance of this movement is ascertained only through the lived ‘comprehension’ of the need for air. ‘Comprehension’ is thus essentially progressive, and, like Dilthey’s distinction between ‘verstehen’ and ‘Verstand’, is to be distinguished from any causal explanation of the relations in question. For our ‘comprehension’ of the other is itself a moment of our own activity. Moreover the ‘comprehension’ of the need for air immediately brings together the instrumental objects and the men in the room in the one unified enterprise. In so doing ‘comprehension’ is not only progressive but involves at once a regressive appraisal of the total situation which is to be negated and surpassed. In Sartre’s words, ‘...the movement of comprehension is simultaneously progressive (toward the

⁵² ibid., p.91.

⁵³ ibid.

objective result) and regressive (... back toward the original condition)'⁵⁴. This does not exclude the possibility, as Sartre points out, that the 'comprehension' of a situation may be entirely regressive. Using the foregoing example where there was no prior movement towards the window, certain remarks made by a third person entering the room may suddenly illuminate the situation for what it is - an overheated room that needs air. By pointing this out Sartre's intention is to indicate the signifying quality of the inanimate objects in this or any situation which strike an observer in respect of a particular praxis or lack of it. Nevertheless the objects retain this signifying determination only in so far as an individual's own signifying activity or lack of it, has, for an observer, already bestowed a particular signification upon them. Hence, maintains Sartre, the way we 'comprehend' an object, whether inanimate or otherwise, depends entirely on those ends which are either our own or which we attribute to another.

The simple inspection of the social field ought to have led to the discovery that the relation to ends is a permanent structure of human enterprises and that it is on the basis of this relation that real men evaluate actions, institutions, or economic constructions.⁵⁵

At this point the existential dialectic shifts into the historical sphere by virtue of the fact that the individual project is at once determined by its relations to others in the social environment. This is what Sartre refers to as the persistent 'confrontation of projects.' The alienation of the individual is immediately evident in this confrontation, since the objective realisation of ends on the part of the individual inevitably involves those ends and their results being diverted or neutralised by the objective realisations of others in their social interaction. Hence an individual's objective activity may itself be transformed into a material reality which acts against him in the form of an historical determination. More precisely this determination, argues Sartre, consists in that future which the social collective itself proposes for the individual. Sartre illustrates this perspective with two examples. The first concerns an individual choosing a career in the medical profession. Here it is the social demand for health services which opens the possibility of such a choice for certain individuals able to satisfy the necessary pre-requisites. Equally, in being able to meet

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.154.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.157.

these requirements, the individual reveals the particular social milieu from which he or she issues and which, through this choice, he or she will for the most part continue to support. The second involves a coloured man whose desired future as a pilot is denied him by white colonialists simply on the basis of his colour. This man nevertheless chooses to revolt by 'illegally' flying a plane. In so doing, he at once reveals the social oppression of racial prejudice which refuses his future as a pilot, and the general feeling of revolt held by his coloured compatriots against their colonial masters. Hence we see the individual project determined not simply by circumstances originating in the past, but rather more essentially by that 'perspective of the future' proffered by the social collective. Moreover this determining reality in its ever increasing social complexity may indeed set up its own ends in the form of institutionalised systems of morality and economic regulation which do not originate in any particular individual.

Thus are constituted systems, apparatus, instruments, which are real objects possessing material bases in existence; at the same time they are processes pursuing - within society and often against them - ends which no longer belong to anybody but which, as the alienating objectification of ends really pursued, become the objective, totalising unity of collective objects.⁵⁶

In other words the pursuit of ends instigated by collective objects, the most evident being capital as Marx fully understood, may act as an alienating counter-finality disorienting the desired results, the finality of individual or group actions.

This antithesis between the individual and the social process is now overcome, as in Marx's early work, with the future projection of the individual's identity with history. Once individuals recognize the meaning of their actions in the more objective process of history's becoming, once they accept their ability to determine history together, argues Sartre, history will appear less of an act 'without author', less of an 'alien force', and will be revealed more as the multidimensional unity of individual actions.

... the plurality of the *meanings* of History can be discovered and posited for itself only upon the

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.163.

ground of a future totalisation and in contradiction with it. It is our theoretical and practical duty ... to bring closer the moment when History will have *only one meaning*, when it will tend to be dissolved in the concrete men who will make it in common.⁵⁷

Nevertheless despite the individual's continued alienation from the product of labour and other people, or what is, for Sartre, an inability to recognize the meaning of one's actions in the more objective process of history's becoming, it is the individual who makes history through the continual surpassing of already given historical conditions. Indeed even in the face of overwhelming historical forces the identity of the individual and history persists, for being human is nothing but this activity, however alienated, of going beyond one's present circumstances. This existential identity is diametrically opposed to that supported by orthodox Marxism where the individual remains altogether determined by the unrelenting historical circumstances in which he or she is situated. The individual in this case acts, Sartre continues, as an inert object no more able to initiate activity than a machine.

Now the method whereby we determine the meaning and truth of history must somehow retain within it, Sartre contends, the progressive-regressive structure of the existential project. For it is altogether inadequate, as orthodox Marxism inadvertently supposes, to otherwise set down the dialectic as an immanent law of history, as an a priori conceptual scheme which reduces people and events to a pre-determined form. While conceding that orthodox Marxism correctly identifies a relationship between superstructural significations and material substructures, nevertheless the conceptual dissolution of the one in the other results in nothing, Sartre retorts, but a causal determinist exposition of history.

...this cannot suffice for the 'totalisation' as a dialectical process of revelation. The superimposed significations are isolated and enumerated by analysis. The movement which has joined them together 'in life' is, on the contrary synthetic ... we will lose sight of human reality if we do not consider the significations as synthetic, multidimensional, indissoluble objects, which hold individual places in a

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.90.

space-time with multiple dimensions. The mistake here is to reduce the lived signification to the simple linear statement which language gives it.⁵⁸

In contrast to the purely regressive syntheses orchestrated by Marxist orthodoxy the method of historical interpretation employed by Marx, notably in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, argues Sartre, is both progressive and regressive. In anticipation of Sartre's discussion, this method brings to bear on the regressive nature of historical analysis the progressive form of synthesis, whereby the 'lived signification' of an historical event retains its unique determining force in the process of totalisation. Thus contrary to Marxist formalism this method, Sartre maintains, is heuristic; it remains open to the determining influence of new events. The progressive-regressive form pertaining to the existential project is, however, in this methodological dialectic, articulated in reverse.

We shall define the method of the existentialist approach as a regressive-progressive and analytic-synthetic method.⁵⁹

Without himself giving any reason for this reversal we may presume that this distinction derives directly from Marx. For Marx, in his chapter on the 'Fetishism of the Commodity', indeed points out that the process of critical thought takes a quite contrary direction to that historical activity upon which it reflects; and this, since critique begins with an already completed event and works its way back along the path of actual historical development. As we shall see, Sartre, like Hegel, nevertheless resolves this difference between Being and Knowing, between his existential and methodological dialectics in a final identity - indeed that very identity which was articulated as the first moment of his existential dialectic. Unlike Hegel, however, this identity is no longer an absolute universal, namely Spirit as Reason, but rather our own substantial existence as individual historical beings.

If we look more closely now at the method of historical interpretation, the initial moment in this dialectic involves a study of the general economic, social, political, and cultural structures pertaining to a particular phase of historical development; uncovering therein the dominant conflict of interests which drives this period on, and thereby the apparent trend of the totalisation process. Here it will be possible to draw

⁵⁸ ibid., pp.108,109.

⁵⁹ ibid., p.148.

on the empirical findings of Sociology to highlight the irrepressible specificity of certain material conditions within the movement of history. It should be noted, however, continues Sartre, that such a procedure reveals nothing but 'empty forms', for the process of totalisation remains at best provisional and altogether abstract without the mediating reality of particular individuals and groups. Secondly, before considering the problem of mediation it will be necessary to make an empirical study of the particular historical object in question. In the case of an individual the psychological relations of childhood within the family context, and their continuing influence or otherwise in later adult life, will be of central importance. While it is not incorrect to infer that the reality of a particular event, group, or individual is already implicit within the general form of an historical period, just as the latter is present, albeit covertly, within the study of the former, nevertheless both remain mutually exclusive at this point in Sartre's development of method. Rather than seeking to immediately reduce the one to the other through a series of a priori principles, as perpetrated by orthodox Marxism, Sartre now insists on pursuing what he calls the systematic 'cross-referencing' of both.

The existentialist method ... wants to remain *heuristic*.

It will have no other method than a continuous *cross-reference*; it will progressively determine a biography (for example) by examining the period, and the period by studying the biography.⁶⁰

The problem, as we have noted, which Sartre must resolve in respect of this 'cross-referencing' is to demonstrate how history and the particular historical object are mediated without abandoning the specificity, the 'lived signification' of the latter. Sartre turns at once to the existential project, for here the 'instrumental possibilities' envisaged by the individual or group are at once indicative of the techniques available to the social forces of production within a given historical period. This mediation, whether pertaining to a social, political, or cultural field, allows what Sartre calls the 'differential' between the individual and collective to be established according to their use of a particular technique. For in so doing, continues Sartre, we maintain not only the unique qualities of the individual or group under scrutiny, but attain a more profound insight into the 'lived reality' of the social class or historical period in question.

Sartre gives an indication of how this 'differential' may be

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.135.

developed in the cultural sphere with reference to the Marquis de Sade. Firstly we must ascertain the meaning which eighteenth century society bestowed on those ideological 'instruments' employed by Sade, namely the concepts of the self-determining subject and Nature; and we discover that both are construed as essentially peaceful and good. Secondly, in examining the personal interpretation, the 'subjective signification' of these concepts for Sade, we discover respectively the affirmation of his personal right to violence and an objective law of destruction. By tracing this antithetical 'differential' through a regressive series of cross-references, always maintaining the provisional totalisation as a regulative scheme, we will gain, Sartre maintains, a more profound knowledge of the historical depth in which an individual's project is situated. Indeed we will descend from the individual's concrete activity to the most general level of historical determination. We will regress to the material conditions of existence which determine the 'instrumental possibilities' of any project - be it the natural resources available due to geographical or climatic circumstances, the language of discourse, or the 'scarcity of women' to take one of Sartre's examples. In Sade's case this material condition would be his rejection from the aristocratic class. In referring to what constitutes the third moment of his methodological dialectic, and in respect of his study of Flaubert, Sartre states,

At this point in our research we have still not succeeded in revealing anything more than a hierarchy of heterogeneous significations: Madame Bovary, Flaubert's 'femininity', his childhood in a hospital building, existing contradictions in the contemporary petite bourgeoisie, the evolution of the family, of property, etc. Each signification clarifies the other, but their irreducibility creates a veritable discontinuity between them. Each serves as an encompassing framework for the preceding, but the included signification is richer than the including signification. In a word, we have only the outline for the dialectical movement, not the movement itself.⁶¹

Not until this regressive analysis has pursued the individual or group project to its most profound historical determination will it become necessary to proceed with the fourth moment of Sartre's method, namely

⁶¹ ibid., p.146.

the 'progressive synthesis', the reconstruction of the historical totalisation on the determining basis now of the individual or group project.

This reconstruction occurs once again through the technique of cross-referencing based on the 'differential' now between the projected meaning of an action and the manner in which this meaning is historically deviated or alienated by the social collective. It will be necessary to identify the immediate projects, the needs of the groups involved within a particular historical event, to analyse the intended implementation of the instruments at hand, and understand how each has in some way been obstructed, their ends subverted by other groups active in the same event.

Inasmuch as each revealed activity of a group surpasses the activity of an opposing group, is modified in its tactics because of the latter and consequently modifies the structures of the group itself, the event in its full concrete reality is the organised unity of a plurality of oppositions reciprocally surpassed.⁶²

In following the ever-renewed progression from the project to its alienation, where the latter is overcome and yet preserved through further determination by others, we now ascend from the most abstract, general historical determination, the material conditions of life, to the concrete particularity of the individual project. This progressive synthesis will ultimately disclose, argues Sartre, the very real since lived contradiction between the individual and the social collective. The verification of this progressive movement will become evident once all the previously heterogeneous elements, the discontinuous hierarchy of significations present in the third moment, have coalesced in the one synthetic totality. With respect to Sade the final project remains subverted by those historical forces beyond his control. Instead of communicating the glorification of violence and destruction, his activity results in an 'absolute non-communication', and his own relegation to solitude. With respect to Flaubert, we arrive ultimately at the lived contradiction between an intended romanticism and the interpretation of his work by the reading public as essentially realist. Flaubert's achievement is attributed to that which he otherwise disdained. What this result reveals, argues Sartre, is not simply '...a trait of the individual; [but] the total individual grasped in

⁶² *ibid.*, p.128.

his process of objectification'⁶³; an objectification, however, which has been appropriated by others, where the individual again confronts a renewed form of alienation from the product of his labours. The progressive synthesis of historical totalisation thus culminates in an existential contradiction.

The necessity of this method, Sartre argues, depends directly on its intelligibility; and this method is intelligible, he maintains, since it is founded on the 'comprehension' of our own very existence as human beings. In other words what is questioned as 'human reality' directly implicates the social praxis of the questioner. For the 'method of knowing', indeed the very language of the question concerning its object, are determining moments in the outcome of future historical action. Instead of remaining transcendently detached from what is in question, as is the case with the 'hyper-empirical method' employed by many contemporary sociologists and psychologists, the existential method, as Sartre propounds it, implicates the 'comprehended' identity of the question, questioner, and what is questioned in the one individual human existence. It is this, he argues, which gives the method its necessity.

To understand itself, to understand the other, to exist, to act, are one and the same movement which founds direct conceptual knowledge upon indirect, comprehensive knowledge but without ever leaving the concrete - that is, history or, more precisely, the one who *comprehends what he knows*. This perpetual dissolution of intellection in comprehension, and conversely, the perpetual redescend which introduces comprehension into intellection as a dimension of rational non-knowledge at the heart of knowledge is the very ambiguity of a discipline in which the questioner, the question, and the questioned are one.⁶⁴

Sartre's philosophical anthropology thus claims to preserve the dualism of existence and knowledge in the historical identity of the individual subject. Moreover, the subject's inalienable freedom of decision is now conceived as the very condition of possibility of human social alienation, as that without which human alienation would not be possible. In this way the

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.138.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.174.

individual human being is preserved, Sartre maintains, through the positive value and meaning which he or she is able to give to an otherwise alienated condition.