

CRITICAL THEORY

SELECTED ESSAYS

MAX HORKHEIMER



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TRANSLATED BY
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TRADITIONAL AND CRITICAL THEORY

WHAT is "theory"? The question seems a rather easy one for contemporary science. Theory for most researchers is the sum-total of propositions about a subject, the propositions being so linked with each other that a few are basic and the rest derive from these. The smaller the number of primary principles in comparison with the derivations, the more perfect the theory. The real validity of the theory depends on the derived propositions being consonant with the actual facts. If experience and theory contradict each other, one of the two must be reexamined. Either the scientist has failed to observe correctly or something is wrong with the principles of the theory. In relation to facts, therefore, a theory always remains a hypothesis. One must be ready to change it if its weaknesses begin to show as one works through the material. Theory is stored-up knowledge, put in a form that makes it useful for the closest possible description of facts. Poincaré compares science to a library that must ceaselessly expand. Experimental physics is the librarian who takes care of acquisitions, that is, enriches knowledge by supplying new material. Mathematical physics—the theory of natural science in the strictest sense—keeps the catalogue; without the catalogue one would have no access to the library's rich contents. "That is the rôle of mathematical physics. It must direct generalisation, so as to increase what I have called just now the output of science."¹ The general goal of all theory is a universal systematic science, not limited to any particular sub-

1. Henri Poincaré, *Science and Hypothesis*, tr. by W[illiam] J[ohn] G[reenstreet] (London: Walter Scott, 1905), p. 145.

ject matter but embracing all possible objects. The division of sciences is being broken down by deriving the principles for special areas from the same basic premises. The same conceptual apparatus which was elaborated for the analysis of inanimate nature is serving to classify animate nature as well, and anyone who has once mastered the use of it, that is, the rules for derivation, the symbols, the process of comparing derived propositions with observable fact, can use it at any time. But we are still rather far from such an ideal situation.

Such, in its broad lines, is the widely accepted idea of what theory is. Its origins supposedly coincide with the beginnings of modern philosophy. The third maxim in Descartes' scientific method is the decision

to carry on my reflections in due order, commencing with objects that were the most simple and easy to understand, in order to rise little by little, or by degrees, to knowledge of the most complex, assuming an order, even if a fictitious one, among those which do not follow a natural sequence relative to one another.

The derivation as usually practiced in mathematics is to be applied to all science. The order in the world is captured by a deductive chain of thought.

Those long chains of deductive reasoning, simple and easy as they are, of which geometers make use in order to arrive at the most difficult demonstrations, had caused me to imagine that all those things which fall under the cognizance of men might very likely be mutually related in the same fashion; and that, provided only that we abstain from receiving anything as true which is not so, and always retain the order which is necessary in order to deduce the one conclusion from the other, there can be nothing so remote that we cannot reach to it, nor so recondite that we cannot discover it.²

Depending on the logician's own general philosophical outlook, the most universal propositions from which the deduction begins are themselves regarded as experiential judgments, as

2. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, tr. by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931²), volume 1, p. 92.

inductions (as with John Stuart Mill), as evident insights (as in rationalist and phenomenological schools), or as arbitrary postulates (as in the modern axiomatic approach). In the most advanced logic of the present time, as represented by Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, theory is defined "as an enclosed system of propositions for a science as a whole."³ Theory in the fullest sense is "a systematically linked set of propositions, taking the form of a systematically unified deduction."⁴ Science is "a certain totality of propositions . . . , emerging in one or other manner from theoretical work, in the systematic order of which propositions a certain totality of objects acquires definition."⁵ The basic requirement which any theoretical system must satisfy is that all the parts should intermesh thoroughly and without friction. Harmony, which includes lack of contradictions, and the absence of superfluous, purely dogmatic elements which have no influence on the observable phenomena, are necessary conditions, according to Weyl.⁶

In so far as this traditional conception of theory shows a tendency, it is towards a purely mathematical system of symbols. As elements of the theory, as components of the propositions and conclusions, there are ever fewer names of experiential objects and ever more numerous mathematical symbols. Even the logical operations themselves have already been so rationalized that, in large areas of natural science at least, theory formation has become a matter of mathematical construction.

The sciences of man and society have attempted to follow the lead of the natural sciences with their great successes. The difference between those schools of social science which are more oriented to the investigation of facts and those which concentrate more on principles has nothing directly to do with the concept of theory as such. The assiduous collecting of facts

3. Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik* (Halle, 1929), p. 89.

4. Husserl, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

5. Husserl, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

6. Hermann Weyl, *Philosophie der Naturwissenschaft*, in *Handbuch der Philosophie*, Part 2 (Munich-Berlin, 1927), pp. 118ff.

in all the disciplines dealing with social life, the gathering of great masses of detail in connection with problems, the empirical inquiries, through careful questionnaires and other means, which are a major part of scholarly activity, especially in the Anglo-Saxon universities since Spencer's time—all this adds up to a pattern which is, outwardly, much like the rest of life in a society dominated by industrial production techniques. Such an approach seems quite different from the formulation of abstract principles and the analysis of basic concepts by an arm-chair scholar, which are typical, for example, of one sector of German sociology. Yet these divergences do not signify a structural difference in ways of thinking. In recent periods of contemporary society the so-called human studies (*Geisteswissenschaften*) have had but a fluctuating market value and must try to imitate the more prosperous natural sciences whose practical value is beyond question.

There can be no doubt, in fact, that the various schools of sociology have an identical conception of theory and that it is the same as theory in the natural sciences. Empirically oriented sociologists have the same idea of what a fully elaborated theory should be as their theoretically oriented brethren. The former, indeed, are persuaded that in view of the complexity of social problems and the present state of science any concern with general principles must be regarded as indolent and idle. If theoretical work is to be done, it must be done with an eye unwaveringly on the facts; there can be no thought in the foreseeable future of comprehensive theoretical statements. These scholars are much enamored of the methods of exact formulation and, in particular, of mathematical procedures, which are especially congenial to the conception of theory described above. What they object to is not so much theory as such but theories spun out of their heads by men who have no personal experience of the problems of an experimental science. Distinctions like those between community and society (Tönnies), mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim), or culture and civilization (A. Weber) as basic forms of human sociality prove to be of questionable value as soon as one attempts to

apply them to concrete problems. The way that sociology must take in the present state of research is (it is argued) the laborious ascent from the description of social phenomena to detailed comparisons and only then to the formation of general concepts.

The empiricist, true to his traditions, is thus led to say that only complete inductions can supply the primary propositions for a theory and that we are still far from having made such inductions. His opponent claims the right to use other methods, less dependent on progress in data-collection, for the formation of primary categories and insights. Durkheim, for example, agrees with many basic views of the empirical school but, in dealing with principles, he opts for an abridgement of the inductive process. It is impossible, he claims, to classify social happenings on the basis of purely empirical inventories, nor can research make classification easier in the way in which it is expected to do so.

Its [induction's] role is to put into our hands points of reference to which we can refer other observations than those which have furnished us with these very points of reference. But for this purpose it must be made not from a complete inventory of all the individual characteristics but from a small number of them, carefully chosen . . . It will spare the observer many steps because it will guide him . . . We must, then, choose the most essential characteristics for our classification.⁷

Whether the primary principles are gotten by selection, by intuition, or by pure stipulation makes no difference, however, to their function in the ideal theoretical system. For the scientist must certainly apply his more or less general propositions, as hypotheses, to ever new facts. The phenomenologically oriented sociologist will indeed claim that once an essential law has been ascertained every particular instance will, beyond any doubt, exemplify the law. But the really hypothetical character of the essential law is manifested as soon as the question arises whether

7. Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, tr. from the eighth edition by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 80.

in a particular case we are dealing with an instance of the essence in question or of a related essence, whether we are faced with a poor example of one type or a good example of another type. There is always, on the one hand, the conceptually formulated knowledge and, on the other, the facts to be subsumed under it. Such a subsumption or establishing of a relation between the simple perception or verification of a fact and the conceptual structure of our knowing is called its theoretical explanation.

We need not enter here into the details of the various kinds of classification. It will be enough to indicate briefly how the traditional concept of theory handles the explanation of historical events. The answer emerged clearly in the controversy between Eduard Meyer and Max Weber. Meyer regarded as idle and unanswerable the question of whether, even if certain historical personages had not reached certain decisions, the wars they caused would nonetheless sooner or later have occurred. Weber tried to show that if the question were indeed idle and unanswerable, all historical explanation would become impossible. He developed a "theory of objective possibility," based on the theories of the physiologist, von Kries, and of writers in jurisprudence and national economy such as Merkel, Liefmann, and Radbruch. For Weber, the historian's explanations, like those of the expert in criminal law, rest not on the fullest possible enumeration of all pertinent circumstances but on the establishment of a connection between those elements of an event which are significant for historical continuity, and particular, determinative happenings. This connection, for example the judgment that a war resulted from the policies of a statesman who knew what he was about, logically supposes that, had such a policy not existed, some other effect would have followed. If one maintains a particular causal nexus between historical events, one is necessarily implying that had the nexus not existed, then in accordance with the rules that govern our experience another effect would have followed in the given circumstances. The rules of experience here are nothing but the formulations of our knowledge concerning economic, social, and psychologi-

cal interconnections. With the help of these we reconstruct the probable course of events, going beyond the event itself to what will serve as explanation.⁸ We are thus working with conditional propositions as applied to a given situation. If circumstances *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* are given, then event *q* must be expected; if *d* is lacking, event *r*; if *g* is added, event *s*, and so on. This kind of calculation is a logical tool of history as it is of science. It is in this fashion that theory in the traditional sense is actually elaborated.

What scientists in various fields regard as the essence of theory thus corresponds, in fact, to the immediate tasks they set for themselves. The manipulation of physical nature and of specific economic and social mechanisms demand alike the amassing of a body of knowledge such as is supplied in an ordered set of hypotheses. The technological advances of the bourgeois period are inseparably linked to this function of the pursuit of science. On the one hand, it made the facts fruitful for the kind of scientific knowledge that would have practical application in the circumstances, and, on the other, it made possible the application of knowledge already possessed. Beyond doubt, such work is a moment in the continuous transformation and development of the material foundations of that society. But the conception of theory was absolutized, as though it were grounded in the inner nature of knowledge as such or justified in some other ahistorical way, and thus it became a reified, ideological category.

As a matter of fact, the fruitfulness of newly discovered factual connections for the renewal of existent knowledge, and the application of such knowledge to the facts, do not derive from purely logical or methodological sources but can rather be understood only in the context of real social processes. When a discovery occasions the restructuring of current ideas, this is not due exclusively to logical considerations or, more par-

8. Max Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences I: A Critique of Eduard Meyer's Methodological Views," in *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and tr. by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe: Free Press, 1949), pp. 113-63.

particularly, to the contradiction between the discovery and particular elements in current views. If this were the only real issue, one could always think up further hypotheses by which one could avoid changing the theory as a whole. That new views in fact win out is due to concrete historical circumstances, even if the scientist himself may be determined to change his views only by immanent motives. Modern theoreticians of knowledge do not deny the importance of historical circumstance, even if among the most influential nonscientific factors they assign more importance to genius and accident than to social conditions.

In the seventeenth century, for example, men began to resolve the difficulties into which traditional astronomy had fallen, no longer by supplemental constructions but by adopting the Copernican system in its place. This change was not due to the logical properties alone of the Copernican theory, for example its greater simplicity. If these properties were seen as advantages, this very fact points beyond itself to the fundamental characteristics of social action at that time. That Copernicanism, hardly mentioned in the sixteenth century, should now become a revolutionary force is part of the larger historical process by which mechanistic thinking came to prevail.⁹

But the influence of the current social situation on change in scientific structures is not limited to comprehensive theories like the Copernican system. It is also true for special research problems in everyday life. Sheer logic alone will not tell us whether the discovery of new varieties in particular areas of inorganic or organic nature, whether in the chemical laboratory or in paleontological research, will be the occasion for modifying old classifications or for elaborating new ones. The theoreticians of knowledge usually rely here on a concept of theology which only in appearance is immanent to their science. Whether and how new definitions are purposefully drawn up depends in fact not only on the simplicity and consistency of the system but also, among other things, on the directions and goals of

9. A description of this development may be found in Henryk Grossmann, "Die gesellschaftlichen Grundlagen der mechanischen Philosophie und die Manufaktur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 4 (1935), 161ff.

research. These last, however, are not self-explanatory nor are they, in the last analysis, a matter of insight.

As the influence of the subject matter on the theory, so also the application of the theory to the subject matter is not only an intrascientific process but a social one as well. Bringing hypotheses to bear on facts is an activity that goes on, ultimately, not in the savant's head but in industry. Such rules as that coal-tar under certain conditions becomes colored or that nitro-glycerin, saltpeter, and other materials have great explosive force, are accumulated knowledge which is really applied to reality in the great industrial factories.

Among the various philosophical schools it is the Positivists and the Pragmatists who apparently pay most attention to the connections between theoretical work and the social life-process. These schools consider the prevision and usefulness of results to be a scientific task. But in reality this sense of practical purpose, this belief in the social value of his calling is a purely private conviction of the scholar. He may just as well believe in an independent, "suprasocial," detached knowledge as in the social importance of his expertise: such opposed interpretations do not influence his real activity in the slightest. The scholar and his science are incorporated into the apparatus of society; his achievements are a factor in the conservation and continuous renewal of the existing state of affairs, no matter what fine names he gives to what he does. His knowledge and results, it is expected, will correspond to their proper "concept," that is, they must constitute theory in the sense described above. In the social division of labor the savant's role is to integrate facts into conceptual frameworks and to keep the latter up-to-date so that he himself and all who use them may be masters of the widest possible range of facts. Experiment has the scientific role of establishing facts in such a way that they fit into theory as currently accepted. The factual material or subject matter is provided from without; science sees to its formulation in clear and comprehensible terms, so that men may be able to use the knowledge as they wish. The reception, transformation, and rationalization of factual knowledge is the scholar's special

form of spontaneity, namely theoretical activity, whether there is question of as detailed as possible an exposition of a subject as in history and the descriptive branches of other special disciplines, or of the synthesis of masses of data and the attainment of general rules as in physics. The dualism of thought and being, understanding and perception is second nature to the scientist.

The traditional idea of theory is based on scientific activity as carried on within the division of labor at a particular stage in the latter's development. It corresponds to the activity of the scholar which takes place alongside all the other activities of a society but in no immediately clear connection with them. In this view of theory, therefore, the real social function of science is not made manifest; it speaks not of what theory means in human life, but only of what it means in the isolated sphere in which for historical reasons it comes into existence. Yet as a matter of fact the life of society is the result of all the work done in the various sectors of production. Even if therefore the division of labor in the capitalist system functions but poorly, its branches, including science, do not become for that reason self-sufficient and independent. They are particular instances of the way in which society comes to grips with nature and maintains its own inherited form. They are moments in the social process of production, even if they be almost or entirely unproductive in the narrower sense. Neither the structures of industrial and agrarian production nor the separation of the so-called guiding and executory functions, services, and works, or of intellectual and manual operations are eternal or natural states of affairs. They emerge rather from the mode of production practiced in particular forms of society. The seeming self-sufficiency enjoyed by work processes whose course is supposedly determined by the very nature of the object corresponds to the seeming freedom of the economic subject in bourgeois society. The latter believe they are acting according to personal determinations, whereas in fact even in their most complicated calculations they but exemplify the working of an incalculable social mechanism.

The false consciousness of the bourgeois savant in the liberal era comes to light in very diverse philosophical systems. It found an especially significant expression at the turn of the century in the Neo-Kantianism of the Marburg school. Particular traits in the theoretical activity of the specialist are here elevated to the rank of universal categories, of instances of the world-mind, the eternal "Logos." More accurately, decisive elements in social life are reduced to the theoretical activity of the savant. Thus "the power of knowledge" is called "the power of creative origination." "Production" means the "creative sovereignty of thought." For any datum it must be possible to deduce all its determinations from theoretical systems and ultimately from mathematics; thus all finite magnitudes may be derived from the concept of the infinitely small by way of the infinitesimal calculus, and this process is precisely their "production." The ideal to be striven for is a unitary system of science which, in the sense just described, will be all-powerful. Since everything about the object is reduced to conceptual determinations, the end-result of such theoretical work is that nothing is to be regarded as material and stable. The determinative, ordering, unifying function is the sole foundation for all else, and towards it all human effort is directed. Production is production of unity, and production is itself the product.¹⁰ Progress in awareness of freedom really means, according to this logic, that the paltry snippet of reality which the savant encounters finds ever more adequate expression in the form of differential quotients. In reality, the scientific calling is only one, nonindependent, element in the work or historical activity of man, but in such a philosophy the former replaces the latter. To the extent that it conceives of reason as actually determining the course of events in a future society, such a hypostatization of Logos as reality is also a camouflaged utopia. In fact, however, the self-knowledge of present-day man is not a mathematical knowledge of nature which claims to be the eternal Logos, but a critical

10. Cf. Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (Berlin, 1914) pp. 23ff.

theory of society as it is, a theory dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life.

The isolated consideration of particular activities and branches of activity, along with their contents and objects, requires for its validity an accompanying concrete awareness of its own limitations. A conception is needed which overcomes the one-sidedness that necessarily arises when limited intellectual processes are detached from their matrix in the total activity of society. In the idea of theory which the scholar inevitably reaches when working purely within his own discipline, the relation between fact and conceptual ordering of fact offers a point of departure for such a corrective conception. The prevailing theory of knowledge has, of course, recognized the problem which this relation raises. The point is constantly stressed that identical objects provide for one discipline problems to be resolved only in some distant future, while in another discipline they are accepted as simple facts. Connections which provide physics with research problems are taken for granted in biology. Within biology, physiological processes raise problems while psychological processes do not. The social sciences take human and nonhuman nature in its entirety as given and are concerned only with how relationships are established between man and nature and between man and man. However, an awareness of this relativity, immanent in bourgeois science, in the relationship between theoretical thought and facts, is not enough to bring the concept of theory to a new stage of development. What is needed is a radical reconsideration, not of the scientist alone, but of the knowing individual as such.

The whole perceptible world as present to a member of bourgeois society and as interpreted within a traditional worldview which is in continuous interaction with that given world, is seen by the perceiver as a sum-total of facts; it is there and must be accepted. The classificatory thinking of each individual is one of those social reactions by which men try to adapt to reality in a way that best meets their needs. But there is at this point an essential difference between the individual and society.

The world which is given to the individual and which he must accept and take into account is, in its present and continuing form, a product of the activity of society as a whole. The objects we perceive in our surroundings—cities, villages, fields, and woods—bear the mark of having been worked on by man. It is not only in clothing and appearance, in outward form and emotional make-up that men are the product of history. Even the way they see and hear is inseparable from the social life-process as it has evolved over the millennia. The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity, and yet the individual perceives himself as receptive and passive in the act of perception. The opposition of passivity and activity, which appears in knowledge theory as a dualism of sense-perception and understanding, does not hold for society, however, in the same measure as for the individual. The individual sees himself as passive and dependent, but society, though made up of individuals, is an active subject, even if a nonconscious one and, to that extent, a subject only in an improper sense. This difference in the existence of man and society is an expression of the cleavage which has up to now affected the historical forms of social life. The existence of society has either been founded directly on oppression or been the blind outcome of conflicting forces, but in any event not the result of conscious spontaneity on the part of free individuals. Therefore the meaning of "activity" and "passivity" changes according as these concepts are applied to society or to individual. In the bourgeois economic mode the activity of society is blind and concrete, that of individuals abstract and conscious.

Human production also always has an element of planning to it. To the extent then that the facts which the individual and his theory encounter are socially produced, there must be rationality in them, even if in a restricted sense. But social action always involves, in addition, available knowledge and its application. The perceived fact is therefore co-determined by

human ideas and concepts, even before its conscious theoretical elaboration by the knowing individual. Nor are we to think here only of experiments in natural science. The so-called purity of objective event to be achieved by the experimental procedure is, of course, obviously connected with technological conditions, and the connection of these in turn with the material process of production is evident. But it is easy here to confuse two questions: the question of the mediation of the factual through the activity of society as a whole, and the question of the influence of the measuring instrument, that is, of a particular action, upon the object being observed. The latter problem, which continually plagues physics, is no more closely connected with the problem that concerns us here than is the problem of perception generally, including perception in everyday life. Man's physiological apparatus for sensation itself largely anticipates the order followed in physical experiment. As man reflectively records reality, he separates and rejoins pieces of it, and concentrates on some particulars while failing to notice others. This process is just as much a result of the modern mode of production, as the perception of a man in a tribe of primitive hunters and fishers is the result of the conditions of his existence (as well, of course, as of the object of perception).

In this context the proposition that tools are prolongations of human organs can be inverted to state that the organs are also prolongations of the tools. In the higher stages of civilization conscious human action unconsciously determines not only the subjective side of perception but in larger degree the object as well. The sensible world which a member of industrial society sees about him every day bears the marks of deliberate work: tenement houses, factories, cotton, cattle for slaughter, men, and, in addition, not only objects such as subway trains, delivery trucks, autos, and airplanes, but the movements in the course of which they are perceived. The distinction within this complex totality between what belongs to unconscious nature and what to the action of man in society cannot be drawn in concrete detail. Even where there is question of experiencing natural objects as such, their very naturalness is determined by con-

trast with the social world and, to that extent, depends upon the latter.

The individual, however, receives sensible reality, as a simple sequence of facts, into his world of ordered concepts. The latter too, though their context changes, have developed along with the life process of society. Thus, though the ordering of reality by understanding and the passing of judgment on objects usually take place as a foregone conclusion and with surprising unanimity among members of a given society, yet the harmony between perception and traditional thought and among the monads or individual subjects of knowledge is not a metaphysical accident. The power of healthy human understanding, or common sense, for which there are no mysteries, as well as the general acceptance of identical views in areas not directly connected with class conflicts, as for example in the natural sciences, are conditioned by the fact that the world of objects to be judged is in large measure produced by an activity that is itself determined by the very ideas which help the individual to recognize that world and to grasp it conceptually.

In Kant's philosophy this state of affairs is expressed in idealist form. The doctrine of purely passive sensation and active understanding suggests to him the question of whence the understanding derives its assured expectation that the manifold given in sensation will always obey the rules of the understanding. He explicitly rejects the thesis of a pre-established harmony, "a kind of preformation-system of pure reason," in which reason has innate and sure rules with which objects are in accord.¹¹ His own explanation is that sensible appearances are already formed by the transcendental subject, that is, through the activity of reason, when they are received by perception and consciously judged.¹² In the most important chapters of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant tried to give a more detailed explanation of the "transcendental affinity" or subjective de-

11. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 167, tr. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933²), p. 175.

12. Cf. Kant, *op. cit.*, A 110, pp. 137-38.

termination of sensible material, a process of which the individual is unaware.

The difficulty and obscurity which, by Kant's own admission, mark the sections on the deduction and schematism of the pure concepts of understanding may be connected with the fact that Kant imagines the supra-individual activity, of which the individual is unaware, only in the idealist form of a consciousness-in-itself, that is a purely intellectual source. In accordance with the theoretical vision available in his day, he does not see reality as product of a society's work, work which taken as a whole is chaotic, but at the individual level is purposeful. Where Hegel glimpses the cunning of a reason that is nonetheless world-historical and objective, Kant sees "an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze."¹⁸

At least Kant understood that behind the discrepancy between fact and theory which the scholar experiences in his professional work, there lies a deeper unity, namely, the general subjectivity upon which individual knowledge depends. The activity of society thus appears to be a transcendental power, that is, the sum-total of spiritual factors. However, Kant's claim that its reality is sunk in obscurity, that is, that it is irrational despite all its rationality, is not without its kernel of truth. The bourgeois type of economy, despite all the ingenuity of the competing individuals within it, is not governed by any plan; it is not consciously directed to a general goal; the life of society as a whole proceeds from this economy only at the cost of excessive friction, in a stunted form, and almost, as it were, accidentally. The internal difficulties in the supreme concepts of Kantian philosophy, especially the ego of transcendental subjectivity, pure or original apperception, and consciousness-in-itself, show the depth and honesty of his thinking. The two-sidedness of these Kantian concepts, that is, their supreme unity and purposefulness, on the one hand, and their obscurity, unknownness, and

13. Kant, *op. cit.*, B 181, p. 183.

impenetrability, on the other, reflects exactly the contradiction-filled form of human activity in the modern period. The collaboration of men in society is the mode of existence which reason urges upon them, and so they do apply their powers and thus confirm their own rationality. But at the same time their work and its results are alienated from them, and the whole process with all its waste of work-power and human life, and with its wars and all its senseless wretchedness, seems to be an unchangeable force of nature, a fate beyond man's control.

In Kant's theoretical philosophy, in his analysis of knowledge, this contradiction is preserved. The unresolved problem of the relation between activity and passivity, *a priori* and sense data, philosophy and psychology, is therefore not due to purely subjective insufficiency but is objectively necessary. Hegel discovered and developed these contradictions, but finally resolved them in a higher intellectual realm. Kant claimed that there existed a universal subject which, however, he could not quite describe. Hegel escaped this embarrassment by postulating the absolute spirit as the most real thing of all. According to him, the universal has already adequately evolved itself and is identical with all that happens. Reason need no longer stand over against itself in purely critical fashion; in Hegel reason has become affirmative, even before reality itself is affirmed as rational. But, confronted with the persisting contradictions in human existence and with the impotence of individuals in face of situations they have themselves brought about, the Hegelian solution seems a purely private assertion, a personal peace treaty between the philosopher and an inhuman world.

The integration of facts into existing conceptual systems and the revision of facts through simplification or elimination of contradictions are, as we have indicated, part of general social activity. Since society is divided into groups and classes, it is understandable that theoretical structures should be related to the general activity of society in different ways according as the authors of such structures belong to one or other social class. Thus when the bourgeois class was first coming into being in a feudal society, the purely scientific theory which arose with it

tended chiefly to the break-up of the status quo and attacked the old form of activity. Under liberalism this theory was accepted by the prevailing human type. Today, development is determined much less by average men who compete with each other in improving the material apparatus of production and its products, than by conflicting national and international cliques of leaders at the various levels of command in the economy and the State. In so far as theoretical thought is not related to highly specialized purposes connected with these conflicts, especially war and the industry that supports it, interest in theory has waned. Less energy is being expended on forming and developing the capacity of thought without regard to how it is to be applied.

These distinctions, to which others might be added, do not at all change the fact that a positive social function is exercised by theory in its traditional form: that is, the critical examination of data with the aid of an inherited apparatus of concepts and judgments which is still operative in even the simplest minds, as well as the interaction between facts and theoretical forms that goes on in daily professional activity. In this intellectual work the needs and goals, the experiences and skills, the customs and tendencies of the contemporary form of human existence have all played their part. Like a material tool of production, it represents potentially an element not only of the contemporary cultural totality but of a more just, more differentiated, more harmoniously organized one as well. To the extent that this theoretical thinking does not deliberately lend itself to concerns which are external and alien to the object but truly concentrates on the problems which it meets in the wake of technical development and, in this connection, itself turns up new problems and transforms old concepts where necessary—to this extent it may rightly regard the technological and industrial accomplishments of the bourgeois era as its own justification and be confident of its own value.

This kind of theoretical thinking considers itself to belong to the realm of the hypothetical, of course, not of certainty. But the hypothetical character is compensated for in many ways. The

uncertainty involved is no greater than it need be, given the intellectual and technological means at hand at any given time, with their proven general usefulness. The very elaboration of such hypotheses, however small their probability may be, is itself a socially necessary and valuable accomplishment which is not at all hypothetical. The construction of hypotheses and theoretical activity in general are a kind of work which in present social circumstances has a real usefulness; that is, there is a demand for it. In so far as it is underpaid or even neglected, it only shares the fate of other concrete and possibly useful kinds of work which have gotten lost in the present economy. Yet these very kinds of work presuppose the present economy and are part of the total economic process as it exists under specific historical conditions. This has nothing to do with the question of whether scientific labor is itself productive in the narrow sense of the term. In the present order of things there is a demand for an immense number of so-called scientific creations; they are honored in very varying ways, and part of the goods emerging from strictly productive work is handed over for them, without anything at all being thereby settled about their own productivity. Even the emptiness of certain areas of university activity, as well as all the idle ingenuity and the construction of metaphysical and nonmetaphysical ideologies have their social significance, no less than do other needs arising out of social conflicts. However, they do not therefore further the interests of any important large sector of society in the present age. An activity which in its existing forms contributes to the being of society need not be productive at all, that is be a money-making enterprise. Nevertheless it can belong to the existing order and help make it possible, as is certainly the case with specialized science.

We must go on now to add that there is a human activity which has society itself for its object.¹⁴ The aim of this activity

14. In the following pages this activity is called "critical" activity. The term is used here less in the sense it has in the idealist critique of pure reason than in the sense it has in the dialectical critique of political economy. It points to an essential aspect of the dialectical theory of society.

is not simply to eliminate one or other abuse, for it regards such abuses as necessarily connected with the way in which the social structure is organized. Although it itself emerges from the social structure, its purpose is not, either in its conscious intention or in its objective significance, the better functioning of any element in the structure. On the contrary, it is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing. The individual as a rule must simply accept the basic conditions of his existence as given and strive to fulfill them; he finds his satisfaction and praise in accomplishing as well as he can the tasks connected with his place in society and in courageously doing his duty despite all the sharp criticism he may choose to exercise in particular matters. But the critical attitude of which we are speaking is wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct with which society as presently constituted provides each of its members. The separation between individual and society in virtue of which the individual accepts as natural the limits prescribed for his activity is relativized in critical theory. The latter considers the overall framework which is conditioned by the blind interaction of individual activities (that is, the existent division of labor and the class distinctions) to be a function which originates in human action and therefore is a possible object of planful decision and rational determination of goals.

The two-sided character of the social totality in its present form becomes, for men who adopt the critical attitude, a conscious opposition. In recognizing the present form of economy and the whole culture which it generates to be the product of human work as well as the organization which mankind was capable of and has provided for itself in the present era, these men identify themselves with this totality and conceive it as will and reason. It is their own world. At the same time, however, they experience the fact that society is comparable to nonhuman natural processes, to pure mechanisms, because cultural forms

which are supported by war and oppression are not the creations of a unified, self-conscious will. That world is not their own but the world of capital.

Previous history thus cannot really be understood; only the individuals and specific groups in it are intelligible, and even these not totally, since their internal dependence on an inhuman society means that even in their conscious action such individuals and groups are still in good measure mechanical functions. The identification, then, of men of critical mind with their society is marked by tension, and the tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking. Thus, such thinkers interpret the economic categories of work, value, and productivity exactly as they are interpreted in the existing order, and they regard any other interpretation as pure idealism. But at the same time they consider it rank dishonesty simply to accept the interpretation; the critical acceptance of the categories which rule social life contains simultaneously their condemnation. This dialectical character of the self-interpretation of contemporary man is what, in the last analysis, also causes the obscurity of the Kantian critique of reason. Reason cannot become transparent to itself as long as men act as members of an organism which lacks reason. Organism as a naturally developing and declining unity cannot be a sort of model for society, but only a form of deadened existence from which society must emancipate itself. An attitude which aims at such an emancipation and at an alteration of society as a whole might well be of service in theoretical work carried on within reality as presently ordered. But it lacks the pragmatic character which attaches to traditional thought as a socially useful professional activity.

In traditional theoretical thinking, the genesis of particular objective facts, the practical application of the conceptual systems by which it grasps the facts, and the role of such systems in action, are all taken to be external to the theoretical thinking itself. This alienation, which finds expression in philosophical terminology as the separation of value and research, knowledge and action, and other polarities, protects the savant from the tensions we have indicated and provides an assured framework

for his activity. Yet a kind of thinking which does not accept this framework seems to have the ground taken out from under it. If a theoretical procedure does not take the form of determining objective facts with the help of the simplest and most differentiated conceptual systems available, what can it be but an aimless intellectual game, half conceptual poetry, half impotent expression of states of mind? The investigation into the social conditioning of facts and theories may indeed be a research problem, perhaps even a whole field for theoretical work, but how can such studies be radically different from other specialized efforts? Research into ideologies, or sociology of knowledge, which has been taken over from the critical theory of society and established as a special discipline, is not opposed either in its aim or in its other ambitions to the usual activities that go on within classificatory science.

In this reaction to critical theory, the self-awareness of thought as such is reduced to the discovery of the relationship that exists between intellectual positions and their social location. Yet the structure of the critical attitude, inasmuch as its intentions go beyond prevailing social ways of acting, is no more closely related to social disciplines thus conceived than it is to natural science. Its opposition to the traditional concept of theory springs in general from a difference not so much of objects as of subjects. For men of the critical mind, the facts, as they emerge from the work of society, are not extrinsic in the same degree as they are for the savant or for members of other professions who all think like little savants. The latter look towards a new kind of organization of work. But in so far as the objective realities given in perception are conceived as products which in principle should be under human control and, in the future at least, will in fact come under it, these realities lose the character of pure factuality.

The scholarly specialist "as" scientist regards social reality and its products as extrinsic to him, and "as" citizen exercises his interest in them through political articles, membership in political parties or social service organizations, and participation in elections. But he does not unify these two activities, and

his other activities as well, except, at best, by psychological interpretation. Critical thinking, on the contrary, is motivated today by the effort really to transcend the tension and to abolish the opposition between the individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships on which society is built. Critical thought has a concept of man as in conflict with himself until this opposition is removed. If activity governed by reason is proper to man, then existent social practice, which forms the individual's life down to its least details, is inhuman, and this inhumanity affects everything that goes on in the society. There will always be something that is extrinsic to man's intellectual and material activity, namely nature as the totality of as yet unmastered elements with which society must deal. But when situations which really depend on man alone, the relationships of men in their work, and the course of man's own history are also accounted part of "nature," the resultant extrinsicality is not only not a suprahistorical eternal category (even pure nature in the sense described is not that), but it is a sign of contemptible weakness. To surrender to such weakness is nonhuman and irrational.

Bourgeois thought is so constituted that in reflection on the subject which exercises such thought a logical necessity forces it to recognize an ego which imagines itself to be autonomous. Bourgeois thought is essentially abstract, and its principle is an individuality which inflatedly believes itself to be the ground of the world or even to be the world without qualification, an individuality separated off from events. The direct contrary of such an outlook is the attitude which holds the individual to be the unproblematic expression of an already constituted society; an example would be a nationalist ideology. Here the rhetorical "we" is taken seriously; speech is accepted as the organ of the community. In the internally rent society of our day, such thinking, except in social questions, sees nonexistent unanimities and is illusory.

Critical thought and its theory are opposed to both the types of thinking just described. Critical thinking is the function

neither of the isolated individual nor of a sum-total of individuals. Its subject is rather a definite individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and, finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature. The subject is no mathematical point like the ego of bourgeois philosophy; his activity is the construction of the social present. Furthermore, the thinking subject is not the place where knowledge and object coincide, nor consequently the starting-point for attaining absolute knowledge. Such an illusion about the thinking subject, under which idealism has lived since Descartes, is ideology in the strict sense, for in it the limited freedom of the bourgeois individual puts on the illusory form of perfect freedom and autonomy. As a matter of fact, however, in a society which is untransparent and without self-awareness the ego, whether active simply as thinker or active in other ways as well, is unsure of itself too. In reflection on man, subject and object are sundered; their identity lies in the future, not in the present. The method leading to such an identification may be called explanation in Cartesian language, but in genuinely critical thought explanation signifies not only a logical process but a concrete historical one as well. In the course of it both the social structure as a whole and the relation of the theoretician to society are altered, that is both the subject and the role of thought are changed. The acceptance of an essential unchangeableness between subject, theory, and object thus distinguishes the Cartesian conception from every kind of dialectical logic.

How is critical thought related to experience? One might maintain that if such thought were not simply to classify but also to determine for itself the goals which classification serves, in other words its own fundamental direction, it would remain locked up within itself, as happened to idealist philosophy. If it did not take refuge in utopian fantasy, it would be reduced to the formalistic fighting of sham battles. The attempt legitimately to determine practical goals by thinking must always fail. If thought were not content with the role given to it in

existent society, if it were not to engage in theory in the traditional sense of the word, it would necessarily have to return to illusions long since laid bare.

The fault in such reflections as these on the role of thought is that thinking is understood in a detachedly departmentalized and therefore spiritualist way, as it is today under existing conditions of the division of labor. In society as it is, the power of thought has never controlled itself but has always functioned as a nonindependent moment in the work process, and the latter has its own orientation and tendency. The work process enhances and develops human life through the conflicting movement of progressive and retrogressive periods. In the historical form in which society has existed, however, the full measure of goods produced for man's enjoyment has, at any particular stage, been given directly only to a small group of men. Such a state of affairs has found expression in thought, too, and left its mark on philosophy and religion. But from the beginning the desire to bring the same enjoyment to the majority has stirred in the depths of men's hearts; despite all the material appropriateness of class organization, each of its forms has finally proved inadequate. Slaves, vassals, and citizens have cast off their yoke. This desire, too, has found expression in cultural creations. Now, inasmuch as every individual in modern times has been required to make his own the purposes of society as a whole and to recognize these in society, there is the possibility that men would become aware of and concentrate their attention upon the path which the social work process has taken without any definite theory behind it, as a result of disparate forces interacting, and with the despair of the masses acting as a decisive factor at major turning points. Thought does not spin such a possibility out of itself but rather becomes aware of its own proper function. In the course of history men have come to know their own activity and thus to recognize the contradiction that marks their existence. The bourgeois economy was concerned that the individual should maintain the life of society by taking care of his own personal happiness. Such an economy has within it, however, a dynamism which results in a fantastic

degree of power for some, such as reminds us of the old Asiatic dynasties, and in material and intellectual weakness for many others. The original fruitfulness of the bourgeois organization of the life process is thus transformed into a paralyzing barrenness, and men by their own toil keep in existence a reality which enslaves them in ever greater degree.

Yet, as far as the role of experience is concerned, there is a difference between traditional and critical theory. The viewpoints which the latter derives from historical analysis as the goals of human activity, especially the idea of a reasonable organization of society that will meet the needs of the whole community, are immanent in human work but are not correctly grasped by individuals or by the common mind. A certain concern is also required if these tendencies are to be perceived and expressed. According to Marx and Engels such a concern is necessarily generated in the proletariat. Because of its situation in modern society the proletariat experiences the connection between work which puts ever more powerful instruments into men's hands in their struggle with nature, and the continuous renewal of an outmoded social organization. Unemployment, economic crises, militarization, terrorist regimes—in a word, the whole condition of the masses—are not due, for example, to limited technological possibilities, as might have been the case in earlier periods, but to the circumstances of production which are no longer suitable to our time. The application of all intellectual and physical means for the mastery of nature is hindered because in the prevailing circumstances these means are entrusted to special, mutually opposed interests. Production is not geared to the life of the whole community while heeding also the claims of individuals; it is geared to the power-backed claims of individuals while being concerned hardly at all with the life of the community. This is the inevitable result, in the present property system, of the principle that it is enough for individuals to look out for themselves.

But it must be added that even the situation of the proletariat is, in this society, no guarantee of correct knowledge. The proletariat may indeed have experience of meaninglessness in the

form of continuing and increasing wretchedness and injustice in its own life. Yet this awareness is prevented from becoming a social force by the differentiation of social structure which is still imposed on the proletariat from above and by the opposition between personal class interests which is transcended only at very special moments. Even to the proletariat the world superficially seems quite different than it really is. Even an outlook which could grasp that no opposition really exists between the proletariat's own true interests and those of society as a whole, and would therefore derive its principles of action from the thoughts and feelings of the masses, would fall into slavish dependence on the status quo. The intellectual is satisfied to proclaim with reverent admiration the creative strength of the proletariat and finds satisfaction in adapting himself to it and in canonizing it. He fails to see that such an evasion of theoretical effort (which the passivity of his own thinking spares him) and of temporary opposition to the masses (which active theoretical effort on his part might force upon him) only makes the masses blinder and weaker than they need be. His own thinking should in fact be a critical, promotive factor in the development of the masses. When he wholly accepts the present psychological state of that class which, objectively considered, embodies the power to change society, he has the happy feeling of being linked with an immense force and enjoys a professional optimism. When the optimism is shattered in periods of crushing defeat, many intellectuals risk falling into a pessimism about society and a nihilism which are just as ungrounded as their exaggerated optimism had been. They cannot bear the thought that the kind of thinking which is most topical, which has the deepest grasp of the historical situation, and is most pregnant with the future, must at certain times isolate its subject and throw him back upon himself.

If critical theory consisted essentially in formulations of the feelings and ideas of one class at any given moment, it would not be structurally different from the special branches of science. It would be engaged in describing the psychological contents typical of certain social groups; it would be social psychology. The

relation of being to consciousness is different in different classes of society. If we take seriously the ideas by which the bourgeoisie explains its own order—free exchange, free competition, harmony of interests, and so on—and if we follow them to their logical conclusion, they manifest their inner contradiction and therewith their real opposition to the bourgeois order. The simple description of bourgeois self-awareness thus does not give us the truth about this class of men. Similarly, a systematic presentation of the contents of proletarian consciousness cannot provide a true picture of proletarian existence and interests. It would yield only an application of traditional theory to a specific problem, and not the intellectual side of the historical process of proletarian emancipation. The same would be true if one were to limit oneself to appraising and making known the ideas not of the proletariat in general but of some more advanced sector of the proletariat, for example a party or its leadership. The real task set here would be the registering and classifying of facts with the help of the most suitable conceptual apparatus, and the theoretician's ultimate goal would be the prediction of future socio-psychological phenomena. Thought and the formation of theory would be one thing and its object, the proletariat, another.

If, however, the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that his presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change, then his real function emerges. The course of the conflict between the advanced sectors of the class and the individuals who speak out the truth concerning it, as well as of the conflict between the most advanced sectors with their theoreticians and the rest of the class, is to be understood as a process of interactions in which awareness comes to flower along with its liberating but also its aggressive forces which incite while also requiring discipline. The sharpness of the conflict shows in the ever present possibility of tension between the theoretician and the class which his thinking is to serve. The unity of the social forces which promise liberation is at the

same time their distinction (in Hegel's sense); it exists only as a conflict which continually threatens the subjects caught up in it. This truth becomes clearly evident in the person of the theoretician; he exercises an aggressive critique not only against the conscious defenders of the status quo but also against distracting, conformist, or utopian tendencies within his own household.

The traditional type of theory, one side of which finds expression in formal logic, is in its present form part of the production process with its division of labor. Since society must come to grips with nature in future ages as well, this intellectual technology will not become irrelevant but on the contrary is to be developed as fully as possible. But the kind of theory which is an element in action leading to new social forms is not a cog in an already existent mechanism. Even if victory or defeat provides a vague analogy to the confirmation or failure of scientific hypotheses, the theoretician who sets himself up in opposition to society as it is does not have the consolidation that such hypotheses are part of his professional work. He cannot sing for himself the hymn of praise which Poincaré sang to the enrichment deriving even from hypotheses that must be rejected.¹⁵ His profession is the struggle of which his own thinking is a part and not something self-sufficient and separable from the struggle. Of course, many elements of theory in the usual sense enter into his work: the knowledge and prognosis of relatively isolated facts, scientific judgments, the elaboration of problems which differ from those of other theoreticians because of his specific interests but nonetheless manifest the same logical form.

Traditional theory may take a number of things for granted: its positive role in a functioning society, an admittedly indirect and obscure relation to the satisfaction of general needs, and participation in the self-renewing life process. But all these exigencies about which science need not trouble itself because their fulfillment is rewarded and confirmed by the social position of the scientist, are called into question in critical thought. The goal at which the latter aims, namely the rational state of so-

15. Poincaré, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-51.

ciety, is forced upon him by present distress. The theory which projects such a solution to the distress does not labor in the service of an existing reality but only gives voice to the mystery of that reality. However cogently absurdities and errors may be uncovered at any given moment, however much every error may be shown to be taking its revenge, yet the overall tendency of the critical theoretical undertaking receives no sanction from so-called healthy human understanding; it has no custom on its side, even when it promises success. Theories, on the contrary, which are confirmed or disproved in the building of machines, military organizations, even successful motion pictures, look to a clearly distinguishable consumer group, even when like theoretical physics they are pursued independently of any application or consist only in a joyous and virtuous playing with mathematical symbols; society proves its humaneness by rewarding such activity.

But there are no such examples of the form consumption will take in that future with which critical thinking is concerned. Nonetheless the idea of a future society as a community of free men, which is possible through technical means already at hand, does have a content, and to it there must be fidelity amid all change. In the form of an insight that the dismemberment and irrationality of society can now be eliminated and how this is to be accomplished, this idea is constantly being renewed amid prevailing conditions. But the state of affairs upon which judgment is passed in this conception and the tendencies inciting men to build a rational society are not brought into existence outside thought by forces extrinsic to it, with thought then, as it were, accidentally recognizing its own reflection in the product of these forces. Rather, one and the same subject who wants a new state of affairs, a better reality, to come to pass, also brings it forth. Out of the obscure harmony between being and thought, understanding and sense perception, human needs and their satisfaction in today's economy, a harmony which seems an accident to the bourgeois eye, there will emerge in the future age the relation between rational intention and its realization. The struggle for the future provides but a fragmentary re-

flexion of this relation, to the extent that a will which aims at the shaping of society as a whole is already consciously operative in the construction of the theory and practice which will lead to it. Despite all the discipline, justified by the need to win through, the community of those engaged in the struggle experiences something of the freedom and spontaneity which will mark the future. Where the unity of discipline and freedom has disappeared, the movement becomes a matter of interest only to its own bureaucracy, a play that already belongs to the repertory of modern history.

That the future being striven for should be a vital reality even in the present proves nothing, however. The conceptual systems of classificatory understanding, the categories into which dead and living things, social, psychological, and physical phenomena have all been absorbed together, the division of objects and of judgments on them into the various pigeonholes of the special areas of knowledge—all this makes up the apparatus of thought as it has proved and refined itself in connection with the real work process. This world of concepts makes up the consciousness of most men, and it has a basis to which its proponents can appeal. The concerns of critical thought, too, are those of most men, but they are not recognized to be such. The concepts which emerge under its influence are critical of the present. The Marxist categories of class, exploitation, surplus value, profit, pauperization, and breakdown are elements in a conceptual whole, and the meaning of this whole is to be sought not in the preservation of contemporary society but in its transformation into the right kind of society. Consequently, although critical theory at no point proceeds arbitrarily and in chance fashion, it appears, to prevailing modes of thought, to be subjective and speculative, one-sided and useless. Since it runs counter to prevailing habits of thought, which contribute to the persistence of the past and carry on the business of an outdated order of things (both past and outdated order guaranteeing a faction-ridden world), it appears to be biased and unjust.

Above all, however, critical theory has no material accom-

plishments to show for itself. The change which it seeks to bring about is not effected gradually, so that success even if slow might be steady. The growth in numbers of more or less clear-minded disciples, the influence of some among them on governments, the power position of parties which have a positive attitude towards this theory or at least do not outlaw it—all these are among the vicissitudes encountered in the struggle for a higher stage of man's life in community and are not found at the beginnings of the struggle. Such successes as these may even prove, later on, to have been only apparent victories and really blunders. Again: fertilization in agriculture, for example, or the application of a medical therapy may be far removed from ideal reality and yet accomplish something. Perhaps the theories underlying such technology may have to be refined, revised, or abolished in connection with specialized activity and with discoveries in other areas. Through such techniques, nonetheless, a certain amount of labor is saved in achieving results, and many an illness is healed or alleviated.¹⁶ But the first consequence of the theory which urges a transformation of society as a whole is only an intensification of the struggle with which the theory is connected.

Furthermore, although material improvements, originating in the increased powers of resistance of certain groups, are indirectly due to the critical theory, the groups in question are not sectors of society whose steady spread would finally bring the new society to pass. Such ideas mistake the fundamental difference between a fragmented society in which material and ideological power operates to maintain privileges and an association of free men in which each has the same possibility of self-development. Such an association is not an abstract utopia, for the possibility in question can be shown to be real even at the present stage of productive forces. But how many tendencies will actually lead to this association, how many transitional phases have been reached, how desirable and intrinsically val-

16. The same is true of insights in the areas of political economy and financial technology, and their use in economic policy.

uable individual preliminary stages may be, and what their historical importance is in relation to the idea—all this will be made clear only when the idea is brought to realization.

One thing which this way of thinking has in common with fantasy is that an image of the future which springs indeed from a deep understanding of the present determines men's thoughts and actions even in periods when the course of events seems to be leading far away from such a future and seems to justify every reaction except belief in fulfillment. It is not the arbitrariness and supposed independence of fantasy that is the common bond here, but its obstinacy. Within the most advanced group it is the theoretician who must have this obstinacy. The theoretician of the ruling class, perhaps after difficult beginnings, may reach a relatively assured position, but, on the other hand, the theoretician is also at times an enemy and criminal, at times a solitary utopian; even after his death the question of what he really was is not decided. The historical significance of his work is not self-evident; it rather depends on men speaking and acting in such a way as to justify it. It is not a finished and fixed historical creation.

The capacity for such acts of thought as are required in everyday action, social or scientific, has been developed in men by a realistic training over many centuries. Failure here leads to affliction, failure, and punishment. The intellectual modality to which we refer consists essentially in this, that the conditions for bringing about an effect which has always appeared in the same circumstances before are known and in the appropriate context are supplied. There is an object-lesson kind of instruction through good and bad experiences and through organized experiment. The issue here is direct individual self-preservation, and in bourgeois society men have the opportunity of developing a sense of this. Knowledge in this traditional sense, including every type of experience, is preserved in critical theory and practice. But in regard to the essential kind of change at which the critical theory aims, there can be no corresponding concrete perception of it until it actually comes about. If the proof of the

pudding is in the eating, the eating here is still in the future. Comparison with similar historical events can be drawn only in a limited degree.

Constructive thinking, then, plays a more important role than empirical verification in this theory as a whole, in comparison with what goes on in the activity of common sense. This is one of the reasons why men who in particular scientific areas or in other professional activity are able to do extremely competent work, can show themselves quite limited and incompetent, despite good will, when it comes to questions concerning society as a whole. In all past periods when social change was on the agenda, people who thought "too much" were regarded as dangerous. This brings us to the problem of the general relation of the intelligentsia to society.

The theoretician whose business it is to hasten developments which will lead to a society without injustice can find himself in opposition to views prevailing even among the proletariat, as we said above. If such a conflict were not possible, there would be no need of a theory; those who need it would come upon it without help. The conflict does not necessarily have anything to do with the class to which the theoretician belongs; nor does it depend on the kind of income he has. Engels was a businessman. In professional sociology, which derives its concept of class not from a critique of the economy but from its own observations, the theoretician's social position is determined neither by the source of his income nor by the concrete content of his theory but by the formal element of education. The possibility of a wider vision, not the kind possessed by industrial magnates who know the world market and direct whole states from behind the scenes, but the kind possessed by university professors, middle-level civil servants, doctors, lawyers, and so forth, is what constitutes the "intelligentsia," that is, a special social or even suprasocial stratum.

It is the task of the critical theoretician to reduce the tension between his own insight and oppressed humanity in whose service he thinks. But in the sociological concept of which we

speak detachment from all classes is an essential mark of the intelligentsia, a sort of sign of superiority of which it is proud.¹⁷ Such a neutral category corresponds to the abstract self-awareness typical of the savant. To the bourgeois consumer under liberalism knowledge meant knowledge that was useful in some circumstances or other, no matter what kind of knowledge might be in question; the sociology we speak of approaches knowledge in the same way at the theoretical level. Marx and Mises, Lenin and Liefmann, Jaurès and Jevons all come under the same sociological heading, unless the politicians are left out of the list and put down as potential students of the political scientists, sociologists, and philosophers who are the real men of knowledge. From them the politician is to learn to use "such and such a means" when he takes "such and such a stand"; he must learn whether the practical position he adopts can be implemented with logical consistency.¹⁸ A division of labor is established between men who in social conflicts affect the course of history and the social theoreticians who assign them their standpoint.

Critical theory is in contradiction to the formalistic concept of mind which underlies such an idea of the intelligentsia. According to this concept there is only one truth, and the positive attributes of honesty, internal consistency, reasonableness, and striving for peace, freedom, and happiness may not be attributed in the same sense to any other theory and practice. There is likewise no theory of society, even that of the sociologists concerned with general laws, that does not contain political motivations, and the truth of these must be decided not in supposedly neutral reflection but in personal thought and action, in concrete historical activity. Now, it is disconcerting that the intellectual should represent himself in this way, as though a difficult labor of thought, which he alone could accomplish,

17. The author is referring, here and in the following paragraphs, to Karl Mannheim's theory, in his sociology of knowledge, of the specific condition and outlook of the intelligentsia in the bourgeois era.

18. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, tr. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 151.

were the prime requirement if men were accurately to choose between revolutionary, liberal, and fascist ends and means. The situation has not been like that for many decades. The avant-garde in the political struggle need prudence, but not academic instruction on their so-called standpoint. Especially at a time when the forces of freedom in Europe are themselves disoriented and seeking to regroup themselves anew, when everything depends on nuances of position within their own movement, when indifference to substantive content, created by defeat, despair, and corrupt bureaucracy, threatens to overwhelm all the spontaneity, experience, and knowledge of the masses despite the heroic efforts of a few, a conception of the intelligentsia which claims to transcend party lines and is therefore abstract represents a view of problems that only hides the decisive questions.

Mind is liberal. It tolerates no external coercion, no revamping of its results to suit the will of one or other power. But on the other hand it is not cut loose from the life of society; it does not hang suspended over it. In so far as mind seeks autonomy or man's control over his own life no less than over nature, it is able to recognize this same tendency as a force operative in history. Considered in isolation, the recognition of such a tendency seems neutral; but just as mind is unable to recognize it without having first been stimulated and become concerned, neither can it make such recognition a generally accepted fact without a struggle. To that extent, mind is not liberal. Intellectual efforts which arise here and there without any conscious connection with a particular practical commitment but vary according to different academic or other tasks that promise success, intellectual efforts which take now this, now that for their field of concentration, may be useful in the service of one or other historical tendency. But for all their formal correctness (and what theoretical structure, however radically faulted, cannot fulfill the requirements of formal correctness?), they can also hinder and lead astray the development of the mind. The abstract sociological concept of an intelligentsia which is to have missionary functions is, by its structure, an hypostatization of specialized science. Critical theory is neither "deeply

rooted" like totalitarian propaganda nor "detached" like the liberalist intelligentsia.

Our consideration of the various functions of traditional and critical theory brings to light the difference in their logical structure. The primary propositions of traditional theory define universal concepts under which all facts in the field in question are to be subsumed; for example, the concept of a physical process in physics or an organic process in biology. In between primary propositions and facts there is the hierarchy of genera and species with their relations of subordination. Facts are individual cases, examples, or embodiments of classes. There are no differences due to time between the unities in the system. Electricity does not exist prior to an electrical field, nor a field prior to electricity, any more than wolf as such exists before or after particular wolves. As far as an individual knower is concerned there may be one or other temporal sequence among such relationships, but no such sequence exists in the objects themselves.

Furthermore, physics has also ceased to regard more general characteristics as causes or forces hidden in the concrete facts and to hypostatize these logical relationships; it is only sociology that is still unclear on this point. If new classes are added to the system or other changes are introduced, this is not usually regarded as proof that the determinations made earlier are necessarily too rigid and must turn out to be inadequate, for the relationship to the object or even the object itself may change without losing its identity. Changes are taken rather as an indication that our earlier knowledge was deficient or as a substitution of some aspects of an object for others, as a map, for example, may become dated because forests have been cut down, new cities built, or different borders drawn. In discursive logic, or logic of the understanding, the evolution of living beings is conceived in the same way. This person is now a child, then an adult; for such logic this can only mean that there is an abiding stable nucleus, "this person," who successively possesses the attributes of being a child and an adult. For positivism, of course, there is simply no identity: first there is a child, later

there is an adult, and the two are simply distinct complexes of facts. But this view cannot come to grips with the fact that a person changes and yet is identical with himself.

The critical theory of society also begins with abstract determinations; in dealing with the present era it begins with the characterization of an economy based on exchange.¹⁹ The concepts Marx uses, such as commodity, value, and money, can function as genera when, for example, concrete social relations are judged to be relations of exchange and when there is question of the commodity character of goods. But the theory is not satisfied to relate concepts of reality by way of hypotheses. The theory begins with an outline of the mechanism by which bourgeois society, after dismantling feudal regulations, the guild system, and vassalage, did not immediately fall apart under the pressure of its own anarchic principle but managed to survive. The regulatory effects of exchange are brought out on which bourgeois economy is founded. The conception of the interaction of society and nature, which is already exercising its influence here, as well as the idea of a unified period of society, of its self-preservation, and so on, spring from a radical analysis, guided by concern for the future, of the historical process. The relation of the primary conceptual interconnections to the world of facts is not essentially a relation of classes to instances. It is because of its inner dynamism that the exchange relationship, which the theory outlines, dominates social reality, as, for example, the assimilation of food largely dominates the organic life of plant and brute beast.

In critical theory, as in traditional theory, more specific elements must be introduced in order to move from fundamental structure to concrete reality. But such an intercalation of more detailed factors—for example the existence of large money reserves, the diffusion of these in sectors of society that are still precapitalist, foreign trade—is not accomplished by simple deduction as in theory that has been simplified for specialized

19. On the logical structure of the critique of political economy, cf. the essay "Zum Problem der Wahrheit," in Horkheimer *Kritische Theorie*, vol. I (Frankfurt, 1968). p 265ff

use. Instead, every step rests on knowledge of man and nature which is stored up in the sciences and in historical experience. This is obvious, of course, for the theory of industrial technology. But in other areas too a detailed knowledge of how men react is applied throughout the doctrinal developments to which we have been referring. For example, the statement that under certain conditions the lowest strata of society have the most children plays an important role in explaining how the bourgeois society built on exchange necessarily leads to capitalism with its army of industrial reserves and its crises. To give the psychological reasons behind the observed fact about the lower classes is left to traditional science.

Thus the critical theory of society begins with the idea of the simple exchange of commodities and defines the idea with the help of relatively universal concepts. It then moves further, using all knowledge available and taking suitable material from the research of others as well as from specialized research. Without denying its own principles as established by the special discipline of political economy, the theory shows how an exchange economy, given the condition of men (which, of course, changes under the very influence of such an economy), must necessarily lead to a heightening of those social tensions which in the present historical era lead in turn to wars and revolutions.

The necessity just mentioned, as well as the abstractness of the concepts, are both like and unlike the same phenomena in traditional theory. In both types of theory there is a strict deduction if the claim of validity for general definitions is shown to include a claim that certain factual relations will occur. For example, if you are dealing with electricity, such and such an event must occur because such and such characteristics belong to the very concept of electricity. To the extent that the critical theory of society deduces present conditions from the concept of simple exchange, it includes this kind of necessity, although it is relatively unimportant that the hypothetical form of statement be used. That is, the stress is not on the idea that wherever a society based on simple exchange prevails, capitalism must develop—although this is true. The stress is rather on the fact

that the existent capitalist society, which has spread all over the world from Europe and for which the theory is declared valid, derives from the basic relation of exchange. Even the classificatory judgments of specialized science have a fundamentally hypothetical character, and existential judgments are allowed, if at all, only in certain areas, namely the descriptive and practical parts of the discipline.²⁰ But the critical theory of society is, in its totality, the unfolding of a single existential judgment. To put it in broad terms, the theory says that the basic form of the historically given commodity economy on which modern history rests contains in itself the internal and external tensions of the modern era; it generates these tensions over and over again in an increasingly heightened form; and after a period of progress, development of human powers, and emancipation for the individual, after an enormous extension of human control over nature, it finally hinders further development and drives humanity into a new barbarism.

The individual steps within the theory are, at least in intention, as rigorous as the deductions in a specialized scientific theory; each is an element in the building up of that comprehensive existential judgment. Particular parts of the theory can be changed into general or specific hypothetical judgments and applied after the fashion of traditional theory; for example, the idea that increasing productivity usually devalues capital. In many areas of the theory there thus arise propositions the relation of which to reality is difficult to determine. From the fact that the representation of a unified object is true as a whole, it is possible to conclude only under special conditions the extent to which isolated parts of the representation can validly be applied, in their isolation, to isolated parts of the

20. There are connections between the forms of judgment and the historical periods. A brief indication will show what is meant. The classificatory judgment is typical of prebourgeois society: this is the way it is, and man can do nothing about it. The hypothetical and disjunctive forms belong especially to the bourgeois world: under certain circumstances this effect can take place; it is either thus or so. Critical theory maintains: it need not be so; man can change reality, and the necessary conditions for such change already exist.

object. The problem that arises as soon as particular propositions of the critical theory are applied to unique or recurring events in contemporary society has to do not with the truth of the theory but with how suitable the theory is for traditional kinds of intellectual operation with progressively extended goals. The special sciences, and especially contemporary political economics, are unable to derive practical profit from the fragmentary questions they discuss. But this incapacity is due neither to these sciences nor to critical theory alone, but to their specific role in relation to reality.

Even the critical theory, which stands in opposition to other theories, derives its statements about real relationships from basic universal concepts, as we have indicated, and therefore presents the relationships as necessary. Thus both kinds of theoretical structure are alike when it comes to logical necessity. But there is a difference as soon as we turn from logical to real necessity, the necessity involved in factual sequences. The biologist's statement that internal processes cause a plant to wither or that certain processes in the human organism lead to its destruction leaves untouched the question whether any influences can alter the character of these processes or change them totally. Even when an illness is said to be curable, the fact that the necessary curative measures are actually taken is regarded as purely extrinsic to the curability, a matter of technology and therefore nonessential as far as the theory as such is concerned. The necessity which rules society can be regarded as biological in the sense described, and the unique character of critical theory can therefore be called in question on the grounds that in biology as in other natural sciences particular sequences of events can be theoretically constructed just as they are in the critical theory of society. The development of society, in this view, would simply be a particular series of events, for the presentation of which conclusions from various other areas of research are used, just as a doctor in the course of an illness or a geologist dealing with the earth's prehistory has to apply various other disciplines. Society here would be the individual

reality which is evaluated on the basis of theories in the special sciences.

However many valid analogies there may be between these different intellectual endeavors, there is nonetheless a decisive difference when it comes to the relation of subject and object and therefore to the necessity of the event being judged. The object with which the scientific specialist deals is not affected at all by his own theory. Subject and object are kept strictly apart. Even if it turns out that at a later point in time the objective event is influenced by human intervention, to science this is just another fact. The objective occurrence is independent of the theory, and this independence is part of its necessity: the observer as such can effect no change in the object. A consciously critical attitude, however, is part of the development of society: the construing of the course of history as the necessary product of an economic mechanism simultaneously contains both a protest against this order of things, a protest generated by the order itself, and the idea of self-determination for the human race, that is the idea of a state of affairs in which man's actions no longer flow from a mechanism but from his own decision. The judgment passed on the necessity inherent in the previous course of events implies here a struggle to change it from a blind to a meaningful necessity. If we think of the object of the theory in separation from the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism or conformism. Every part of the theory presupposes the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it along lines determined by the theory itself.

The theoreticians of knowledge who started with physics had reason, even if they were not wholly right, to condemn the confusion of cause and operation of forces and to substitute the idea of condition or function for the idea of cause. For the kind of thinking which simply registers facts there are always only series of phenomena, never forces and counterforces; but this, of course, says something about this kind of thinking, not about nature. If such a method is applied to society, the result is statistics and descriptive sociology, and these can be important for many purposes, even for critical theory.

For traditional science either everything is necessary or nothing is necessary, according as necessity means the independence of event from observer or the possibility of absolutely certain prediction. But to the extent that the subject does not totally isolate himself, even as thinker, from the social struggles of which he is a part and to the extent that he does not think of knowledge and action as distinct concepts, necessity acquires another meaning for him. If he encounters necessity which is not mastered by man, it takes shape either as that realm of nature which despite the far-reaching conquests still to come will never wholly vanish, or as the weakness of the society of previous ages in carrying on the struggle with nature in a consciously and purposefully organized way. Here we do have forces and counterforces. Both elements in this concept of necessity—the power of nature and the weakness of society—are interconnected and are based on the experienced effort of man to emancipate himself from coercion by nature and from those forms of social life and of the juridical, political, and cultural orders which have become a straitjacket for him. The struggle on two fronts, against nature and against society's weakness, is part of the effective striving for a future condition of things in which whatever man wills is also necessary and in which the necessity of the object becomes the necessity of a rationally mastered event.

The application, even the understanding, of these and other concepts in the critical mode of thought, demand activity and effort, an exercise of will power, in the knowing subject. The effort may be made, of course, to supply for a deficient understanding of these ideas and of how they are linked together, simply by greater attention to their logical implications and the elaboration of apparently more exact definitions, even of a "unified language," but the effort cannot succeed. The issue is not simply one of misunderstanding but of a real opposition of outlooks. The concept of necessity in the critical theory is itself a critical concept; it presupposes freedom, even if a not yet existent freedom. But the idea of freedom as a purely interior reality which is always there even when men are en-

slaved is typical of the idealist mentality. The tendency immanent in this not wholly false but surely distorted conception of freedom was most clearly expressed by the young Fichte: "I am now fully convinced that the human will is free and that the purpose of our existence is not to be happy but only to deserve happiness."²¹ Here we see the real identity underlying fundamental metaphysical polarities and schools. The claim that events are absolutely necessary means in the last analysis the same thing as the claim to be really free here and now: resignation in practice.

The inability to grasp in thought the unity of theory and practice and the limitation of the concept of necessity to inevitable events are both due, from the viewpoint of theory of knowledge, to the Cartesian dualism of thought and being. That dualism is congenial both to nature and to bourgeois society in so far as the latter resembles a natural mechanism. The idea of a theory which becomes a genuine force, consisting in the self-awareness of the subjects of a great historical revolution, is beyond the grasp of a mentality typified by such a dualism. If scholars do not merely think about such a dualism but really take it seriously, they cannot act independently. In keeping with their own way of thinking, they can put into practice only what the closed causal system of reality determines them to do, or they count only as individual units in a statistic for which the individual unit really has no significance. As rational beings they are helpless and isolated. The realization that such a state of affairs exists is indeed a step towards changing it, but unfortunately the situation enters bourgeois awareness only in a metaphysical, ahistorical shape. In the form of a faith in the unchangeableness of the social structure it dominates the present. Reflecting on themselves men see themselves only as on-lookers, passive participants in a mighty process which may be foreseen but not modified. Necessity for them refers not to events which man masters to his own purposes but only to events which he anticipates as probable. Where the intercon-

21. Fichte, *Briefwechsel*, ed. by H. Schulz, volume 1 (Leipzig, 1925), p. 127.

nection of willing and thinking, thought and action is admitted as in many sectors of the most recent sociology, it is seen only as adding to that objective complexity which the observer must take into account. The thinker must relate all the theories which are proposed to the practical attitudes and social strata which they reflect. But he removes himself from the affair; he has no concern except—science.

The hostility to theory as such which prevails in contemporary public life is really directed against the transformative activity associated with critical thinking. Opposition starts as soon as theorists fail to limit themselves to verification and classification by means of categories which are as neutral as possible, that is, categories which are indispensable to inherited ways of life. Among the vast majority of the ruled there is the unconscious fear that theoretical thinking might show their painfully won adaptation to reality to be perverse and unnecessary. Those who profit from the status quo entertain a general suspicion of any intellectual independence. The tendency to conceive theory as the opposite of a positive outlook is so strong that even the inoffensive traditional type of theory suffers from it at times. Since the most advanced form of thought at present is the critical theory of society and every consistent intellectual movement that cares about man converges upon it by its own inner logic, theory in general falls into disrepute. Every other kind of scientific statement which does not offer a deposit of facts in the most familiar categories and, if possible, in the most neutral form, the mathematical, is already accused of being theoretical.

This positivist attitude need not be simply hostile to progress. Although in the intensified class conflicts of recent decades rulers have had to rely increasingly on the real apparatus of power, ideology is nonetheless still a fairly important cohesive force for holding together a social structure threatened with collapse. In the determination to look at facts alone and to surrender every kind of illusion there still lurks, even today, something like a reaction against the alliance of metaphysics and oppression.

It would be a mistake, however, not to see the essential

distinction between the empiricist Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and that of today. In the eighteenth century a new society had already been developed within the framework of the old. The task now was to free an already existent bourgeois economy from its feudal limitations and to let it operate freely. Bourgeois scientific thought, too, needed, fundamentally, only to shake off the old dogmatic chains in order to progress along a path it had already mapped out. Today, on the contrary, in the transition from the present form of society to a future one mankind will for the first time be a conscious subject and actively determine its own way of life. There is still need of a conscious reconstruction of economic relationships. Indiscriminate hostility to theory, therefore, is a hindrance today. Unless there is continued theoretical effort, in the interest of a rationally organized future society, to shed critical light on present-day society and to interpret it in the light of traditional theories elaborated in the special sciences, the ground is taken from under the hope of radically improving human existence. The demand therefore for a positive outlook and for acceptance of a subordinate position threatens, even in progressive sectors of society, to overwhelm any openness to theory. The issue, however, is not simply the theory of emancipation; it is the practice of it as well.

The individual parts of a theory which attempts to deduce the complicated reality of liberal capitalism and ultimately of the capitalism of the huge combines from the model of a simple commodity economy cannot be as indifferent to the time-element as the steps in a deductive system of classification are. Within the hierarchic systems of organisms, the digestive function, so important for men too, finds its pure expression, as it were, in the class of the Aschelminthes. Similarly there are historical forms of society which show, at least approximately, a simple commodity economy. As we indicated above, the conceptual development is, if not parallel, at least in verifiable relation to the historical development. But the essential relatedness of theory to time does not reside in the correspondence between individual parts of the conceptual construction and

successive periods of history; that is a view on which Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*, examples of the same method, are in agreement. It consists rather in the continuous alteration of the theoretician's existential judgment on society, for this judgment is conditioned by its conscious relation to the historical practice of society.

This kind of alteration has nothing to do with the principle by which modern metaphysics and philosophy of religion have rejected every consistently developed theoretical structure: any specific theoretical content must be constantly and "radically questioned," and the thinker must be constantly beginning anew. Critical theory does not have one doctrinal substance today, another tomorrow. The changes in it do not mean a shift to a wholly new outlook, as long as the age itself does not radically change. The stability of the theory is due to the fact that amid all change in society the basic economic structure, the class relationship in its simplest form, and therefore the idea of the supersession of these two remain identical. The decisive substantive elements in the theory are conditioned by these unchanging factors and they themselves therefore cannot change until there has been a historical transformation of society. On the other hand, however, history does not stand still until such a point of transformation has been reached. The historical development of the conflicts in which the critical theory is involved leads to a reassignment of degrees of relative importance to individual elements of the theory, forces further concretizations, and determines which results of specialized science are to be significant for critical theory and practice at any given time.

In order to explain more fully what is meant, we shall use the concept of the social class which disposes of the means of production. In the liberalist period economic predominance was in great measure connected with legal ownership of the means of production. The large class of private property owners exercised leadership in the society, and the whole culture of the age bears the impress of this fact. Industry was still broken up into a large number of independent enterprises which were small by modern standards. The directors of factories, as was suitable for

this stage of technological development, were either one or more of the owners or their direct appointees. Once, however, the development of technology in the last century had led to a rapidly increasing concentration and centralization of capital, the legal owners were largely excluded from the management of the huge combines which absorbed their small factories, and management became something quite distinct from ownership before the law. Industrial magnates, the leaders of the economy, came into being.

In many cases these managers were initially the major owners of the concerns. Today, however, such ownership has become unimportant, and there are now some powerful managers who dominate whole sectors of industry while owning a steadily decreasing part of the businesses they direct. This economic process brings with it a change in the way the political and legal apparatus functions, as well as in ideologies. Without the juridical definition of ownership being changed at all, owners become increasingly powerless before the directors and their staffs. In a lawsuit which owners might bring against managers in the course of a difference of views, the managers' direct control of the means which these huge enterprises have at their disposal gives them such an advantage that a victory of their opponents is for the most part hardly possible. The influence of management, which may initially be exercised only over lower judicial and administrative authorities, finally extends to the higher ones and ultimately to the State and its power apparatus.

Once the legal owners are cut off from the real productive process and lose their influence, their horizon narrows; they become increasingly unfitted for important social positions, and finally the share which they still have in industry due to ownership and which they have done nothing to augment comes to seem socially useless and morally dubious. These and other changes are accompanied by the rise of ideologies centering on the great personality and the distinction between productive and parasitic capitalists. The idea of a right with a fixed content and independent of society at large loses its importance. The very same sector of society which brutally maintains its private

power to dispose of the means of production (and this power is at the heart of the prevailing social order) sponsors political doctrines which claim that unproductive property and parasitic incomes must disappear. The circle of really powerful men grows narrower, but the possibility increases of deliberately constructing ideologies, of establishing a double standard of truth (knowledge for insiders, a cooked-up story for the people), and of cynicism about truth and thought generally. The end result of the process is a society dominated no longer by independent owners but by cliques of industrial and political leaders.

Such changes do not leave the structure of the critical theory untouched. It does not indeed fall victim to the illusion that property and profit no longer play a key role, an illusion carefully fostered in the social sciences. On the one hand, even earlier it had regarded juridical relations not as the substance but as the surface of what was really going on in society. It knows that the disposition of men and things remains in the hands of a particular social group which is in competition with other economic power groups, less so at home but all the more fiercely at the international level. Profit continues to come from the same social sources and must in the last analysis be increased by the same means as before. On the other hand, in the judgment of the critical theorist the loss of all rights with a determined content, a loss conditioned by the concentration of economic power and given its fullest form in the authoritarian state, has brought with it the disappearance not only of an ideology but also of a cultural factor which has a positive value and not simply a negative one.

When the theory takes into account these changes in the inner structure of the entrepreneurial class, it is led to differentiate others of its concepts as well. The dependence of culture on social relationships must change as the latter change, even in details, if society indeed be a single whole. Even in the liberalist period political and moral interpretations of individuals could be derived from their economic situation. Admiration for nobility of character, fidelity to one's word, independence of

judgment, and so forth, are traits of a society of relatively independent economic subjects who enter into contractual relationships with each other. But this cultural dependence was in good measure psychologically mediated, and morality itself acquired a kind of stability because of its function in the individual. (The truth that dependence on the economy thoroughly pervaded even this morality was brought home when in the recent threat to the economic position of the liberalist bourgeoisie the attitude of freedom and independence began to disintegrate.) Under the conditions of monopolistic capitalism, however, even such a relative individual independence is a thing of the past. The individual no longer has any ideas of his own. The content of mass belief, in which no one really believes, is an immediate product of the ruling economic and political bureaucracies, and its disciples secretly follow their own atomistic and therefore untrue interests; they act as mere functions of the economic machine.

The concept of the dependence of the cultural on the economic has thus changed. With the destruction of the classically typical individual, the concept has as it were become more materialistic, in the popular sense of the term, than before. The explanation of social phenomena has become simpler yet also more complicated. Simpler, because economic factors more directly and consciously determine men and because the solidity and relative capacity for resistance of the cultural spheres are disappearing. More complicated, because the economic dynamism which has been set in motion and in relation to which most individuals have been reduced to simple means, quickly brings ever new visions and portents. Even advanced sectors of society are discouraged and gripped by the general sense of helplessness.

The permanency of truth, too, is connected with the constellations of reality. In the eighteenth century truth had on its side a bourgeoisie that was already economically developed. But under the conditions of later capitalism and the impotence of the workers before the authoritarian state's apparatus of oppression, truth has sought refuge among small groups of ad-

mirable men. But these have been decimated by terrorism and have little time for refining the theory. Charlatans profit by this situation and the general intellectual level of the great masses is rapidly declining.

What has been said is intended to show that the continuous change of social relationships, due immediately to economic developments and finding its most direct expression in the formation of the ruling class, does not affect only some areas of the culture. It also affects the way in which the culture depends on the economy and, thus, the key ideas in the whole conception. This influence of social development on the structure of the theory is part of the theory's doctrinal content. Thus new contents are not just mechanically added to already existent parts. Since the theory is a unified whole which has its proper meaning only in relation to the contemporary situation, the theory as a whole is caught up in an evolution. The evolution does not change the theory's foundations, of course, any more than recent changes essentially alter the object which the theory reflects, namely contemporary society. Yet even the apparently more remote concepts of the theory are drawn into the evolution. The logical difficulties which understanding meets in every thought that attempts to reflect a living totality are due chiefly to this fact.

If we take individual concepts and judgments out of their context in the theory and compare them with concepts and judgments from an earlier version of the theory, contradictions arise. This is true whether we think of the historical developmental stages through which the theory passes or of the logical steps within the theory itself. Amid all the abiding identity of the concepts of enterprise and entrepreneur there is nonetheless distinction, according as the concepts are taken from the presentation of the early form of bourgeois economy or from the presentation of developed capitalism, and according as they are taken from the nineteenth-century critique of political economy which has the liberalist manufacturer in view or from the twentieth-century critique which envisages the monopolist. The

representation of the entrepreneur, like the entrepreneur himself, passes through an evolution.

The contradictions which arise when parts of the theory are taken as independent entities are thus not due to errors or to a neglect of clear definitions. They are due to the fact that the theory has a historically changing object which, however, remains identical amid all the changes. The theory is not a storehouse of hypotheses on the course of particular events in society. It constructs a developing picture of society as a whole, an existential judgment with a historical dimension. What the bourgeois entrepreneur or even the bourgeois man as such was (the fact, for example, that his character showed not only rationalist traits but also an element of that irrationalism which presently prevails in middle-class mass movements) depends on the original economic situation of the bourgeoisie. The basic concepts of the theory capture this reality. But those economic origins manifest themselves so clearly only in the conflicts of the present day. The reason for this is not that the bourgeois is understanding change at the present time but that in connection with present-day change the interests and attention of the theoretician lead him to accentuate new aspects of this object.

It may be of systematic interest and not entirely useless to classify and juxtapose the various kinds of dependency, commodity, class, entrepreneur, and so forth, as they occur in the logical and historical phases of the theory. But the sense of these concepts ultimately becomes clear only when we grasp the whole conceptual structure with its demands for adaptation to ever new situations. Consequently such systems of classes and subclasses, of definitions and specifications of concepts, which are extracted from the critical theory do not have even the value of the conceptual inventories found in other specialized science, for the latter are at least applied in the relatively uniform practice of daily life. To transform the critical theory of society into a sociology is, on the whole, an undertaking beset with serious difficulties.

The question we have been touching on, concerning the rela-

tion between thought and time, has, it must be admitted, a special difficulty connected with it. The objection is urged that it is impossible to speak in any strict sense of changes in a theory properly so called. The claim that such changes occur presupposes rather a theory that only glosses over the difficulty. No one can turn himself into a different subject than what he is at this historical moment. To speak of the constancy or changeableness of truth is strictly meaningful only in a polemical context. That is, one would be opposing the idea of an absolute, suprahistorical subject or the possibility of exchanging subjects, as though a person could remove himself from his present historical juncture and truly insert himself into any other he wished.

How far this last is in fact possible or impossible is not our concern here. In any event the critical theory is indeed incompatible with the idealist belief that any theory is independent of men and even has a growth of its own. Documents have a history but a theory does not have its vicissitudes. The claim, then, that certain elements have been added to it and that it must adapt itself to new situations in the future without changing its essential content is rather an integral part of the theory as it exists today and seeks to affect practice. Those who have the theory in their heads have it there in its totality and act according to that totality. The continuous progress of a truth that is independent of the thinking subject or a trust in the advance of science can refer in the proper and strict sense only to that function of knowledge which will continue to be necessary even in a future society, namely the mastering of nature. This knowledge, too, admittedly belongs to the existent social totality. Here, however, the presupposition of claims that this knowledge lasts or changes, namely the continuance of economic production and reproduction in familiar forms, really has, in a certain way, the same meaning as the claim that the subjects of knowledge are interchangeable. The fact that class society is divided does not render illusory, in this context, the equivalence of human subjects. Knowledge in this instance is itself a thing which one generation passes on to another; to the extent that

men must live, they need it. In this respect, too, then, the traditional scientist can be reassured.

The idea of a transformed society, however, does not have the advantage of widespread acceptance, as long as the idea has not yet had its real possibility tested. To strive for a state of affairs in which there will be no exploitation or oppression, in which an all-embracing subject, namely self-aware mankind, exists, and in which it is possible to speak of a unified theoretical creation and a thinking that transcends individuals—to strive for all this is not yet to bring it to pass. The transmission of the critical theory in its strictest possible form is, of course, a condition of its historical success. But the transmission will not take place via solidly established practice and fixed ways of acting but via concern for social transformation. Such a concern will necessarily be aroused ever anew by prevailing injustice, but it must be shaped and guided by the theory itself and in turn react upon the theory.

The circle of transmitters of this tradition is neither limited nor renewed by organic or sociological laws. It is constituted and maintained not by biological or testamentary inheritance, but by a knowledge which brings its own obligations with it. And even this knowledge guarantees only a contemporary, not a future community of transmitters. The theory may be stamped with the approval of every logical criterion, but to the end of the age it will lack the seal of approval which victory brings. Until then, too, the struggle will continue to grasp it aright and to apply it. A version of it which has the propaganda apparatus and a majority on its side is not therefore the better one. In the general historical upheaval the truth may reside with numerically small groups of men. History teaches us that such groups, hardly noticed even by those opposed to the status quo, outlawed but imperturbable, may at the decisive moment become the leaders because of their deeper insight.

Today, when the whole weight of the existing state of affairs is pushing mankind towards the surrender of all culture and relapse into darkest barbarism, the circle of solidarity is narrow enough. The opponents, the masters of this age of decline,

possess indeed neither fidelity nor solidarity. Such concepts, on the contrary, are elements of the right theory and practice. Cut loose from such theory and practice, these concepts change their meaning as do all parts of a living whole. It is true, of course, that in a gang of thieves, for example, positive traits of human community can make their appearance, but this very possibility points to a deficiency in the larger community within which the gang exists. In an unjust society criminals are not necessarily inferior as human beings, whereas in a fully just society they would be unhuman. Only in a context can particular judgments about what is human acquire their correct meaning.

There are no general criteria for judging the critical theory as a whole, for it is always based on the recurrence of events and thus on a self-reproducing totality. Nor is there a social class by whose acceptance of the theory one could be guided. It is possible for the consciousness of every social stratum today to be limited and corrupted by ideology, however much, for its circumstances, it may be bent on truth. For all its insight into the individual steps in social change and for all the agreement of its elements with the most advanced traditional theories, the critical theory has no specific influence on its side, except concern for the abolition of social injustice. This negative formulation, if we wish to express it abstractly, is the materialist content of the idealist concept of reason.

In a historical period like the present true theory is more critical than affirmative, just as the society that corresponds to it cannot be called "productive." The future of humanity depends on the existence today of the critical attitude, which of course contains within it elements from traditional theories and from our declining culture generally. Mankind has already been abandoned by a science which in its imaginary self-sufficiency thinks of the shaping of practice, which it serves and to which it belongs, simply as something lying outside its borders and is content with this separation of thought and action. Yet the characteristic mark of the thinker's activity is to determine for itself what it is to accomplish and serve, and this not in fragmentary

fashion but totally. Its own nature, therefore, turns it towards a changing of history and the establishment of justice among men. Behind the loud calls for "social spirit" and "national community," the opposition between individual and society grows ever greater. The self-definition of science grows ever more abstract. But conformism in thought and the insistence that thinking is a fixed vocation, a self-enclosed realm within society as a whole, betrays the very essence of thought.

Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell

POSTSCRIPT¹

IN the preceding essay I pointed out two ways of knowing: one is based on the *Discourse on Method*, the other on Marx's critique of political economy. Theory in the traditional sense established by Descartes and everywhere practiced in the pursuit of the specialized sciences organizes experience in the light of questions which arise out of life in present-day society. The resultant network of disciplines contains information in a form which makes it useful in any particular circumstances for the greatest possible number of purposes. The social genesis of problems, the real situations in which science is put to use, and the purposes which it is made to serve are all regarded by science as external to itself.

The critical theory of society, on the other hand, has for its object men as producers of their own historical way of life in its totality. The real situations which are the starting-point of science are not regarded simply as data to be verified and to be predicted according to the laws of probability. Every datum depends not on nature alone but also on the power man has over it. Objects, the kind of perception, the questions asked, and the meaning of the answers all bear witness to human activity and the degree of man's power.

In thus relating matter—that is, the apparently irreducible facts which the scientific specialist must respect—to human

1. The "Postscript" appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, volume 6, number 3, along with an essay by Herbert Marcuse entitled "Philosophie und kritische Theorie." Marcuse's essay has since been reprinted in his *Kultur und Gesellschaft*, volume 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1965), pages 102ff. English translation: "Philosophy and critical theory," in: *Negations. Essays in Critical Theory*, with translations from the German by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Postor: Beacon Press, 1968).

production, the critical theory of society agrees with German idealism. Ever since Kant, idealism has insisted on the dynamic moment in the relationship and has protested against the adoration of facts and the social conformism this brings with it. "As in mathematics," says Fichte, "so in one's whole view of the world; the only difference is that in interpreting the world one is unconscious that he is interpreting, for the interpretation takes place necessarily, not freely."² This thought was a commonplace in German idealism. But the activity exercised on the matter presented to man was regarded as intellectual; it was the activity of a metempirical consciousness-in-itself, an absolute ego, the spirit, and consequently the victory over the dumb, unconscious, irrational side of this activity took place in principle in the person's interior, in the realm of thought.

In the materialist conception, on the contrary, the basic activity involved is work in society, and the class-related form of this work puts its mark on all human patterns of reaction, including theory. The intervention of reason in the processes whereby knowledge and its object are constituted, or the subordination of these processes to conscious control, does not take place therefore in a purely intellectual world, but coincides with the struggle for certain real ways of life.

The elaboration of theories in the traditional sense is regarded in our society as an activity set off from other scientific and nonscientific activities, needing to know nothing of the historical goals and tendencies of which such activity is a part. But the critical theory in its concept formation and in all phases of its development very consciously makes its own that concern for the rational organization of human activity which it is its task to illumine and legitimate. For this theory is not concerned only with goals already imposed by existent ways of life, but with men and all their potentialities.

To that extent the critical theory is the heir not only of German idealism but of philosophy as such. It is not just a re-

2. Fichte, "Logik und Metaphysik," in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, volume 2 (Berlin, 1937), p. 47.

search hypothesis which shows its value in the ongoing business of men; it is an essential element in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men. However extensive the interaction between the critical theory and the special sciences whose progress the theory must respect and on which it has for decades exercised a liberating and stimulating influence, the theory never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery. In this it resembles Greek philosophy, not so much in the Hellenistic age of resignation as in the golden age of Plato and Aristotle. After the fruitless political projects of both these men the Stoics and Epicureans confined themselves to developing a doctrine of individualistic practices. The new dialectical philosophy, however, has held on to the realization that the free development of individuals depends on the rational constitution of society. In radically analyzing present social conditions it became a critique of the economy.

Critique, however, is not identical with its object. Philosophy has not provided a teaching on national economy. The curves of the mathematical political economics of our day are no more able to maintain a link with essentials than are positivist or existential philosophy. Concepts in these disciplines have lost any relation to the fundamental situations of the age. Rigorous investigation has always required the isolating of structures, but today the guidelines for this process are no longer being supplied, as in Adam Smith's time, by conscious, inspiring, historical concerns. Modern analyses have lost all connection with any rounded knowledge that deals with historical reality. It is left to others or to a later generation or to accident to establish a relation of the analyses to reality and specific goals. As long as there is a social demand for and recognition of such activity, the sciences are not disturbed by reality or leave the care of it to other disciplines, for example sociology or philosophy, which of course act the same way in turn. The forces which guide the life of society, those rulers of the day, are thereby tacitly accepted by science itself as judges of its meaning and value, and knowledge is declared powerless.

Unlike modern specialized science, however, the critical theory of society has continued to be a philosophical discipline even when it engages in a critique of the economy. For its content is the transformation of the concepts which dominate the economy into their opposites: fair exchange into a deepening of social injustice, a free economy into monopolistic control, productive work into rigid relationships which hinder production, the maintenance of society's life into the pauperization of the peoples. Of central importance here is not so much what remains unchanged as the historical movement of the period which is now approaching its end. *Capital* is no less exact in its analyses than the political economics it criticizes, but in even its most refined estimates of particular, periodically recurring events knowledge of the historical course of society as a whole supplies the dynamic motif. Its distinction from the views of the pure economic specialist is due not to some special philosophical object but to its regard for the tendencies of society as a whole, which regard plays a decisive role even in the most abstract logical and economic discussions.

The philosophical character of the critical theory emerges by comparison not only with political economy but also with economism in practice. The struggle against the illusory harmonies of liberalism and the broadcasting of the contradictions immanent in it and in the abstractness of its concept of freedom have been taken up verbally in very different parts of the world and turned into reactionary slogans. The economy must serve man, not man the economy: this is in the mouths of the very men who have always meant by the economy their own patrons. Society as a whole and the community are being glorified by people who cannot think of them in their simple and proper meaning but only in opposition to the individual. They are identified with the depraved order of things which these people themselves represent. In the concept of "holy egoism" and of the vital concerns of the imaginary "national community," the concern of real men for an uninhibited development and a happy existence is confused with the hunger of influential groups for power.

The popular materialism of practice pure and simple, which dialectical materialism criticizes, is camouflaged by idealist slogans whose very transparency makes them attractive to its most faithful practitioners, and it has become the real religion of the age.⁸ Professional scholars, eager to conform, may reject every connection of their disciplines with so-called value judgments and firmly pursue the separation of thought and political attitude. But the real wielders of power in their nihilism take such rejections of illusion with brutal seriousness. Value judgments, they say, belong either in the nation's poetry or in the people's courts but certainly not in the tribunals of thought. The critical theory, on the contrary, having the happiness of all individuals as its goal, does not compromise with continued misery, as do the scientific servants of authoritarian States. Reason's intuition of itself, regarded by philosophy in former times as the highest degree of happiness, is transformed in modern philosophy into the materialist concept of a free, self-determining society, while retaining from idealism the conviction that men have other possibilities than to lose themselves in the status quo or to accumulate power and profit.

Some elements of the critical theory reappear, with a distorted meaning, in the theory and practice of its opponents. To such an extent, since the setback of all progressive efforts in the developed countries of Europe, has confusion spread even among the enemies of such efforts. The abolition of social relationships which presently hinder development is in fact the next historical goal. But abolition is a dialectical concept. The takeover of what belongs to the individual into the state's keeping, the spread of industry, even in the widespread satisfaction

3. The form and the content of faith are not indifferent to each other. What is believed influences the act of holding something to be true. The contents of nationalist ideology, which are inconsistent with the level the mind has reached in the industrial world, are not known the way a truth is known. Even the most devoted accept these contents only at the surface of their minds, and all know what the real truth of the matter is. If the listeners realize that the speaker does not believe what he is saying, his power over them is only increased. They bask in the sun of his maliciousness. When circumstances get very much worse, such a community, of course, will not survive.

of the masses are facts whose historical significance is determined only by the nature of the totality to which they belong. However important they may be in comparison with realities which are survivals from the past, they can nonetheless be swept up with the latter into a retrogressive movement. The old world is in decline because of an outdated principle of economic organization, and the cultural collapse is bound up with it as well. The economy is the first cause of wretchedness, and critique, theoretical and practical, must address itself primarily to it.

It would be mechanistic, not dialectical thinking, however, to judge the future forms of society solely according to their economy. Historical change does not leave untouched the relations between the spheres of culture, and if in the present state of society economy is the master of man and therefore the lever by which he is to be moved to change, in the future men must themselves determine all their relationships in the face of natural necessities. Economics in isolation will therefore not provide the norm by which the community of men is to be measured. This is also true for the period of transition in which politics will win a new independence from the economy. Only at the end of that period will political problems be reduced to simple problems of administration. Before that point is reached the whole situation can change; thus even the character of the transition remains indeterminate.

Economism, to which the critical theory is often reduced, does not consist in giving too much importance to the economy, but in giving it too narrow a scope. The theory is concerned with society as a whole, but this broad scope is forgotten in economism where limited phenomena are made the final court of appeal. According to critical theory the present economy is essentially determined by the fact that the goods which men produce beyond their needs do not pass directly into the hands of society but are privately acquired and exchanged. The abolition of this state of affairs aims at a higher principle of economic organization and not at all at some philosophical utopia. The old principle drives mankind into a series of catastrophes. But the concept of socialization, which describes the change to a new

state of society, contains more than elements from political economy or jurisprudence. If industrial production is under state control, this is a historical fact the significance of which in the critical theory would have to be analyzed for each state. Whether a real socialization is going on, that is, whether a higher principle of economic life is actually being developed, does not depend simply on, for example, a change in certain property relations or on increased productivity in new forms of social collaboration. It depends just as much on the nature and development of the society in which all these particular developments are taking place. The issue, then, is the real nature of the new relations of production.

Even if "natural privileges" which depend on individual talent and efficiency continue to exist for a while, at least no new social privileges are to replace them. In such a provisional situation inequality must not be allowed to become fixed but must be increasingly eliminated. What is to be produced and how, whether relatively fixed social groups with special interests are to exist and social distinctions to be preserved or even deepened, furthermore the active relation of the individual to government, the relation of key administrative acts involving individuals to their own knowledge and will, the dependence of all situations that can be mastered by men upon real agreement—in brief, the degree of development of the essential elements in real democracy and partnership is part of the concept of socialization.

None of these elements is separable from the economic. The critique of economism, however, consists not in turning away from economic analysis but in engaging in it more fully and along the lines indicated by history. The dialectic theory does not practice any criticism based solely on ideas. Even in its idealist form it had rejected the notion of a good-in-itself wholly set over against reality. It does not judge by what is beyond time but by what is within time. When a totalitarian State proceeds to a partial nationalization of property, it justifies itself by appeals to community and collectivist practices. Here the falsehood is obvious. But even where steps are honestly taken,

the critical theory has the dialectical function of measuring every historical stage in the light not only of isolated data and concepts but of its primary and total content, and of being concerned that this content be vitally operative. The right philosophy today does not take the form of withdrawing from concrete economic and social analyses in order to work on empty minutiae which are related to nothing and are calculated to hide reality at every point. The critical theory has never been reducible to specialized economic science. The dependence of politics on the economy has been its object, not its program.

Among those who appeal to the critical theory today some with full awareness degrade it to being a pure rationalization of their current enterprises. Others restrict themselves to shallow concepts which even verbally have become odd-sounding and make of it a leveling-down ideology which everyone understands because no thoughts at all pass through anyone's mind. Since its beginning, however, dialectical thought has meant the most advanced state of knowledge, and it is only from this, in the last analysis, that decisive action can come. Its representatives in times of setback have always been relatively few, something it has in common with philosophy. As long as thought has not won a definitive victory, it cannot feel secure in the shadow of power. But if its concepts, which sprang from social movements, today seen empty because no one stands behind them but its pursuing persecutors, yet the truth of them will out. For the thrust towards a rational society, which admittedly seems to exist today only in the realms of fantasy, is really innate in every man.

That is not a claim that should bring a sigh of relief. For the realization of possibilities depends on historical conflicts. The truth about the future does not take the form of a verification of data which differ from others only in having some special importance. Rather, man's own will plays a part in that truth, and he may not take his ease if the prognosis is to come true. And even after the new society shall have come into existence, the happiness of its members will not make up for the wretchedness of those who are being destroyed in our contemporary society.

Nor does the theory bring salvation to those who hold it. Inseparable from drive and will, it preaches no psychic condition, as does the Stoa or Christianity. The martyrs of freedom have not sought their own peace of soul. Their philosophy was politics, and if their souls remained calm in the face of terror, this was not their goal. Nor could the dread they experienced bear witness against them.

The apparatus of power has not really gotten less refined since Galileo's penance and recantation; if it took second place to other kinds of machination in the nineteenth century, it has more than made up for its backwardness in the twentieth. Here again the end of the era proves to be a return to its beginnings, but on a higher level. Goethe said that individuality is happiness. Another poet added that its possession is a social achievement and can be lost at any time; Pirandello, who leaned towards fascism, knew his own times better than he realized. Under the totalitarian lordship of evil, men may retain not simply their lives but their very selves only by accident, and recantations mean less today than in the Renaissance. A philosophy that thinks to find peace within itself, in any kind of truth whatsoever, has therefore nothing to do with the critical theory.

Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell