

Negative Dialectics

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Part III. Models. Meditations on Metaphysics

1

After Auschwitz 354-358

It can no longer be asserted that the immutable would be the truth and what moves, the transient, would be appearance [Schein], the indifference of what is temporal and eternal ideas towards each other is no longer to be maintained, not even with the daring Hegelian explanation that temporal existence would serve the eternal, by means of the annihilation inherent in its concept, which would portray itself in the eternity of annihilation. One of the mystical impulses secularized in dialectics, was the doctrine of the relevance of the innerworldly, the historical, to what traditional metaphysics delineated as transcendence, or at least, less gnostically and radically, for the position of consciousness to the questions which the canon of philosophy assigned to metaphysics. The feeling which after Auschwitz resists every assertion of positivity of existence as sanctimonious prattle, as injustice to the victims; which is reluctant to squeeze any meaning, be it ever so washed-out, out of their fate, has its objective moment after events which condemn the construction of a meaning of immanence, which radiates from an affirmatively posited transcendence, to a mockery. Such a construction would affirm the absolute negativity and ideologically aid its continued existence, which really lies in any case in the principle of the existent society down to its self-destruction. The earthquake of Lisbon sufficed to cure Voltaire of the Leibnizean theodicy, and the visible catastrophe of the first nature was insignificant, compared with the second, social one, which defies the human imagination by preparing a real hell out of human evil. The capacity for metaphysics is crippled, because what occurred, smashed the basis of the compatibility of speculative metaphysical thought with experience. The dialectical motif of the recoil of quantity into quality triumphs once more, unspeakably. With the murder of millions through administration, death has become something which has never yet been so feared. No possibility anymore, that it could enter into the experienced lives of individuals as something somehow concordant with its course. The individuated is expropriated of the final and most impoverished thing which remained to it. That the individual [Individuum] no longer died in the concentration camps, but rather the exemplar, has to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measures. Genocide is the absolute integration, which is everywhere being prepared, where human beings are made the same, polished, as the military calls it, until they are literally cancelled out, as deviations from the concept of their complete nullity. Auschwitz confirms the philosopheme of pure identity as death. The most provocative dictum from Beckett's Endgame: that there would no longer be anything to really be afraid of, reacts to a praxis, which delivered its first test case in the camps and in whose once honorable concept already lurks teleologically the annihilation of the non-identical. Absolute negativity is in plain view, is no longer surprising. Fear was bound to the principium individuationis [Latin: principle of individuation] of self-preservation, which abolishes itself out of its own consistency.

What the sadists in the camps told their victims: tomorrow you will be smoke rising from these chimneys into the sky, names the indifference of the life of every individual, which history is moving towards: already in their formal freedom they are as fungible and replaceable as under the boots of the liquidators. Because however the individual, in the world whose law is the universal individual advantage, has nothing else except this self, which has become historically indifferent, the carrying out of the tried-and-true tendency is at the same time what is most horrifying; nothing leads beyond this any more than beyond the electrified barbed wire fences around the camps. Perennial suffering has as much right to express itself as the martyr has to scream; this is why it may have been wrong to say that poetry could not be written after Auschwitz. What is not wrong however is the less cultural question of whether it is even permissible for someone who accidentally escaped and by all rights ought to have been murdered, to go on living after Auschwitz. Their continued existence already necessitates the coldness, of the basic principle of capitalist subjectivity, without which Auschwitz would not have been possible: the drastic guilt of the spared. As if to make up for this they are secretly haunted by dreams in which they no longer live, but were gassed in 1944, as if their entire existence after that was purely imaginary, emanation of the vagrant wish of someone who was killed twenty years ago.

Reflective people, and artists, not seldom have the feeling of not quite being there, of not playing along; as if they were not at all themselves, but a sort of spectator. In many cases others find this repugnant; Kierkegaard based his polemic against what he called the aesthetic sphere on this. What in the meantime the critique of philosophical personalism speaks to, is that this position towards the immediate, which disavows all existential attitudes, arrives at its objective truth in a moment which leads beyond the delusion of the self-preserving motive. In the “it isn’t all that important”, which for its part indeed is happy to ally itself with bourgeois coldness, the individual [Individuum] can soonest of all, yet without fear, become conscious of the nullity of existence. That which is inhuman in this, the capacity to distance oneself and rise above things by being a spectator, is in the end precisely what is human, whose ideologues react so vehemently against. It is not entirely implausible, that that part, which conducts itself so, would be the immortal one. The scene in which Shaw on the way to the theater showed his identification to a beggar and hurriedly said “press”, hides under the cynicism something of the consciousness of this. It would help to explain the matter-at-hand, which astonished Schopenhauer: that the emotions in sight of the death not only of others but also our own, are many times over so weak. Very likely human beings are without exception under a bane, none capable of love, and for that reason each and every one feels not loved enough. But the attitude of being a spectator expresses at the same time the doubt as to whether this could be all there is, while nonetheless the subject, so relevant in its delusion, has nothing other than that poverty and ephemerality, which is animalistic in its impulses. Under the bane living beings have the alternative between involuntary ataraxy – an aesthetic of weakness – and the animality of the involved. Both are false life. Something of each however belongs to a right *désinvolture* [off-handedness] and sympathy. The guilty pressure of self-preservation has withstood, perhaps even strengthened itself on the unceasing contemporary threat. Only self-preservation must suspect, that the life in which it fortifies itself, is becoming what it shudders at, into a ghost, a piece of the world of spirits, which the waking consciousness

sees through as not existent. The guilt of life, which as pure factum already robs another life of breath, according to a statistics, which complements an overwhelming number of murdered with a minimal number of rescued, as if this were foreshadowed in the calculation of probability, is no longer to be reconciled with life. That guilt reproduces itself unceasingly, because it cannot be completely present to the consciousness at any moment. This, nothing else, compels one to philosophy. This latter experiences therein the shock, that the deeper, the more powerfully it penetrates, the greater the suspicion that it would be distancing itself from how things are; that the most superficial and trivial intuitions would like, were the essence once revealed, to be in the right against those which aim at the essence. Therein a harsh ray of light falls on truth itself. Speculation feels a certain duty to concede the position of the corrective to its opponent, "common sense" [in English]. Life feeds the horror of the apprehension, that what must be cognized would resemble what is found to be "down to earth" [in English], rather than what raises itself up; it could be, that this apprehension is confirmed even beyond the pedestrian, while nonetheless the thought has its happiness, the promise of its truth, solely in the elevation. If the pedestrian had the last word, if it were the truth, then truth would be debased. The trivial consciousness, as it is theoretically expressed in positivism and unreflective nominalism, may be nearer to the *adaequatio rei atque cogitationis* [Latin: making the thing equal with what is thought] than the sublime one, truer in its grotesque mockery of the truth than the august one, unless a concept of truth different from that of the *adaequatio* is supposed to succeed. The innervation, that metaphysics would like to win solely by throwing itself away, applies to such a different truth. It is not the least of the motivations of the transition to materialism. The tendency to do this can be followed from the Hegelian Marx down to the Benjaminic rescue of the induction; the work of Kafka might form its apotheosis. If negative dialectics demands the self-reflection of thinking, then this implies in tangible terms, that thinking must, nowadays at any rate, in order to be true, also think against itself. If it does not measure itself by the extremity, which flees from the concept, then it is cast in advance in the same mold as the musical accompaniment, with which the SS was wont to drown out the cries of their victims.

2

Metaphysics and Culture 358-361

Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon humanity in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again. This imperative is as unmanageable vis-à-vis its foundation as the given fact formerly was to the Kantian one. To treat it discursively would be heinous: in it the moment of the supplementary in what is moral can be bodily felt. Bodily, because it is the abhorrence, become practical, of the unbearable physical pain inflicted on individuals, even after individuality, as an intellectual form of reflection, is on the point of disappearing. Only in the unvarnished materialistic motive does morality survive. The course of history compels metaphysics, which was traditionally the unmediated opposite of materialism, towards this last. What the Spirit once boasted of determining or construing as similar to its own, moves towards what the Spirit is not the same as; what escapes its domination and what nevertheless reveals the former as absolute evil. The somatic layer of living beings, distant from meaning, is the staging-grounds of suffering, which burned everything assuaging of the Spirit and its

objectification, culture, without consolation in the camps. The process by which metaphysics is irresistibly borne to what it was once conceived against, has reached its vanishing-point. Philosophy since the young Hegel, to the extent it did not sell out to the approved way of thinking, has not been able to repress how very much it has slipped into the questions of material existence. Something of this is apprehended in the childhood fascination, which emanates from the zone of the knacker, of carrion, from the repulsively sweet smell of putrefaction, from the notorious expressions for that zone. The power of that realm in the unconscious may be no less than that of the infantile sexual one; both intermingle in the anal fixation, but are scarcely the same. Unconscious knowledge whispers to the child, that what is repressed by civilized education over there, is what it is all about: the impoverished physical existence sparks the greatest interest, which is scarcely less repressed, into the What is that and Where does it go. Whoever could manage to recollect what once occurred to them in the words Luderbach [proper name, meaning roughly "Baitwater"] and Schweinstiege [proper name, meaning roughly "Pigsteps"] would probably be closer to absolute knowledge than the Hegelian chapter which promises it to the reader, in order to haughtily withhold it. The integration of physical death in culture would need to be theoretically repealed, yet not for the sake of the ontological pure essence of death, but for the sake of what the stench of the cadaver expresses and what its transfiguration into the burial corpse covers over. A hotel owner, called Adam, in view of a child who was fond of him, struck the rats pouring from the holes in the courtyard dead with a club; the child created in his image that of the first human being. That this is forgotten; that one no longer understands, what one sensed once before the dog-catcher's wagon, is the triumph of culture and its failure. It cannot tolerate the memory of that zone, because it does the same as the old Adam, and exactly this is incompatible with its concept of itself. It perhorresces a stench, because it stinks; because its palace, as a magnificent line from Brecht put it, is built of dogshit. Years after that line was written, Auschwitz irrefutably demonstrated the failure of culture. That it could happen in the midst of all the traditions of philosophy, art and the enlightening sciences, says more than merely that these, the Spirit, was not capable of seizing and changing human beings. In those branches themselves, in the emphatic claim of their autarky, dwells untruth. All culture after Auschwitz, including its urgent critique, is garbage. By restoring itself after what transpired in its landscape without resistance, it has turned entirely into that ideology which it potentially was, ever since it took it upon itself, in opposition to material existence, to breathe life into this latter with the light, which the separation of the Spirit from manual labor withheld from such. Whoever pleads for the preservation of a radically culpable and shabby culture turns into its accomplice, while those who renounce culture altogether immediately promote the barbarism, which culture reveals itself to be. Not even silence can break out of the circle; it merely rationalizes one's own subjective incapacity with the state of objective truth and debases this once more into a lie. If the Eastern states have, in spite of their twaddle to the contrary, abolished culture and transformed it as a pure means of domination into junk, this is what that culture, which moans about this, only deserves, and to what for its part, in the name of the democratic right of human beings to what already resembles them, it zealously tends. It is only that the administrative barbarism of the functionaries over there [in the East], by praising itself as culture and proclaiming its bad state of affairs as a precious and sacred legacy, convicts its reality, the infrastructure, to be as barbaric for its part as

the superstructure they demolish, by taking it under control. In the West, it is at least permitted to say so. – The theology of the crisis registered, what it rebelled against abstractly and for that reason in vain: that metaphysics is fused with culture. The absoluteness of the Spirit, aureole of culture, was the same principle which untiringly did violence to what it pretended to express. After Auschwitz, no word intoned from on high, nor any theological one, has any right in its original form. The challenge of the words handed down by tradition; the test, as to whether God would permit this and not wrathfully intervene, once more carried out the judgement on the victims, which Nietzsche had passed long before on the ideas. Someone who withstood Auschwitz and other camps, with a power which is to be admired, remarked heatedly against Beckett: if he had been in Auschwitz, he would write differently, namely more positively, with the trench-religion of a survivor. The survivor was right in a different sense than he thought; Beckett, and whoever else remained in control of themselves, would have been broken there and presumably forced to confess to that trench-religion which the survivor garbs in the words, he wants to give human beings courage: as if this depended on any sort of intellectual construction; as if the intent, which turns to human beings and arranges itself according to them, would not rob them of what they are due, even if they believe the opposite. This is what metaphysics has come to.

3

Dying Today 361-366

This lends the demand to begin at the beginning or, as they put it, to radically put in question, to scrape away at the appearance [Schein], with which a failed culture would paint over its guilt and the truth, its suggestive power. But as soon as that presumed demolition yields to the urge for an unspoiled fundament, it thereby conspires with the culture which it boasts of demolishing. While the Fascists thundered against destructive cultural Bolshevism, Heidegger made destruction respectable as the institution of penetrating into being. Cultural critique and barbarism are not without a certain understanding. It was quickly tried out in practice. Metaphysical considerations, which seek to get rid of the elements which are mediated as culture to them, deny the relationship of their presumably pure categories to social content. Disregarding society, they encourage its continued existence in the existing forms, which for their part bar the recognition of truth along with its realization. The idol of pure Ur-experience gibbers as much as what is culturally prepared, the out-of-date stockpile of categories, which is *thesei* [Greek: thesis]. What solely could lead beyond this is what determines both in its mediatedness: culture as the lid on trash, nature, even where it turns into the capstone of being, as the projection of the bad cultural demand, that things must nevertheless stay the same throughout all changes. Not even the experience of death suffices as what is ultimate and beyond doubt, as a metaphysics similar to the one Descartes once deduced from the untenable ego cogitans [Latin: cognizing ego].

That the metaphysics of death degenerated either into advertising for the heroic death or into the triviality of the pure repetition of what is unmistakable, namely that everyone has to die, its entire ideological bad state of affairs, is very likely based on the enduring frailty of human consciousness to this day, which cannot stand up to the experience of death, perhaps cannot even accept it at all. No human life, which conducts

itself openly and freely towards objects, suffices to complete what is extant in the Spirit of every human being as potential; it and death yawn from each other. The reflections on death which give meaning are as helpless as the tautological ones. The more the consciousness escapes animality and becomes what is solidified and lasting in its forms, the more obdurately does it resist anything which makes its own eternity suspect. Coupled with the historical enthroning of the subject as Spirit was the deception, that it could never be lost. If earlier forms of property meshed with magical practices, which banished death, then the ratio exorcises the latter as tenaciously as only the rites once did, the more completely all human relations are determined by property. At a final stage, in despair, it itself turns into property. Its metaphysical exaltation is unleashed from its experience. The current metaphysics of death is nothing but the powerless solace of society over the fact that through social transformations, human beings came to be deprived of what was once supposed to have made death bearable to them, the feeling of its epic unity with the rounded life. But it may have only transfigured the domination of death by the weariness of the elderly and those sated with life, who for that reason believe it right to die, because their toil-filled previous life was indeed no life at all and stole from them the power of resisting death. In the socialized society however, in the inescapably dense web of immanence, human beings perceive death solely as something external and alien to them, without illusions as to its commensurability with their life. They cannot absorb the fact, that they must die. An oblique, severed piece of hope clings to this: precisely because death does not, as in Heidegger, constitute the entirety of existence, one experiences, so long as one is not senile, death and its emissaries, illnesses, as heterogenous, ego-alien. One may ground this, quick-wittedly, in the fact that the ego would be nothing other than the principle of self-preservation opposed to death and incapable of absorbing it with the consciousness, which is itself ego. But the experience of the consciousness yields little to support this view; it does not necessarily have, in the sight of death, the form of contrariness, which one would expect. The Hegelian doctrine, that what is, perishes by itself, is hardly confirmed by the subject. That one has to die, appears even to the elderly, who are conscious of the signs of venerability, rather like an unfortunate accident caused by one's own physique, with traces of the same contingency as the nowadays typical external accidents. This strengthens the speculation, which counterpoints the insight of the preponderance [Vorrang] of the object: as to whether the Spirit would not have a moment of what is independent, of what is not mixed up together, which becomes free exactly when it is not for its part devouring everything and reproducing itself in thrall to death. In spite of the deceptive interest of self-preservation, the power of resistance of the idea of immortality, as Kant still harbored it, could scarcely be explained without this moment. Admittedly that power of resistance appears to be sinking in the history of the species, as much as in declining individuals. After the downfall of the objective religions, secretly ratified long ago, which promised to take away the sting of death, the latter has turned into something entirely alien today through the socially determined downfall of continuous experience at large.

The less subjects live anymore, the more abrupt, frightening, the death. In that the latter literally transforms the former into a thing, it makes them aware of their permanent death, of reification, of the form of their relations, which they are partly culpable of. The civilized integration of death, without power over it and ridiculous before it, which it covers up cosmetically, is the reaction-formation to something social [Gesellschaftliche],

the awkward attempt of exchange-society to plug the last holes still left open by the world of commodities. Death and history, particularly the collective one of the category of the individual [Individuum], form a constellation. If the individual, Hamlet, once deduced its absolute essentiality out of the dawning consciousness of the irrevocability of death, then the downfall of the individual brings down the entire construction of bourgeois existence along with it. What is annihilated in itself and perhaps also for itself is something nugatory. Hence the constant panic in the sight of death. It is no longer to be placated except through its repression. Death as such, or as a biological Ur-phenomenon, is not to be extracted out of the coils of history;¹ the individuated [Individuum], which carries the experience of death, is far too much of a historical category for that. The statement, that death would always be the same, is as abstract as untrue; the form, by which the consciousness comes to grips with death, varies along with the concrete conditions of how one dies, down to the physical aspect. Death in the concentration camps has a new horror: since Auschwitz the fear of death means, to fear things worse than death. What death does to what is socially condemned, is anticipated biologically in beloved human beings of great age; not only their bodies but their ego, everything which determines them as human beings, crumbles without illness and violent intervention. The remnants of confidence in their transcendental duration disappear as it were into earthly life: what is it supposed to be in them, anyway, which is not dying. The comforting faith, that in such disintegration or madness the core of the human being would continue to exist, has, in its indifference towards that experience, something foolish and cynical about it. It prolongs the snotty, philistine [Spiessbuerger] truism – that one remains always what one is – into infinity. Whoever turns away from what negated their possible fulfillment, pulls a face at the metaphysical need.

Nevertheless the thought, that death would be the simply and purely ultimate, is unthinkable. Attempts to express death in language, are in vain all the way into logic; whoever would be the subject, of which it is predicated, that it is here, now, dead. Not only pleasure, which, according to Nietzsche's luminous word, wants eternity, recoils against transience. If death were that absolute, which philosophy positively conjured in vain, then everything is nothing at all, every thought is thought into the void, none could be somehow truly thought. For it is a moment of truth, that it would endure along with its temporal core; without any duration, there would be none at all, even its last trace would be devoured by absolute death. Its idea defies thinking no less than that of immortality. But what is unthinkable in death does not render the thought immune against the unreliability of every metaphysical experience. The context of delusion, which encompasses all human beings, has a share in what they imagine to tear the veil with. In place of the Kantian epistemological question, as to how metaphysics would be possible, steps the one from the philosophy of history, as to whether metaphysical experience is even possible at all. This latter was never so far beyond what is temporal as in the scholastic usage of the word metaphysics. It has been observed that mysticism, whose name hopes to rescue the immediacy of metaphysical experience against its loss through institutional construction, forms a social tradition for its part and stems from tradition, across the demarcation lines of religions, which are heresies to each other. The name of the corpus of Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah, means tradition. Metaphysical immediacy, where it dared to venture the furthest, did not deny how very mediated it is. If it appeals however to tradition, then it must also confess its dependency on the historical condition

of the Spirit. In Kant the metaphysical ideas were indeed removed from the existential judgements of an experience, which was to be fulfilled in the material, but were supposed to be located in spite of the antinomies in the consistency of pure reason; today they would be as absurd as the ones named, by a zealously classifying defense-mechanism, as what their absence expresses. The consciousness however, which refuses to deny the fall in the philosophy of history of metaphysical ideas, and yet cannot bear this latter, if it is not supposed to also deny itself as consciousness, tends thereby in more than a merely semantic confusion to elevate the fate of metaphysical ideas straightaway to something metaphysical. Despair in the world, which nevertheless has its fundament in the thing and its truth and is neither aesthetic *weltschmerz* nor a false consciousness worthy of damnation, would already guarantee, so runs the false conclusion, the existence of what is hopelessly relinquished, even though existence has turned into the universal context of guilt. Of all the disgrace, which theology experienced with good reason, the worst of all is the howl of joy in which the positive religions break out, over the despair of the unbelieving. They voice their *Te Deum* at virtually every denial of God, because they at least use the name of God. Just as the means usurped the ends, in the ideology swallowed by the entire population of the Earth, so too has the resurrected metaphysics of today usurped the need, for what it lacks. The truth-content of what is absent becomes indifferent; they assert it, because it would be good for human beings. The solicitors of metaphysics argue as one with the pragmatism which they detest, which dissolved metaphysics *a priori*. Likewise, despair is the latest ideology, as historical and historically conditioned, as the course of the cognition which has gnawed at the metaphysical ideas, which is not to be stopped by means of any *cui bono* [Latin: who benefits].

4

Happiness and Waiting in Vain 366-368

What metaphysical experience would be, to those who eschew the reduction of this to presumably religious primal experiences, is closest to how Proust imagined it, in the happiness promised by the names of villages like Otterbach, Watterbach, Reuenthal, Monbrunn. You think that if you go there, you would be in what is fulfilled, as if it really existed. If you really go there, that which is promised recedes like a rainbow. Nevertheless you aren't disappointed; rather, you feel that you are too close, and that's why you don't see it. This is presumably why the difference between landscapes and the districts, which determine the world of images of childhood, is not that great. What Proust experienced at Illiers was something many children of the same social strata shared at different places. But for this generality, what is authentic in Proust's portrayal, to form, one must be enraptured at that one spot, without squinting at the generality. To the child it is obvious that what delights it about its favorite little town is to be found there and only there, and nowhere else; it errs, but its error constitutes the model of experience, that of a concept, which ultimately would be that of the thing itself, not the poverty of that which is shorn away from things. The marriage, during which the Proustian narrator gazes as a child for the first time at the Duchess de Guermantes, may have taken place just so, and with the same power over his later life, at another time and another place. Solely in view of what is absolutely, indissolubly individualized is to be hoped, that this is how it already was and would be; only by approaching this, would the concept of the concept be fulfilled. It clings however to the promise of happiness, while

the world which denies it, which is that of the dominating universality, is what Proust's reconstruction of experience opposes *entêtier* [French: obstinately]. Happiness, the only aspect of metaphysical experience which is more than powerless needing, grants the interior of objects as what is simultaneously removed from such. Whoever meanwhile naïvely enjoys this sort of experience, as if they held what it suggests in their hands, succumbs to the conditions of the empirical world, which they wanted to escape from, and which nevertheless grants them the only possibility thereof. The concept of metaphysical experience is still antinomic, in other ways than the transcendental dialectic of Kant taught. What is announced in what is metaphysical without recourse to the experience of the subject, without its immediate being-present [*Dabeisein*], is helpless before the desire of the autonomous subject, to permit nothing to be foisted on it, which would not be comprehensible to it. What is immediately evident to it however ails from fallibility and relativity.

That the category of reification which was inspired by the wishful image of unbroken subjective immediacy no longer deserves that key character to which apologetic thinking, absorbing the materialistic one early on, overzealously accords it, has a reciprocal influence on everything which goes under the concept of metaphysical experience. The objective theological categories, which philosophy attacked as reifications since the young Hegel, are by no means only remains, which dialectics would eliminate. They stand complementarily to the weakness of the idealistic dialectic, which as identity-thinking lays claim to what does not fall into thinking, which nevertheless, as soon as it is contrasted to that as its mere other, loses every possible determination. What is precipitated in the objectivity of metaphysical categories is not solely, as existentialism would have it, hardened society, but just as much the preponderance [*Vorrang*] of the object as a moment of dialectics. The liquefaction of everything thingly without a remainder regressed to the subjectivism of the pure act, hypostasized the mediation as immediacy. Pure immediacy and fetishism are equally untrue. The insistence on the former against reification relinquishes, as Hegel's institutionalism descried, the moment of the otherness in dialectics, as arbitrarily as this in turn, according to the practice of the later Hegel, is not to be detained in something solidified beyond it. The surplus over the subject, however, which the subjective metaphysical experience does not wish to be talked out of, and the truth-moment in the thingly are extremes, which touch in the idea of truth. For this latter would be so little without the subject, which escapes from the appearance [*Schein*], as without that which is not the subject and in which the truth has its *Ur-image*. – Pure metaphysical experience becomes unmistakably paler and more desultory in the course of the process of secularization, and this softens the substantiality of the older one. It conducts itself negatively in that “Is that all?”, which comes closest to being realized as waiting in vain. Art has demonstrated this; in Wozzeck Alban Berg ranked those bars as highest, which express, as only music can, waiting in vain, and cited its harmony at the decisive caesuras and conclusion of Lulu. No such innervation however, nothing of what Bloch called symbolic intention, is immune to adulteration by mere life. Waiting in vain does not vouchsafe what the expectation aims at, but reflects the condition, which has its measure in the denial. The less of life which remains, the more tempting for the consciousness, to take the wretched and abrupt remains of living beings for the phenomenal [*erscheinende*] absolute. Nevertheless nothing could be experienced as something truly alive, which would not also promise something

transcendental to life; no exertion of the concept leads beyond this. It is and is not. The despair in that which is, overshadows the transcendental ideas, which once commanded it to halt. That the finite world of unending misery would be circumscribed by a divine world-plan, turns for everyone, who is not engaged in the business of the world, into that madness, which comports itself so well with the positive normal consciousness. The unsalvageability of the theological conception of the paradox, a last, starved-out bastion, is ratified by the course of the world, which translates the skandalon [Latin: scandal], at which Kierkegaard tarried, into open profanation.

5

“Nihilism” 369-374

The metaphysical categories live on, secularized, in what the vulgar higher urge calls the question of the meaning of life. The ring of the word, reminiscent of a world-view, condemns the question. Almost irresistibly it conjoins upon itself the answer, that the meaning of life would be the one the questioner gives it. Not even the Marxism debased into an official credo, as in the late Lukacs, will answer much differently. The answer is false. The concept of meaning involves an objectivity beyond all making; as something made it is already a fiction, duplicating that subject, be it ever so collective, and swindles it out of what it seems to grant. Metaphysics deals with something objective, without however being permitted to dispense with subjective reflection. The subjects run into themselves, their “constitution”: it is up to metaphysics to reflect on how far they are nevertheless capable of seeing beyond themselves. Philosophemes which dispense with this, disqualify themselves as counsel. The activity of someone connected to that sphere was characterized decades earlier: he travels around and gives lectures to employees about meaning. Whoever sighs with relief, when life shows a resemblance to life for once and is not, as per the cognition of Karl Kraus, set in motion solely for the sake of production and consumption, eagerly and immediately reads the presence of something transcendental out of this. The depravation of speculative idealism into a question of meaning retrospectively damns the one which even at its zenith proclaimed such a meaning, although with slightly different words, the Spirit as the absolute, which cannot get rid of its origin in the inadequate subject and placates its need in its mirror image. This is an Ur-phenomenon of ideology. The total of the question itself exerts a bane, which amidst all affirmative posturing becomes nugatory before the real catastrophe. If someone in despair, who wants to kill themselves, asked someone who is trying to talk them out of it, what the meaning of life is, none could be named by the helpless helper; as soon as they try, they are refuted, the echo of a consensus omnium [Latin: universal consensus], which forms the kernel of the proverb, that the Kaiser after all needs soldiers. A life which had meaning would not have to ask about such; the latter flees from the question. The opposite however, abstract nihilism, would have to fall silent before the counter-question: why do you live yourself. To size up the whole, to calculate the net-profit of life, is precisely the death which the so-called question of meaning wished to escape, even to the extent the latter, without any other exit, prefers to enthuse over the meaning of death. What would have a claim on the name of meaning without disgrace, is in what is open, not in what is closed in itself; the thesis, that life would have none, would be as a positive one just as foolish, as its opposite is false; the former is true only

as a blow against the asseverating phrase. Not even Schopenhauer's inclination to identity the essence of the world, the blind will, as what is absolutely negative under the humane view, befits the state of consciousness any longer; the claim of total subsumption, all too analogous to the positive one of the contemporaries he detested, the idealists. Natural religion flickers up once more, the fear of demons, against which the Epicurean enlightenment once painted the wretched idea of disinterested observing gods as something better. In contrast to Schopenhauerian irrationalism, the monotheism which he attacked in the Spirit of the enlightenment also has its true aspect. Schopenhauer's metaphysics regresses to a phase, in which the genius has not yet awoken amidst what is mute. He denies the motive of freedom which, for the time being, and perhaps even in the phase of complete unfreedom, humanity remembers. Schopenhauer gets to the bottom of the illusory appearance [Scheinhafte] of individuation, but his recipe for freedom in the fourth book, the repudiation of the will to life, is just as illusory [scheinhaft]: as if what is ephemerally individualized could have the least power over its negative absolute, the will as a thing in itself, could step out of its bane otherwise than in self-deception, without the entire metaphysics of the will escaping through the breach. Total determinism is no less mythical than the totals of the Hegelian logic. Schopenhauer was an idealist malgré lui-même [French: in spite of himself], spokesperson of the bane. The totum [Latin: the whole] is the totem. The consciousness could not despair at all over what is grey, if it did not harbor the concept of a different color, whose scattered trace is not lacking in the negative whole. It always stems from the past, hope from its counter-force [Widerspiel], from what must fall or is condemned; such an interpretation would very likely accord with the last sentence of Benjamin's text on the Elective Affinities, "Only for the sake of the hopeless are we given hope." It is tempting nevertheless, to seek meaning not in life at large but in fulfilled moments. These compensate in this world's existence for the fact that it no longer tolerates anything outside it. Incomparable power emanates from the metaphysician Proust, because he gave himself over to this temptation with an unbridled demand for happiness like no other, without wishing to retain his ego. But through the progress of the novel the incorruptible one reinforced the fact that even that fullness, the moment rescued by meditation, would not be it. As close as Proust was to Bergson's circle of experience, which raised the conception of the meaningfulness of life in its concretion to a theory, so much more was Proust, inheritor of the French novel of disillusionment, at the same time the critic of Bergsonianism. The talk of the fullness of life, a *lucus a non lucendo* [Latin: the forest is so-called because there is no light] even where it illuminates, is rendered idle by its immeasurable discrepancy with death. If this is irrevocable, then the assertion of a meaning which arises in the light of a fragmentary, albeit genuine experience, is ideological. Proust thus helped, in one of the central passages of his work, the death of Bergotte, the hope for the resurrection towards its groping expression, contrary to all philosophy of life, yet not under the cover of the positive religions. The idea of the fullness of life, even the one which the socialist conceptions of humanity promise, is for that reason not the utopia for which it is mistaken, because that fullness cannot be separated from the greed which the Jugendstil called "living to the full", of a need which has the act of violence and subjugation in itself. If there is no hope without the satiation of desire, then this latter is still enmeshed in the notorious context of like for like, of what is precisely hopeless. No fullness without power-jousting. Negatively, by virtue of the consciousness of nullity, theology is in the

right against those who believe in life on earth. That much is true in the jeremiads on the emptiness of existence. Only it is not to be cured from within, in the sense that human beings would have a change of heart, but solely through the abolition of the principle of renunciation. With it, the cycle of fulfillment and appropriation would in the end also disappear: so deeply are metaphysics and the arrangement of life interwoven.

Nihilism is associated with the keywords of emptiness and meaninglessness. Nietzsche adopted the expression, which Jacobi first used philosophically, presumably from the newspapers, which reported on Russian atrocities. With an irony, for which the ear has meanwhile grown too dull, he employed it for the denunciation of the opposite of what the word meant in the praxis of conspirators, of Christianity as the institutionalized repudiation of the will to life. Philosophy need not do without the word any longer. Conformistically, in the opposite direction of Nietzsche, it has refunctioned it into the epitome of a condition, which is either accused of or accuses itself of nullity. For the thought-habit, to which nihilism is in any case something bad, that condition awaits an injection of meaning, indifferent as to whether the critique of this, which one ascribed to nihilism, is well-founded or not. In spite of its non-committalness [Unverbindlichkeit], such talk of nihilism abets demagoguery. It demolishes however a straw-man, which it itself set up. The statement, that everything would be nothing, is as empty as the word being, which the Hegelian movement of the concept identified it with, not in order to hold fast to the identity of both but rather, advancing past and once again falling behind the abstract nihilism, in order to place something determinate in both places, which alone by virtue of its determinacy would be more than nothing. That human beings would want nothingness, as Nietzsche occasionally suggests, would be ridiculous hubris for each determinate individual will, even if organized society should succeed in making the earth uninhabitable or blowing it up sky-high. To believe in nothingness – under this is scarcely more to be thought than under that of nothingness itself; the something, which, legitimately or not, is meant by the word belief, is according to its own meaning not any nothingness. The naïve belief in nothingness would be as fatuous as the naïve belief in being, the palliative of the Spirit, which proudly finds its satisfaction, in seeing through the swindle. Since the indignation over nihilism once more being ladled out these days scarcely applies to that mysticism, which still discovers in nothingness, as the nihil privativum [Latin: empty object of a concept], that something which is negated there, and which comes to pass in the dialectics unleashed by the word nothingness, then what is in all likelihood supposed to be morally defamed, by means of the mobilization of a word which is everywhere detested and incompatible with universal good cheer, are those who refuse to accept the Western inheritance of positivity and do not subscribe to any meaning of the existent. If they prattle on about the nihilism of values, that there would be nothing which one could hold on to, then this cries out for the overcoming, native to the same subaltern sphere of language. What is covered up is the perspective, as to whether the condition in which one could no longer hold on to anything might be the only one worthy of human beings; one which permitted the thought to at last behave as autonomously, as philosophy had always merely asked them to do and in the same breath prevented them from doing. Overcomings, even those of nihilism along with the Nietzschean kind, who meant it otherwise and yet delivered slogans to Fascism, are at all times worse than what is overcome. The medieval nihil privativum [Latin: empty object of a concept], which recognized the concept of nothingness as the negation of something

instead of something auto-semantic, is as far ahead of the zealous overcomings as the imago of Nirvana, of nothing as a something. Those to whom despair is not a terminus may ask, as to whether it were better, that there be nothing at all rather than something. Even this admits to no general answer. For a human being in a concentration camp, if someone who had escaped in time could at all judge over this, it would be better if they had not been born. Nevertheless the ideal of nothingness would evaporate before the momentary quiver of an eye, indeed before the feeble tail-wagging of a dog, which one has just given a treat, which it promptly forgets. To the question, as to whether one is a nihilist or not, a thinking person would very likely have to answer with the truth: too little, perhaps out of coldness, because one's sympathy with that which suffers is too slight. In nothingness culminates the abstraction, and the abstract is what is reprehensible. Beckett reacted to the situation of the concentration-camps, which he does not name, as if there were a ban on such like that of the graven image, in the only befitting manner. What is, is like the concentration-camp. Once he speaks of a lifelong death-sentence. The only hope, faintly dawning, is that there would be nothing anymore. This too he rejects. Out of the fissure of inconsistency formed by this, the image-world of nothingness appears as something which tethers his poetry. In the legacy of its treatment, of the apparently stoical carrying-on, what is noiselessly screamed is that things ought to be different. Such nihilism implies the opposite of the identification with nothingness. Gnostically, it regards the world as it has been created as radically evil and its repudiation the possibility of a different, not yet existent one. So long as the world is as it is, then all images of reconciliation, peace and quiet resemble those of death. The smallest difference between nothingness and that which has come to rest, would be the refuge of hope, the no-man's-land between the border-posts of being and nothingness. From that zone needs to be extricated, instead of overcoming, the consciousness of what the alternative would have no power over. Nihilists are those, who oppose nihilism with their more and more washed-out positivities, conspiring by means of these with all existent malice and finally with the destructive principle. What honors thought, is defending what nihilism is castigated as.

6

Kant's Resignation 374-377

The antinomic structure of the Kantian system expressed more than contradictions, in which the speculation on metaphysical objects would necessarily be entangled: something indeed in the history of philosophy. The powerful effect of the critique of reason, far beyond its epistemological content, is to be ascribed to the faithfulness with which the work demonstrated the state of the experience of consciousness. The historiography of philosophy regards the achievement of the text primarily in the conclusive separation of valid cognition and metaphysics. In fact it first appears as the theory of scientific judgements, nothing more. Epistemology, logic understood in a broader sense, is concerned with the investigation of empirical world according to laws. Kant intends however more. Through the medium of epistemological reflection, he issues the by no means neutral answer to the so-called metaphysical questions, that these actually ought not be asked. To this extent the Critique of Pure Reason anticipates the Hegelian doctrine, that logic and metaphysics would be the same, as much as the positivistic one, which circumvents the questions, on which everything would depend, by

means of their abolition, and mediately [mittelbar] decides them negatively. German idealism extrapolated its metaphysics from the fundamental claim of epistemology, which makes the attempt to carry the whole. Thought to the end, the critique of reason, which disputes the objectively valid cognition of the absolute, exactly thereby judges itself the absolute. This is what idealism emphasized. Nevertheless its consistency bends the motif into its opposite and into what is untrue. Kant's objectively much more modest doctrine – read: theory of science – is accorded a thesis, which the former fights against, in spite of its inescapability, with good reason. Kant is expanded, against himself, beyond the theory of science by means of conclusions which are stringently drawn from him. By means of its consistency idealism violates Kant's metaphysical reservation; pure consistency-thinking turns irresistibly into the absolute. Kant's confession, that reason would necessarily entangle itself in those antinomies, which he then dissolved through reason, was anti-positivistic.*1* Nevertheless he does not disdain the positivistic solace, that one could settle into the narrow realm, which the critique of the property of reason leaves behind to this latter, satisfied with the firm soil underfoot. He joins in with the eminently bourgeois affirmation of one's own narrowness. According to Hegel's critique of Kant, the issue of whether the jurisdiction of reason has overstepped the boundaries of possibility of experience and whether it may do so, already presupposes a position beyond the realms divided on the Kantian map, a third court of appeals, as it were.*2* As the possibility of the decision, Kant's topological zeal insinuates, without giving an account of this, exactly that transcendence in contrast to the realm of the understanding, over which he disdains to positively judge. This court of appeals became the absolute subject of German idealism, "Spirit", which would first produce the dichotomy subject-object and thereby the borders of finite cognition. Once however such a metaphysical view of the Spirit loses its potency, then the only thing the border-setting intention still restricts is what cognizes, the subject. The critical one turns into the renouncing one. No longer trusting the infinity of the essence which animates it, it secures itself contrary to its own essence in its own finitude and in what is finite. It wishes to be undisturbed all the way into the metaphysical sublimation, the absolute turns into an idle concern for it. This is the repressive side of criticism; the idealists who followed were as far ahead of their class, as they were in rebellion against it. In the origins of what Nietzsche still praised as intellectual honesty, lurks the self-hatred of the Spirit, the innervated Protestant rage at the whore Reason. The rationality which eliminates the imagination, still held in high esteem by St. Simon and the enlighteners, which, complementarily to this, dries up by itself, is irrationalistically corrupted. Even criticism changes its function: the change of the bourgeoisie from a revolutionary class into a conservative one is repeated in it. The echo of this philosophical matter-at-hand is the malice of the sound human understanding, proud of its own narrow provincialism, which fills the world today. It says, e contrario [Latin: to the contrary], that the borders, in whose cult virtually all are united, are not to be respected. It is "positive", marked by that selfsame caprice of what is subjectively instituted, for which the "common sense" [in English] embodied in Babbitt denounces speculation. Kant's allegory of the land of truth, the island in the ocean, objectively characterizes the intellectual happiness squirreled away in the corner as a Robinsonade: just as the dynamic of the productive forces quickly enough destroyed the idyll, in which the small-town citizen [Kleinbuerger], justifiably mistrustful of dynamics, would gladly have tarried. The Kantian pathos of the infinite crassly conflicts with the

home-baked nature of his doctrine. If the practical reason has primacy over the theoretical one, then this latter, itself a mode of conduct, would have to reach into what its superior is presumably capable of, unless its own concept should become untenable by means of the cut between understanding and reason. Kant is pushed however precisely in that direction by his conception of scientificity. He may not say it and yet must say it; the inconsistency, which is so easily entered into the ledger of the history of the Spirit as a relic of older metaphysics, is realized by the thing. The island of cognition which Kant boasted of measuring, ends up for its part through self-righteous narrowness in that which is untrue, which he projected onto the cognition of what is unlimited. It is impossible to endow the cognition of the finite with a truth, which is for its part deduced from the absolute – in Kantian terms: from reason – in which the cognition would not reach. The ocean of Kantian metaphor threatens to swallow up the island at every moment.

7

Desire of Salvation and Block 377-382

That metaphysical philosophy, as it essentially coincided historically with the great systems, has more glamour than the empiristic and positivistic ones, is not, as the inane word conceptual poetry would have us believe, something merely aesthetic, also not any sort of psychological wish-fulfillment. The immanent quality of a thought – what manifests itself therein in power, resistance, imagination, as the unity of the critical with its opposite – is, although no *index veri* [Latin: index of truth], then at least a clue. That Carnap and Mises would be truer than Kant and Hegel, could not be the truth, even if it were so. The Kant of the critique of reason said in the doctrine of ideas, that theory would not be possible without metaphysics. That it however is possible, implies that right of metaphysics, to which the same Kant, who smashed it through the effect of his work, held fast. The Kantian rescue of the intelligible sphere is not only, as everyone knows, Protestant apologetics, but would also like to intervene in the dialectic of enlightenment there, where this latter terminates in the abolition of reason. How much deeper the Kantian desire of the rescue is grounded than solely in the pious wish, to hold something of the traditional ideas in hand in the midst of and contrary to nominalism, is attested to by the construction of immortality as a postulate of practical reason. It condemns the intolerability of what exists and reinforces the Spirit, which cognizes it. That no innerworldly betterment would suffice to do justice to the dead; that none would touch upon the injustice of death, is what moves Kantian reason to hope against reason. The secret of his philosophy is the unthinkability of despair. Compelled by the convergence of all thoughts into an absolute, he does not leave it at the absolute border between the absolute and the existent, which he was no less compelled to draw. He held fast to the metaphysical ideas and forbade nevertheless the thought of the absolute, which might one day be realized just like eternal peace, from jumping to the conclusion that the absolute would for that very reason exist. His philosophy circles, probably just as every other one does, by the way, around the ontological proof of God. With magnificent ambiguity, he left his own position open; the motif of the “An eternal Father must dwell” [line from Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*], which Beethoven’s composition of the Kantian hymn to joy put the emphasis, in true Kantian spirit, on the “must”, stands in contrast to passages in which Kant, therein as close to Schopenhauer as this latter later claimed, rejected metaphysical

ideas, especially that of immortality, as ensnared in the conceptions of space and time, and thus for their part delimited. He disdained the transition to affirmation.

The Kantian block, the theory of the boundaries of possible positive cognition, derives, also in keeping with Hegel's critique, from the form-content dualism. The human consciousness would be, so runs the anthropological argument, condemned to eternal arrest, as it were, in the forms of cognition which it was once given. That what affects these latter would escape every determination, it would receive only from the forms of consciousness. But the forms are not that ultimate, which Kant described them as. By means of the reciprocity between them and the existent content they also develop in their own right. This however is incompatible with the conception of the indestructible block. Once the forms are moments of a dynamic, which would in truth befit the treatment of the subject as an originary apperception, then their positive form can so little be stipulated for all future cognition than any other sort of content, without which they are not and with which they transform themselves. Only if the dichotomy of form and content were absolute, could Kant maintain that the dichotomy would reject every content coming from the forms, not from the material one. If the forms appropriate this material moment themselves, then the block shows itself to be something created by precisely the subject, which it inhibits. The subject becomes as much exalted as debased, when the borders are located in it, in its transcendental-logical organization. The naïve consciousness, to which very likely Goethe inclined as well: that one simply does not yet know, but perhaps one could still solve the puzzle, is closer to the metaphysical truth than Kant's *ignoramus*. His anti-idealistic doctrine of the absolute limit and the idealistic one of absolute knowledge are not at all so hostile to each other, as they said of each other; the latter too amounts to this, that in keeping with the course of thought of the Hegelian Phenomenology, the absolute knowing would be nothing but the course of thought of phenomenology itself, thus by no means would transcend.

Kant, who frowned upon the precipitate rush into intelligible worlds, equates the subjective side of Newtonian science with cognition, the correspondingly objective one with truth. The question of how metaphysics would be possible as a science is thus to be taken precisely: as to whether it satisfies the criteria of a cognition oriented towards the ideal of mathematics and so-called classical physics. The Kantian posing of the problem, which bears in mind the metaphysics he assumes to be a natural predisposition, refers to the "how" of the generalized and necessarily supposed cognition; but really means its "what", its possibility itself. He repudiates this, according to the measure of that ideal. Science, which is released from any further reservations due to its imposing results, is however the product of bourgeois society. The rigidly dualistic basic structure of Kant's rational-critical model duplicates that of a relation of production, in which commodities fall out of machines like his phenomena fall out of the cognitive mechanism; where the material and its own determinacy are as indifferent in relation to their profit as in Kant, who has it stenciled in. The end-product, which has exchange-value, resembles the Kantian objects, which are subjectively produced and accepted as objectivity. The permanent *reductio ad hominem* [Latin: reduction to the person] of everything which appears equips cognition for the ends of internal and external domination; its highest expression is the principle of unity, borrowed from that of compartmentalized production, divided into partial acts. What makes the Kantian theory of rationality grandiose is that it is really interested only in the realm of authority of scientific propositions. The

delimitation of the Kantian posing of the question to the organized natural-scientific experience, the orientation to validity and epistemological subjectivism are so interwoven that one could not be without the other. As long as the subjective inquiry is supposed to be the test of validity, so long are cognitions which are not scientifically sanctioned, namely non-necessary and non-universal, inferior; that is why all efforts to emancipate the Kantian epistemology from the natural-scientific realm had to fail. Inside the identifying approach, one cannot completely make up for what the former eliminates according to its own essence; at most, the approach is to be transformed out of the cognition of its inadequacy. That it however does so little justice to the living experience, which is cognition, indicates its falsehood, the incapacity to achieve what it sets before itself, namely to ground experience. For such a foundation in something fixed and invariant contradicts what experience knows about itself, which indeed, the more open it is and the more it realizes itself, is always changing its own forms. The incapacity of doing this is the incapacity of experience itself. One can add no cognitive theorems to Kant, which are not explicated by him, because their exclusion is central to his epistemology; the systematic claim of the doctrine of pure reason is registered in the exclusion unmistakably enough. Kant's system is one of stop signals. The subjectively arranged constitutional analysis does not transform the world, as it is given to the naïve bourgeois consciousness, but is proud of its "empirical realism". To it, however, the height of its claim to validity is as one with the level of abstraction. It tendentially stamps out, obsessed with the a priority of its synthetic judgements, everything in cognition which does not fit into its ground-rules. The social division of labor is respected without reflection along with the defect, which became flagrant in the two hundred years since then: that the sciences, organized by the division of labor, illegitimately seized a monopoly of truth in themselves. The paralogisms of the Kantian epistemology are, put in bourgeois and very Kantian terms, the uncovered bills of exchange, which went to protest with the development of science into one of a mechanical bustle. The authority of the Kantian concept of truth became terroristic with the ban on thinking the absolute. Irresistibly it drives towards the ban on thinking pure and simple. The Kantian block projects the self-mutilation of reason on truth, which it inflicts on itself as the rite of initiation of its scientificity. That is why what happens in Kant as cognition is so scanty, compared with the experience of living beings, to which the idealistic systems, be it ever so invertedly, wished to do justice.

Kant would scarcely have disputed the fact that the idea of truth mocks the scientific ideal. But the discrepancy is revealed by no means only in view of the mundus intelligibilis [Latin: intelligible world] but in every cognition achieved by the unconstrained consciousness. To this extent the Kantian block is an appearance [Schein], which blasphemes in the Spirit, what in the hymns of the late Hoederlin is philosophically ahead of philosophy. This was not foreign to the idealists, but what was open to them ended up under the same bane, which forced Kant to contaminate experience and science. While many an impulse of idealism wanted to aim at what is open, it would pursue it by the extension of the Kantian principle, and the contents became even less free in it than in Kant. This in turn is what lends his block its moment of truth: it prevented the mythology of the concept. The social suspicion is well-founded that that block, the limit before the absolute, would be one with the privation of labor, which really does hold human beings in the same bane, which Kant transfigured into

philosophy. The imprisonment in immanence to which he, as honestly as brutally, damns the Spirit, is that in self-preservation, as it is imposed upon human beings in a society, which conserves nothing but the denial which it would no longer need. If the beetle-like natural-historical care [Sorge] were once broken through, then the position of consciousness towards the truth would be transformed. Its current one is dictated by the objectivity, which constrains them in their condition. If the Kantian doctrine of the block was a piece of social appearance [Scheins], then it is nevertheless just as firmly grounded, as the factual rule of the appearance [Schein] over human beings. The separation of sensibility and understanding, the nerve of the argument for the block, is for its part a social product; sensibility is designated by means of the chorismos as the victim of understanding, because the arrangement of the world, in spite of all institutions to the contrary, does not satisfy it. With its social condition, the division would in all likelihood be allowed to disappear one day, while the idealists are ideologues, because they glorify the reconciliation in the midst of what is unreconciled as achieved or ascribe it to the totality of what is unreconciled. Their efforts to explicate the Spirit as the unity of itself with what is non-identical to it, were as consistent as in vain. Such self-reflection overtakes the thesis of the primacy of practical reason, which reaches from Kant via the idealists straightaway to Marx. The dialectic of praxis would also demand: the abolition of praxis, of production for production's sake, of the universal cover of a false one. That is the materialistic basis for the traits, which rebel in negative dialectics against the official doctrinal concept of materialism. The moment of independence, of irreducibility in the Spirit may very likely concord with the preponderance [Vorrang] of the object. Where the Spirit becomes autonomous here and now, as soon as it names the fetters in which it ends up, by putting others into fetters, it, and not the entangled praxis, anticipates freedom. The idealists made a heaven of the Spirit, but woe betide whoever had one.

8

Mundus Intelligibilis 382-386

The construction of the block faces opposite in Kant to the positive one of metaphysics in the Practical Reason. He was by no means silent about what is despairing in it: "Unless meanwhile a transcendental property of freedom is added in, in order to begin transformations of the world, then this property would nonetheless have to be at the very least only outside of the world (though it always remains a bold presumption, to assume an object outside of the summation of all possible intuitions, which cannot be given to any possible perception)".² The parenthesis of the "bold presumption" registers Kant's skepticism about his own mundus intelligibilis [Latin: intelligible world]. That formulation from the footnote to the antithesis of the Third Antinomy comes quite close to atheism. What was later zealously demanded, is called here theoretical presumption; Kant's desperate fear of imagining that the postulate would be an existential judgement, is strenuously evaded. According to the passage, what ought to be able to be thought as an object of possible intuition, at the very least, is what must simultaneously be thought as something removed from every such intuition. Reason would have to capitulate to the contradiction, be it only for prescribing itself borders through hubris, irrationalistically delimiting its own realm of validity, without being objectively tied, as reason, to those borders. But if intuition too was incorporated into infinite reason, as in the idealists and

also the neo-Kantians, then transcendence would be virtually cashiered by the immanence of the Spirit. – What Kant briefly hints at with respect to freedom, would apply first and foremost to God and immortality. For these words do not relate to any pure possibility of conduct, but are, according to their own concept, postulates of an existent, however stylized. This latter requires a “matter” and would depend in Kant completely on that intuition, whose possibility he excludes from the transcendental ideas. The pathos of what is intelligible to Kant is the complement of the difficulty of assuring itself of anything, even if it were only in the medium of the self-sufficient thought, which the word intelligible designates. It may not name anything real. The movement of the Critique of Practical Reason meanwhile proceeds towards a positivity of the mundus intelligibilis [Latin: intelligible world], which was not envisioned in Kant’s intention. As soon as the ought-to-be [Seinsollende], emphatically separated from the existent, is exemplified as the realm of its own essence and endowed with absolute authority, it takes on through the procedure, be it ever so involuntarily, the character of a second existence. The thought that does not think anything, is none at all. Ideas, the content of metaphysics, may no more be graphically clear than mirages; otherwise they would be robbed of every objectivity. What is intelligible would be swallowed up by exactly that subject, which the intelligible sphere is supposed to transcend. A century after Kant the flattening of the intelligible into the imaginary became the cardinal sin of neo-Romanticism and the Jugendstil, and of their tailor-made philosophy, the phenomenological one. The concept of the intelligible is neither one of something real nor one of something imaginary. Rather aporetic. Nothing on earth and nothing in the empty heavens is to be saved, by defending it. The “yes but” retort to the critical argument, which does not wish something to be torn away from it, already has the form of the stubbornly insistent existent, of the clinging, irreconcilable with the idea of salvation, in which the cramp of such prolonged self-preservation would relax. Nothing can be saved untransformed, nothing, which has not made its way through the door of its death. If salvation is the innermost impulse of every Spirit, then is there no hope except that of unreserved abandonment: of what is to be rescued as well as of the Spirit, which hopes. The gestus of hope is that which holds onto nothing of what the subject itself wishes to hold onto, by which the latter promises itself, that it would endure. The intelligible, in the spirit of Kant’s setting of boundaries no less than that of the Hegelian method, would be to go beyond these, to think solely negatively. Paradoxically, the intelligible sphere envisaged by Kant would be once more “appearance” [Erscheinung]: what returns to that which is hidden from the finite Spirit, what it is compelled to think and by virtue of its own finitude deforms. The concept of the intelligible is the self-negation of the finite Spirit. What merely is becomes, in the Spirit, aware of its defect; the farewell from the existence obdurate in itself is the origin of that in the Spirit, which separates it from the principle in it, which exploits nature. This turn of phrase wishes, that not even it itself would turn into the existent: otherwise the monotony would repeat itself endlessly. What is hostile to life in the Spirit would be nothing but heinous, if it did not culminate in its self-reflection. The asceticism which it demands from others is false, good its own: in its self-negation it goes beyond itself; this was not so alien to the later Kantian Metaphysics of Morals, as one might expect. In order to be the Spirit, it must know that it does not exhaust itself in what it reaches; nor in the finitude, which it resembles. That is why it thinks what would be beyond it. Such metaphysical experience inspired Kant’s philosophy, once it is broken out of the mythical

armor [Panzer] of the method. The consideration, as to whether metaphysics would be at all still possible, must reflect the negation of what is finite, which the finite demands. Its enigma animates the word intelligible. Its conception is not entirely unmotivated thanks to that moment of independence, which the Spirit lost through its absolutization and which this latter obtains for its part as what is not identical with the existent, as soon as the non-identical is insisted upon, that not everything existent is evaporated in the Spirit. The Spirit participates, in all its mediations, in existence, which substituted for its alleged transcendental purity. It is in the moment of transcendental objectivity in it, which can be no more split off than ontologized, that the possibility of metaphysics has its inconspicuous locale. The concept of the intelligible realm would be that of something which is not and yet is not only not. In keeping with the rules of the sphere, which negate themselves in the intelligible one, these would have to be unresistingly rejected as imaginary. Nowhere else is truth so fragile as here. It can degenerate into a hypostasis of something thought up for no reason at all, in which the thought imagines to possess what is lost; the effort, to comprehend it, is easily confused in turn with the existent. The thought is nugatory which confuses what is thought with what is real, in the false conclusion, demolished by Kant, of the ontological proof of God. The mistaken conclusion is a result however of the immediate elevation of negativity, of the critique of the merely existent, into something positive, as if the insufficiency of that which is, would guarantee, that what is, would be rid of that insufficiency. Even in extremity the negation of the negation is no positivity. Kant called the transcendental dialectic a logic of appearance [Schein]: the doctrine of the contradictions, in which every treatment of the transcendental as something positively cognizable would inevitably entangle itself. His verdict is not rendered obsolete by Hegel's effort to vindicate the logic of the appearance [Schein] as that of the truth. But the reflection does not break off with the verdict on appearance [Schein]. Become conscious of itself, it is no longer the old one. What is said by finite beings about transcendence, is the latter's appearance [Schein], however, as Kant well knew, a necessary one. That is why the salvation of appearance [Schein], the object of aesthetics, has its incomparable metaphysical relevance.

9

Neutralization 386-391

In Anglo-Saxon countries Kant is often euphemistically called an agnostic. As little of the wealth of his philosophy this leaves, the horrid simplification is not completely nonsensical. The antinomic structure of the Kantian doctrine, which survives the dissolution of the antinomies, can be crudely translated into the injunction upon thinking, to refrain from idle questions. It excessively increases the vulgar form of bourgeois skepticism, whose solidity takes seriously only that which is held safely in hand. Kant was not entirely free of such a mentality. That in the categorical imperative and already in the ideas of the Critique of Pure Reason, he adds in that denigrated sublimity with raised forefinger, a bonus, which the bourgeoisie is as loathe to dispense with as its Sunday, the parody of freedom from labor – this surely reinforced Kant's authority in Germany, far beyond the effect of the thoughts themselves. The moment of non-committal [unverbindlicher] conciliation in rigorism fits well with the tendency towards the neutralization of everything intellectual in décor, which after the victory of the revolution or, where this did not occur, through the imperceptible bourgeoisification which ended up

prevailing, conquered the entire scenery of the Spirit and also the theorems which bourgeois emancipation previously employed as a weapon. Since the interests of the victorious class no longer needed them, they became, as Spengler astutely enough noted in Rousseau, uninteresting in a double sense. The function of the Spirit is subordinated in society, although the latter ideologically praises the former. The Kantian *non liquet* [Latin: not proven] contributed to the transformation of critique of the religions allied to feudalism into that indifference, which donned a veil of humanity under the name of tolerance. The Spirit, as metaphysics no less than as art, neutralizes itself the more that what society is proud of as its culture, loses any relation to possible praxis. In the Kantian metaphysical ideas this latter was still unmistakable. With them bourgeois society wanted to escape its own restricted principle, to sublimate itself, as it were. Such a Spirit becomes unacceptable and culture into a compromise between its bourgeois utilizable form and, after modern German nomenclature, what is insupportable in it, which it projects into the unattainable distance. The material circumstances render an additional service. Under the compulsion to expanded investment, capital becomes master of the Spirit, whose objectifications are by virtue of their own and unavoidable hypostatization spurred to turn the latter into property, into commodities. The satisfaction of aesthetics, devoid of interest, transfigures the Spirit and debases it, in that it is satisfied to consider, to admire, in the end to blindly and disconnectedly revere everything which was once created and thought there, regardless of its truth-content. With objective mockery, the increasing commodity character aestheticizes culture for the sake of utility. Philosophy turns into the manifestation of the Spirit as a showpiece. What Bernard Groethuysen traced back in religion to the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries: that the devil is no longer to be feared and God is no longer to be hoped for, expands beyond metaphysics, in which the recollection of God and the devil lives on, even where it critically reflects on that fear and hope. What disappears, is what ought to be most urgent to human beings in a highly unideological sense; objectively it has become problematic; subjectively the social web and the permanent overtaxing through the pressure to conform grants them neither the time nor the power any longer to think about it. The questions are not solved, not even their insolubility is referred to. They are forgotten, and where they are talked about, they are lulled only that much deeper into their bad sleep. Goethe's fatal dictum, that Eckermann need not read Kant, because his philosophy has had its effect, has crossed over into the general consciousness, has triumphed in the socialization of metaphysical indifference.

The indifference of the consciousness towards metaphysical questions, which are by no means resolved through satisfaction in this world, is by no means a matter of indifference to metaphysics itself. Hidden therein is a horror, which, if human beings did not repress it, would take their breath away. One could be led to anthropological speculations, as to whether the developmental-historical recoil, which endowed the human species with the open consciousness and thereby that of death, contradicts a nevertheless ongoing animal constitution, which does not permit it to bear that consciousness. The possibility of the continuation of life would entail the price of a restriction of consciousness, which protects it from what it nevertheless is itself, the consciousness of death. Inconsolable the perspective, that the narrow provincialism of all ideologies could be traced back biologically, as it were, to a necessity of self-preservation and would by no means disappear with a right arrangement of society, though indeed it is

only in the right society that the possibility of the right life would arise. The present one still spreads lies about how death is not to be feared, and sabotages the reflection on this. Schopenhauer's pessimism took notice, of how little human beings *media in vita* [Latin: in the midst of life] are wont to concern themselves with death.*3* He read this indifference, just like Heidegger a hundred years later, as the essence of human beings, instead of reading human beings as products of history. The lack of metaphysical meaning turns into a metaphysicum [Latin: something metaphysical] for both. By this at any rate the depths are to be measured, which neutralization, an existential in bourgeois consciousness, plumbs. This depth awakens the doubt as to whether things, as a romantic tradition which survived all romanticism has drilled into the Spirit, were all that different in the times allegedly overflowing with metaphysics, which the young Lukacs called the ones of plenitude [sinnerfuellen]. The tradition drags along a paralogism. The enclosure of cultures, the collective committalness [Verbindlichkeit] of metaphysical intuitions, their power over life, does not guarantee their truth. Rather the possibility of metaphysical experience is the sibling of that of freedom, and only the developed subject, which has torn the bonds praised as holy, is capable of it. The socially sanctioned, dull-witted intuition of allegedly blissful times is by contrast related to the naïve positivistic belief in facts. The ego must be historically strengthened, in order to conceive of the immediacy of the reality principle beyond the idea of what is more than the existent. The social order, which shrinks itself down into its own meaning, also seals itself off against the possibility beyond the social order. Metaphysics is in contrast to theology not merely, as per positivistic doctrine, a historically later stage, not only the secularization of theology into the concept. It preserves theology in its critique of it, by uncovering to human beings the possibility of what theology imposed on them and thereby violated. The forces exploded the cosmos of the spirit, which bound them; the latter received its just deserts. The autonomous Beethoven is more metaphysical than Bach's *ordo* [Latin: social order]; therefore truer. Subjectively emancipated and metaphysical experience converge in humanity. Every expression of hope, which emanates from great works of art more powerfully than the theological texts handed down by tradition even in the era when the former are falling silent, is configured with that of human beings; nowhere more unambiguously than in the moment of Beethoven. What signifies that not everything is in vain, is the self-reflection of nature in subjects, through the sympathy with that which is human; solely in the experience of its own natural base [Naturhaftigkeit] does the genius escape from nature. It is to Kant's lasting honor that he, like no other philosopher, registered the constellation of the human and the transcendental in the doctrine of the intelligible. Before humanity opened its eyes, human beings exhausted themselves under the objective pressure of life-and-death necessity in the disgrace of their neighbors, and the life-immanence of meaning is the cover of their prejudice. Ever since something like organized society arose at large, as a solidly buttressed, autarkic context, the pressure to leave it was only weak. The child which was not already prepared, could not help but be struck by how impoverished and thin the section in its Protestant song-book is, which bears the title "The Last Things", compared with all the practice drills of what the believers are to believe and how they are to behave. The long-standing suspicion, that magic and superstition continue to flourish in religion, has as its flip side, that the core of the positive religions, the hope of the beyond, was scarcely ever so important as its concept demanded. Metaphysical speculation unites with the one of the philosophy of

history: it has faith in the possibility of a right consciousness even of those last things solely in a future without life-and-death necessity. The curse of the latter is, that they do not drive beyond mere existence so much as disguise it, solidifying it as a metaphysical authority. The “all is vanity”, with which the great theologians since Solomon bethought immanence, is too abstract to lead beyond immanence. Where human beings are assured of the indifference of their existence, they raise no objections; as long as they do not change their position towards existence, any other one is idle for them. Whoever accuses the existent of nullity without distinction and without a perspective of what is possible, furnishes assistance to the dull bustle. The animality towards which such total praxis tends is worse than the first: it becomes itself a principle. The Capucin sermon of the vanity of immanence secretly liquidates the transcendence as well, which was once fed from experiences in immanence. Neutralization however, deeply complicit with that indifference, has still survived the catastrophes, which according to the fanfares of the apologists are supposed to have thrown back human beings onto what radically concerns them. For the fundamental constitution of society has not changed. It damns the theology and metaphysics resurrected out of necessity, in spite of many brave Protestant attempts to resist, to the passport of the mindset of conformity. No rebellion of mere consciousness leads beyond this. Even in the consciousness of subjects, bourgeois society would rather choose total destruction, its objective potential, rather than bringing itself to reflections which might threaten its foundations. The metaphysical interests of human beings require the undiminished perception of their material ones. As long as they are veiled from them, they live under the veil of Maya. Only when, what is, is changed, is that, which is, not everything.

10

Only an Allegory 391-394

In a commentary published decades after his composition of George's Rapture, Arnold Schoenberg praised the poem as the prophetic anticipation of the feelings of astronauts. By naively reducing one of his most significant works to the level of “science fiction” [in English], he involuntarily acted out of the privation of metaphysics. Doubtless the material content is in the neo-Romantic poem, the face of someone who steps on “other planets”, the allegory of something internalized, of ecstasy and elevation reminiscent of Maximinus. The ecstasy is not any in space, were it even in the cosmic experience, although it must borrow its images from this latter. But exactly this betrays the objective ground of the far too earthly exegesis. To take the promise of theology literally would be as barbaric as this latter. Only historically accumulated respect inhibits the consciousness of that. And the poetic elevation is purloined from the theological realm like the symbolic language of that cycle generally. Religion à la lettre [French: literally] would indeed resemble “science fiction” [in English]; space travel would lead into the real promised heaven. The theologians could not refrain from childish reflections on the consequences of rocket travel for their Christology, while conversely the infantilism of the interest in rocket travel brings the latent one of tidings of salvation to light. If these were however purified of all material content, utterly sublimated, then they would encounter the most excruciating embarrassment at having to say, what they stand for. If every symbol only symbolizes another one, something once more conceptual, then its core remains empty and thereby the religion. This is the antinomy of theological consciousness today. The

Tolstoyan – anachronistic – Ur-Christianity would get along with it the easiest, the successor Christi here and now without any reflection, with closed eyes. Something of the antinomy is already hidden in the construction of Faust. With the verse, “I hear the tidings indeed, but I lack the faith” he interprets his own depth of emotions, which preserves him from suicide, as the return of deceptive consoling traditions from childhood. Nevertheless he ascends into the Marianist heaven. The poem does not decide, as to whether its progressive course would refute the skepticism of the mature thinker or whether its last word would be once more a symbol – “only an allegory” – and transcendence secularized, in well-nigh Hegelian fashion, into the image of the whole of fulfilled immanence. Whoever makes transcendence thingly-solid [dingfest], can be justifiably charged, as by Karl Kraus, with lack of imagination, hostility to the intellect, and in these the betrayal of transcendence. If by contrast the possibility of redemption in the existent, be it ever so distant and weak, is totally cut off, then the Spirit would turn into an illusion, ultimately deifying the finite, conditioned, merely existent subject as the carrier of the Spirit. This paradox of what is transcendent had an answer in Rimbaud’s vision of a humanity emancipated from oppression as the true deity. Later the Old-Kantian Mynona undisguisedly mythologized the subject and rendered idealism manifest as hubris. With these sorts of speculative consequences, “science fiction” and rocketry easily came to an understanding. If in fact the earth was the only heavenly body inhabited by rational beings, then that would be a metaphysicum [Latin: something metaphysical], whose idiocy would denounce metaphysics; in the end human beings would really be the gods, only under the bane, which prevents them from know it – and what gods! – indeed without domination over the cosmos, whereby such speculations are fortunately once again rendered void.

All metaphysical ones however are pushed fatally into the apochryphal. The ideological untruth in the conception of transcendence is the separation of body and soul, reflex of the division of labor. It leads to the idolization of the *res cogitans* [Latin: thinking substance] as the principle which exploits nature, and to the material denial, which would dissolve in the concept of a transcendence beyond the context of guilt. Hope however clings, as in Mignon’s song, to the transfigured body. Metaphysics does not want to hear anything of this, does not want to demean itself with what is material. That is why it crosses the line to the inferior belief in spirits. There is no difference between the hypostasis of a noncorporeal and nevertheless individualized Spirit – for what indeed would theology have left in its hands without it – and the fraudulent assertion of existing purely spiritual beings through spiritism, than the historical dignity, which garbs the concept of the Spirit. Social success, social power turns through such dignity into the criterion of metaphysical truth. Spiritualism, in German the doctrine of the Spirit as the individual-substantial principle, is, without its final letters, the English word for spiritism. The equivocation rests upon the epistemological privation, which once motivated the idealists to go beyond the analysis of the individual consciousness towards the construction of a transcendental or absolute one. Individual consciousness is a piece of the spatio-temporal world, without any prerogative over this and not to be conceived of as detached from the world of bodies according to a human faculty. The idealistic construction however, which intends to eliminate the earthly remains, becomes devoid of essence, as soon as it totally stamps out that egoity, which was the model for the concept of the Spirit. Hence the assumption of an insensible egoity, which is nevertheless

supposed to manifest itself as existence, contrary to its own determination, in space and time. According to the current state of cosmology, heaven and hell as existents in space are simple archaisms. This would relegate immortality to that of the spirits, lending it something ghostly and unreal, which mocks its own concept. The Christian dogmatics, which thought of the awakening of souls as coinciding with the resurrection of the flesh, was metaphysically more consistent – more enlightened, if you will – than speculative metaphysics; just as hope means corporeal resurrection and knows through its intellectualization that it has been robbed of what is best. With that meanwhile the unreasonable demands of metaphysical speculation increase unbearably. Cognition weighs heavily on the side of absolute mortality, which is intolerable to it, before which it turns into something absolutely indifferent. This is what the idea of truth drives towards, the highest among the metaphysical ones. Whoever believes in God, can therefore not believe in Him. The possibility, for which the divine name stands, is held fast by those who do not believe. If the ban on the graven image was at one time extended to the naming of the Name, then it has itself become suspected of superstition in this form. It has exacerbated itself: to even think of hope, violates it and works against it. So deeply is history sunk into the metaphysical truth, which denies history – progressing demythologization – in vain. This last however devours itself like the mythical gods were wont to do with their children. By leaving nothing left over except the merely existent, they recoil into mythos. For it is nothing less than the closed context of immanence, of what is. Today metaphysics has contracted into this contradiction. The thinking which attempts to remove it, is threatened with untruth here and there.

11

Appearance [Schein] of the Other 394-397

The ontological proof of God is, in spite of the Kantian critique and, as it were, absorbing this latter into itself, resurrected in the Hegelian dialectic. However in vain. In that Hegel consistently dissolves the non-identical into pure identity, the concept becomes the guarantor of what is not conceptual, transcendence is captured by the immanence of the Spirit and is so much as abolished into its totality. The more transcendence is subsequently disassembled through enlightenment in the world and in the Spirit, the more it turns into something hidden, as if it had concentrated itself into an extreme point beyond all mediations. To this extent the anti-historical theology of the utterly divergent has its historical index. The question of metaphysics sharpens itself, as to whether this wholly thin, abstract, indeterminate thing would be its ultimate and already lost defensive position, or whether metaphysics survives alone in what is slightest and shabbiest, in the state of complete inconspicuousness [Unscheinbarkeit], which brings the high-handed reason, which takes care of business without resistance and without reflection, to reason. The thesis of positivism is that of the nullity of metaphysics, even that which fled into profanity. Even the idea of truth is sacrificed, for whose sake positivism was initiated. To have established this, is Wittgenstein's achievement, however well, incidentally, his vow of silence fits with the falsely resurrected, dogmatic metaphysics, no longer to be distinguished from the wordlessly ecstatic naïve faith in being. What would not be affected by demythologization, without apologetically making itself available, would be no argument – whose sphere is the antinomical pure and simple – but the experience, that

the thought, which does not cut off its own head, culminates in transcendence, down to the idea of a constitution of the world in which not only existent suffering would be abolished, but would revoke even the sort which is irrevocably past. The convergence of all thoughts in the concept of something, which would be different from the unspeakable existent, the world, is not the same as the infinitesimal principle with which Leibniz and Kant had thought to render the idea of transcendence commensurable to a science, whose own fallibility, the confusion of the exploitation of nature and being-in-itself, motivates the correcting experience of convergence. The world is worse than hell and better. Worse, because not even the nihilism of that absolute would be, as which it ultimately still appears in Schopenhauerian Nirvana as reconcilable. The inescapably closed context of immanence denies even that meaning, which the Indian philosopheme of the world as the dream of an evil demon glimpses in such; Schopenhauer thinks mistakenly, because he declares the law, which preserves immanence in its own bane, unmediated to that which is essential, which is barred from immanence and could not at all be conceived other than as transcendent. The world is better, because the absolute conclusiveness which Schopenhauer credits to the course of the world is borrowed for its part from the idealistic system, pure identity-principle and as deceptive as any. The disturbed and damaged course of the world is, as in Kafka, also incommensurable with the sense of its own sheer senselessness and blindness, not to be stringently construed according to their principle. It conflicts with the attempt of the despairing consciousness, to posit despair as an absolute. The course of the world is not completely conclusive, also not absolute despair; this latter is on the contrary its conclusiveness. As untenable as the traces of the Other are in it; as much as all happiness is distorted by its revocability, the existent is nevertheless shot through, in the gaps which stamp identity as a lie, with the promises, constantly broken again, of that Other. Every happiness is a fragment of the total happiness, which human beings are denied and which they deny themselves. Convergence, the humanly promised Other of history, points unswervingly to what ontology illegitimately resettles before history or exempts from it. The concept is not real, as the ontological proof would have it, but it could not be thought, if something in the thing did not press towards it. Kraus, who, armored against every tangible, imaginatively unimaginative assertion of transcendence, preferred to read this latter longingly rather than cancel it out, was no romantic liberal metaphorist. Though metaphysics is not to be resurrected – the concept of resurrection belongs to creatures, to not something created, and is in intellectual forms the index of its untruth – but perhaps it only originates with the realization of what is thought in its sign. Art anticipates something of this. Nietzsche's work overflows with invective against metaphysics. But no formulation describes the latter more faithfully than that of Zarathustra: pure fool, pure poet. The thinking artist understood the unthought art. The thought, which does not capitulate before the miserably ontic, turns by the latter's criteria into nothing, truth into untruth, philosophy into folly. Nevertheless it cannot abdicate, lest stupidity triumph in realized unreason. *Aux sots je préfère les fous* [French: To pigs, I prefer fools]. Folly is truth in the form, with which human beings are stricken, as soon as they do not, in the midst of the untrue, let go of truth. Even in its highest achievements art is appearance [Schein]; the appearance [Schein], however, what is irresistible in it, it receives from what does not appear [Scheinlosen]. By refraining from judgement, it says, especially the ones scorned as nihilistic, that everything would not be just nothing. Otherwise, what

always is, would be pale, colorless, indifferent. There is no light on human beings and things, in which transcendence is not reflected. Inextinguishable, the resistance against the fungible world of exchange in that of the eye, which does not want the colors of the world to be destroyed. In appearance [Schein] is the promise of what does not appear [Scheinlose].

12

Self-reflection of Dialectics 397-400

At question is, whether metaphysics, as the knowledge of the absolute, would at all be possible without the construction of absolute knowledge, without that idealism, which lends its title to the last chapter of the Hegelian Phenomenology. Doesn't it say, that whoever deals with the absolute, would necessarily be the thinking organ, capable of doing this, precisely thereby itself the absolute; would not dialectics, on the other hand, in the transition to a metaphysics, which is not simply the same as dialectics, violate its own strict concept of negativity? Dialectics, the epitome of negative knowledge, would like none other beside it; even as the negative kind, it drags along with itself the commandment of exclusivity from the positive kind, from the system. It would have to negate, according to such reasoning, non-dialectical consciousness as finite and fallible. In all its historical forms it has refused to step out of it. It mediated conceptually, whether willed or no, between the unconditional and the finite spirit; this made theology intermittently time and again into its enemy. Although it thinks the absolute, the latter remains, as something mediated by the former, in thrall to conditioned thought. If the Hegelian absolute was the secularization of the deity, then nevertheless precisely that of its secularization; as the totality of the Spirit that absolute remained enchained to its finite human model. If thought however in the undiminished consciousness of this reaches, gropingly, beyond anything of this sort, in that it names the Other as something utterly incommensurable to it, which it nevertheless thinks, then it will find shelter nowhere else than in the dogmatic tradition. Thinking is in such thoughts alien to its content, unreconciled, and newly condemned to two sorts of truth, which would be incompatible with the idea of the true. Metaphysics depends upon whether one can get out of this aporia without underhanded trickery. To do this, dialectics, at once the imprint of the universal context of mystification and its critique, must turn in one last movement against itself. The critique of everything particular, which posits itself absolutely, is that of the shadow of absoluteness over the critique itself, of the fact that it, too, against its tendency, must remain in the medium of the concept. It destroys the identity-claim, by honoring it in its testing. That is why it only reaches so far as this latter. The latter stamps the former as the magic circle with the appearance [Schein] of absolute knowledge. It is up to its self-reflection to cancel it out, exactly therein the negation of the negation, which does not cross over into a position. Dialectics is the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion, not something already escaped from this latter. To break out of the latter from inside, is objectively its goal. The power to break out grows in it from the context of immanence; what would apply to it, once more, is Hegel's dictum, that dialectics would absorb the power of the opponent, turning it against the latter; not only in what is dialectically individual but in the end in the whole. It grasps, with the means of logic, this latter's character of compulsion, hoping that it would yield. The absolute however, as it hovers before metaphysics, would be the non-identical, which

would only emerge until after the identity-compulsion dissolved. Without the identity-thesis dialectics is not the whole; but therefore also no cardinal sin, to leave it in a dialectical step. It lies in the determination of negative dialectics, that it does not come to rest within itself, as if it were total; that is its form of hope. Kant indicated something of this in the doctrine of the transcendental thing in itself beyond the mechanism of identification. However stringent the critique of that doctrine by his successors, they regressively reinforced the bane that much more, just like the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie as a whole: they hypostasized the compulsion itself as the absolute. To be sure Kant, for his part, in the determination of the thing in itself as that of an intelligible essence, conceived of transcendence as the non-identical, but equated it with the absolute subject, bowing nonetheless to the identity-principle. The process of cognition, which is supposed to approach the transcendental thing asymptotically, slides it ahead of itself, as if it were, and removes it from consciousness. The identifications of the absolute transpose it onto the human beings, from whom the identity-principle derives; they are, as they at times confess and as the enlightenment can strikingly demonstrate to them every time, anthropomorphisms. That is why the absolute, which the Spirit approaches, melts away before it: its approach is a mirage. However the successful elimination of every anthropomorphism, with which the context of delusion would be removed, very likely coincides in the end with this latter, with absolute identity. To deny the secret by identification, by constantly tearing more chunks out of it, does not solve it. Rather, as though in play, it stamps the control of nature as a lie, by means of the memento of the powerlessness of its power. Enlightenment leaves as good as nothing left of metaphysical truth-content, *presque rien* [French: almost nothing] after a modern musical term. What shrinks back becomes ever smaller, just as Goethe portrayed in the parable of the little box of the New Melusine, which names an extremity; ever more inconspicuous [unscheinbarer]; this is the reason that, in the critique of cognition as much as in the philosophy of history, metaphysics migrates into micrology. This latter is the place of metaphysics as the refuge from what is total. Nothing absolute is to be expressed otherwise than in the subject-matter and categories of immanence, while nevertheless this latter is not to be deified either in its conditionality or as its total summation. Metaphysics is, according to its own concept, not possible as a deductive context of judgements over the existent. Just as little can it be thought according to the model of that which is absolutely divergent, which fearsomely mocks thinking. Consequently it would be possible solely as the legible constellation of the existent. From this latter it would receive its material, without which it would not be, would not however transfigure the existence of its elements, but would bring them instead into a configuration, in which the elements assemble into a script. To that end it must be good at wishing. That the wish would be a bad father to the thought, has been since Xenophanes one of the general theses of the European enlightenment, and still applies undiminished against the ontological attempts at restoration. But thinking, itself a conduct, contains the need – at first the life-and-death necessity – in itself. One thinks out of need, even where “wishful thinking” [in English] is dismissed. The motor of the need is that of the effort, which thinking involves as activity. The object of critique is therefore not the need in thinking but the relationship between both. The need in thinking wishes, however, that there would be thinking. It demands its negation through thinking, it must disappear into thinking, if it is really supposed to be satisfied, and in this negation it lives on,

representing in the innermost cells of thought, what is not the same as the latter. The smallest innerworldly markings would be relevant to the absolute, for the micrological glance demolishes the shells of that which is helplessly compartmentalized according to the measure of its subsuming master concept and explodes its identity, the deception, that it would be merely an exemplar. Such thinking is solidaristic with metaphysics in the moment of the latter's fall.

Footnotes

1 [Footnote pg 375]

“A dialectical thesis of pure reason must accordingly have this distinction from all sophistical suppositions in itself, that it does not concern an arbitrary question, which is drawn up only in a certain random intent, but one which every human reason must necessarily run into in its course; and second, that it along with its opposite would not merely lead to an artificial appearance [Schein], which, once perceived, promptly disappears, but a natural and unavoidable appearance [Schein], which itself, if one is no longer fooled by it, still continues to deceive, though does not defraud, and can thus indeed be rendered harmless, but never cancelled out.” (Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, WW III, Academy Edition, pg 290)

2 [Footnote pg 375]

“Normally... a great store is set on the limits of thought, of reason etc., and it is asserted, there is no going beyond the limits. In this assertion however lies the lack of consciousness, that when something is itself determined as a limit, it has already been surpassed. For a determinacy, the border, is only determined as a limit, in opposition to its Other at large, as against what it does not restrict; the Other of a limit is precisely the surpassing [Hinaus] of the same.” (Hegel, WW 4, pg 153)

3 [Footnote pg 388]

“The human being alone carries the certainty of its death along with itself in abstract concepts: these latter can nevertheless, which is quite strange, frighten it only at particular moments, where an occasion concretizes it in its imagination. Against the mighty voice of nature the reflection can do little. Even in itself, as in animals, which do not think, an enduring condition prevails as that assurance, which originates out of the innermost consciousness, that it is itself nature, the world, by virtue of which no human being is noticeably troubled by the thought of certain and never distant death, but each lives there, as if they would live eternally; which goes so far as to say, that none would have an actual living conviction of the certainty of their death, since otherwise there could be no great difference between their mood and that of the condemned criminal; otherwise each would indeed cognize that certainty in abstracto [Latin: abstractly] and theoretically, but would put it aside, as other theoretical truths, which are not applicable to praxis, without accepting it in any fashion in its living consciousness.” (Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, SWW, ed. Frauenstaedt, II. Volume, Leipzig 1888, pg 332).