Critique of Cynical Reason

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Chapter 1
Cynicism: The Twilight of False Consciousness

And indeed no longer was anyone to be seen who stood behind everything. Everything turned continually about itself. Interests changed from hour to hour. Nowhere was there a goal anymore. . . . The leaders lost their heads. They were drained to the dregs and calcified. . . . Everyone in the land began to notice that things didn't work anymore. . . . Postponing the collapse left one path open.

Franz Jung, Die Eroberung der Maschinen (1921)

The discontent in our culture has assumed a new quality: It appears as a universal, diffuse cynicism. The traditional critique of ideology stands at a loss before this cynicism. It does not know what button to push in this cynically keen consciousness to get enlightenment going. Modern cynicism presents itself as that state of consciousness that follows after naive ideologies and their enlightenment. In it, the obvious exhaustion of ideology critique has its real ground. This critique has remained more naive than the consciousness it wanted to expose; in its well-mannered rationality, it did not keep up with the twists and turns of modern consciousness to a cunning multiple realism. The formal sequence of false consciousness up to now—lies, errors, ideology—is incomplete; the current mentality requires the addition of a fourth structure: the phenomenon of cynicism. To speak of cynicism means trying to enter the old building of ideology critique through a new entrance.

It violates normal usage to describe cynicism as a universal and diffuse phenomenon; as it is commonly conceived, cynicism is not diffuse but striking, not universal but peripheral and highly individual. The unusual epithets describe something of its new manifestation, which renders it both explosive and unassailable.

The ancient world knows the cynic (better: kynic) as a lone owl and as a provocative, stubborn moralist. Diogenes in the tub is the archetype of this figure. In the picture book of social characters he has always appeared as a distance-creating mocker, as a biting and malicious individualist who acts as though he needs nobody and who is loved by nobody because nobody escapes his crude un-
masking gaze uninjured. Socially he is an urban figure who maintains his cutting edge in the goings-on of the ancient metropolises. He could be characterized as the earliest example of declassed or plebeian intelligence. His "cynical" turn against the arrogance and the moral trade secrets of higher civilization presupposes the city, together with its successes and shadows. Only in the city, as its negative profile, can the figure of the cynic crystallize in its full sharpness, under the pressure of public gossip and universal love-hate. And only the city can assimilate the cynic, who ostentatiously turns his back on it, into the group of its outstanding individuals, on whom its liking for unique, urbane personalities depends.

The fertile ground for cynicism in modern times is to be found not only in urban culture but also in the courtly sphere. Both are dives of pernicious realism through which human beings learn the crooked smile of open immorality. Here, as there, a sophisticated knowledge accumulates in informed, intelligent minds, a knowledge that moves elegantly back and forth between naked facts and conventional facades. From the very bottom, from the declassed, urban intelligentsia, and from the very top, from the summits of statesmanly consciousness, signals penetrate serious thinking, signals that provide evidence of a radical, ironic treatment (Ironisierung) of ethics and of social conventions, as if universal laws existed only for the stupid, while that fatally clever smile plays on the lips of those in the know. More precisely, it is the powerful who smile this way, while the kynical plebeians let out a satirical laugh. In the great hall of cynical knowledge the extremes meet: Eulenspiegel meets Richelieu; Machiavelli meets Rameau's nephew; the loud Condottieri of the Renaissance meet the elegant cynics of the rococo; unscrupulous entrepreneurs meet disillusioned outsiders; and jaded systems strategists meet conscientious objectors without ideals.

Since bourgeois society began to build a bridge between the knowledge of those at the very top and those at the very bottom and announced its ambition to ground its worldview completely on realism, the extremes have dissolved into each other. Today the cynic appears as a mass figure: an average social character in the upper echelons of the elevated superstructure. It is a mass figure not only because advanced industrial civilization produces the bitter loner as a mass phenomenon. Rather, the cities themselves have become diffuse clumps whose power to create generally accepted public characters has been lost. The pressure toward individualization has lessened in the modern urban and media climate. Thus modern cynics —and there have been mass numbers of them in Germany, especially since the First World War—are no longer outsiders. But less than ever do they appear as a tangibly developed type. Modern mass cynics lose their individual sting and refrain from the risk of letting themselves be put on display. They have long since ceased to expose themselves as eccentrics to the attention and mockery of others. The person with the clear, "evil gaze" has disappeared into the crowd; anonymity now becomes the domain for cynical deviation. Mod-
em cynics are integrated, asocial characters who, on the score of subliminal illusionlessness, are a match for any hippie. They do not see their clear, evil gaze as a personal defect or an amoral quirk that needs to be privately justified. Instinctively, they no longer understand their way of existing as something that has to do with being evil, but as participation in a collective, realistically attuned way of seeing things. It is the universally widespread way in which enlightened people see to it that they are not taken for suckers. There even seems to be something healthy in this attitude, which, after all, the will to self-preservation generally supports. It is the stance of people who realize that the times of naivety are gone.

Psychologically, present-day cynics can be understood as borderline melancholies, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and can remain more or less able to work. Indeed, this is the essential point in modern cynicism: the ability of its bearers to work—in spite of anything that might happen, and especially, after anything that might happen. The key social positions in boards, parliaments, commissions, executive councils, publishing companies, practices, faculties, and lawyers' and editors' offices have long since become a part of this diffuse cynicism. A certain chic bitterness provides an undertone to its activity. For cynics are not dumb, and every now and then they certainly see the nothingness to which everything leads. Their psychic (seelisch) apparatus has become elastic enough to incorporate as a survival factor a permanent doubt about their own activities. They know what they are doing, but they do it because, in the short run, the force of circumstances and the instinct for self-preservation are speaking the same language, and they are telling them that it has to be so. Others would do it anyway, perhaps worse. Thus, the new, integrated cynicism even has the understandable feeling about itself of being a victim and of making sacrifices. Behind the capable, collaborative, hard facade, it covers up a mass of offensive unhappiness and the need to cry. In this, there is something of the mourning for a "lost innocence," of the mourning for better knowledge, against which all action and labor are directed.

Thus, we come to our first definition: Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.

"Enlightened false consciousness": To choose such a formulation seems to be a blow against the tradition of enlightenment. The sentence itself is cynicism in a crystalline state. Nonetheless, it claims an objective (sachlich) validity; its content and its necessity are developed in the present essay. Logically it is a paradox, for how could enlightened consciousness still be false? This is precisely the issue here.
To act against better knowledge is today the global situation in the superstructure; it knows itself to be without illusions and yet to have been dragged down by the "power of things." Thus what is regarded in logic as a paradox and in literature as a joke appears in reality as the actual state of affairs. Thus emerges a new attitude of consciousness toward "objectivity."

"Enlightened false consciousness": This formulation should be regarded not as an incidental phrase but as a systematic approach, as a diagnostic model. It thus commits itself to a revision of enlightenment; it must clarify its relation to what is traditionally called "false consciousness"; further, it must review the course of enlightenment and the labor of ideology critique, in whose development it was possible for "false consciousness" to reabsorb enlightenment. If this essay had historical intentions, it would be to describe the modernization of false consciousness. But the intention here on the whole is not historical but physiognomic: The focus is on the structure of a reflexively buffered false consciousness. Nevertheless, I want to show that this structure cannot be grasped without localizing it in a political history of polemical reflections.4

There can be no healthy relation of modern-day enlightenment to its own history without sarcasm. We have to choose between a pessimism that remains "loyal" to its origins and reminds one of decadence and a lighthearted disrespect in the continuation of the original tasks. As things stand, the only loyalty to enlightenment consists in disloyalty. This can be partly understood from the position of its heirs, who look back on the "heroic" times and are necessarily more skeptical of the results. To be an heir always carries a certain "status cynicism"5 with it, as is well known from stories about the inheritance of family capital. The retrospective position alone, however, does not explain the particular tone of modern cynicism. Disillusionment with enlightenment is by no means only a sign that epigones can and must be more critical than the founders. The characteristic odor of modern cynicism is of a more fundamental nature—a constitution of consciousness afflicted with enlightenment that, having learned from historical experience, refuses cheap optimism. New values? No thanks! With the passing of defiant hopes, the listlessness of egoisms pervades. In the new cynicism, a detached negativity comes through that scarcely allows itself any hope, at most a little irony and pity.

In the final analysis, it is a matter of the social and existential limits of enlightenment. The compulsion to survive and desire to assert itself have demoralized enlightened consciousness. It is afflicted with the compulsion to put up with preestablished relations that it finds dubious, to accommodate itself to them, and finally even to carry out their business.

In order to survive, one must be schooled in reality. Of course. Those who mean well call it growing up, and there is a grain of truth to that. But that is not all. Always a bit unsettled and irritable, collaborating consciousness looks around
for its lost naivete, to which there is no way back, because consciousness-raising is irreversible.

Gottfried Benn, himself one of the prominent speakers on the structure of modern cynicism, has probably provided the formulation of the century for cynicism, lucid and unabashed: "To be dumb and have a job, that's happiness." But it is the converse of the sentence that really reveals its full content: "To be intelligent and still perform one's work, that is unhappy consciousness in its modernized form, afflicted with enlightenment. Such consciousness cannot become dumb and trust again; innocence cannot be regained. It persists in its belief in the gravitational pull of the relations to which it is bound by its instinct for self-preservation. In for a penny, in for a pound. At two thousand marks net a month, counterenlightenment quietly begins; it banks on the fact that all those who have something to lose come to terms privately with their unhappy consciousness or cover it over with "engagements."

The new cynicism, precisely because it is lived as a private disposition that absorbs the world situation, does not glaringly draw attention to itself in a way that would correspond to the concept itself. It envelops itself in discretion—as we will soon see, this is a key word for charmingly mediated alienation. The self-cognizant accommodation, which has sacrificed its better judgment to "compulsions," no longer sees any reason to expose itself aggressively and spectacularly. There is a nakedness that no longer has an unmasking effect and in which no "naked fact" appears on whose grounds one could position oneself with serene realism. There is something lamentable about the neocynical accommodation to given circumstances; it is no longer self-confidently naked. For this reason it is also methodologically quite difficult to bring this diffuse, murky cynicism to expression. It has withdrawn into a mournful detachment that internalizes its knowledge as though it were something to be ashamed of, and as a consequence, it is rendered useless for taking the offensive. The great offensive parades of cynical impudence have become a rarity; ill-humor has taken its place, and there is no energy left for sarcasm. Gehlen even thought that today not even the English can be cutting any more because their reserves of dissatisfaction have been consumed and the rationing of stocks has begun. The discontent that follows offensives does not open its mouth wide enough for enlightenment to gain anything.

That is one of the reasons why, in later chapters, a disproportionate amount of "cynical material" from the Weimar Republic is cited—in addition to older documents that are also given attention. In the introduction to Part V, I attempt a physiognomy of an epoch. Here a decade is characterized whose first descendant was fascism and whose second descendant is us.

To speak of the Weimar Republic means, as it always has, to immerse oneself in social consciousness-raising. For reasons that can be enumerated, Weimar culture was cynically disposed like scarcely any previous culture; it gave birth to an
abundance of brilliantly articulated cynicisms, which read like textbook examples. It experienced the pain of modernization more violently and expressed its disillusionment more coldly and more sharply than the present could ever do. We discover in it superb formulations of modern unhappy consciousness, crucially relevant even today; indeed, their general validity is perhaps only today really comprehensible.

A critique of cynical reason would remain an academic glass bead game if it did not pursue the connection between the problem of survival and the danger of fascism. In fact, the question of "survival," of self-preservation and self-assertion, to which all cynicisms provide answers, touches on the central problem of holding the fort and planning for the future in modern nation-states. Through various approaches, I attempt to fix the logical locus of German fascism in the convolutions of modern, self-reflective cynicism. This much can be said in advance: In German fascism the typically modern dynamics of psychocultural fear of disintegration, regressive self-assertion, and objective, cold rationality combines with a time-honored strain of military cynicism that on German, and especially Prussian, soil enjoys an equally macabre and deep-rooted tradition.

Perhaps these considerations about cynicism, as the fourth configuration of false consciousness, will help to overcome the characteristic speechlessness of genuinely philosophical critique regarding so-called Fascist ideology. Philosophy as a "discipline" has no real thesis about "theoretical fascism" because it basically considers the latter to be beneath all critique. The explanations of fascism as nihilism (Rauschning et al.) or as the product of "totalitarian thinking" remain diffuse and imprecise. The "inauthentic," patchwork character of Fascist ideology has already been sufficiently emphasized, and everything it wanted to represent as substantial statements has long since been radically criticized by the individual sciences: psychology, political science, sociology, historiography. For philosophy, the programmatic statements of fascism do not even rate as a serious, substantial ideology over which a reflective critique would really have to toil. But herein lies the weak point-of-critique. It remains fixated on "serious opponents," and with this attitude it neglects the task of comprehending the ideological template of "unserious," shallow "systems." To this day critique has thus not been a match for this modern blend of opinion and cynicism. But since questions of social and individual self-preservation are discussed precisely in such blends, there are good reasons for concerning oneself with their composition. Questions of self-preservation must be approached in the same language as those of self-destruction (Selbstvernichtung). The same logic in the repudiation of morality seems to operate in them. I call it the logic of the "cynical structure," that is, of the self-repudiation of refined ethics. Elucidating this structure will clarify what it would mean to opt for life.
Notes

1. [This alludes to the work by Freud.-Trans.]
2. The first movement (Aufhebung) of this definition takes place in chapter 5, the second in Part II.
3. [This refers to a subchapter in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. —Trans.]
4. See the six cardinal cynicisms, chapter 8.
5. [A cynicism deriving from social status (Positionszynismus). —Trans.]
6. See the second critique of religion, chapter 3.
Chapter 2
Enlightenment as Dialogue: Critique of Ideology as Continuation of the Miscarried Dialogue through Other Means

Those who speak of cynicism will recall the limits of enlightenment. In this respect, focusing on the salient features of Weimar cynicism, apart from the advantage of making things clearer, also promises to be fruitful for the philosophy of history. The Weimar Republic represents in the course of German history not only a product of delayed development to nation-state-heavily burdened by the Wilhelminian legacy, the spirit of a cynically illiberal political system—but also a paradigm for "enlightenment miscarried."

It has often been shown how and why the early champions of republican enlightenment at that time could not have been anything else but a desperately well intentioned minority of representatives of reason against almost insurmountable odds: massive currents of antienlightenment and hatred for the intelligentsia; an array of antidemocratic and authoritarian ideologies that knew how to effectively organize the public sphere; an aggressive nationalism with a desire for revenge; an unenlightenable confusion of stubborn conservatisms, displaced petty bourgeois, messianic religious sects, apocalyptic political views, and equally realistic and psychopathological rejections of the demands of a disagreeable modernity. The wounds of the war kept getting infected in the smoldering crisis; Nietzscheanism continued to be rampant—as the most prominent style of thinking for the German-narcissistic sulkiness and for the moody, arrogant, "protestant" relationship to a "bad reality." The climate of crisislike agitation produced a penetrating psychopolitical oscillation between fear of the future and resentment, unstable pseudorealisms and psychic makeshifts. If ever an epoch called for a historical
psychopathology, it is the decade and a half between the fall of the empire and the establishment of national socialism.

The first impression turns out to be right here: Those who sought to promote enlightenment in such a society fought a losing battle. The powers of enlightenment were too weak for a precise number of reasons. Enlightenment was never able to ally itself effectively with the mass media, and individual self-determination was never an ideal for industrial monopolies and their organizations. How could it have been?

Obviously enlightenment is fragmented through the resistance of powers opposed to it. It would be wrong, however, to regard this only as a question of power arithmetic. For enlightenment is fragmented equally by a qualitative resistance in the opponent's consciousness. The latter fiercely resists the invitation to discussion and the undermining talk about truth; even talking itself is resented because through it conventional views, values, and forms of self-assertion are brought into question. The interpretation of this resistance as a basic principle of ideology has become one of the main motifs of enlightenment.

It is not only in modern times that enlightenment has had to deal with an opposed consciousness that has increasingly entrenched itself in impregnable positions. In principle, the front can be traced back to the days of the Inquisition. If it is true that knowledge is power, as taught by the workers' movement, it is also true that not all knowledge is welcomed with open arms. Because there are no truths that can be taken possession of without a struggle, and because all knowledge must choose a place in the configuration of hegemonic and oppositional forces, the means of establishing knowledge seem to be almost more important than the knowledge itself. In modern times, enlightenment shows itself to be a tactical complex. The demand to universalize the rational draws it into the vortex of politics, pedagogy, and propaganda. With this, enlightenment consciously represses the harsh realism of older precepts of wisdom, for which there was no question that the masses are foolish and that reason is to be found only among the few. Modern elitism has to encode itself democratically.

It is not our task to give a historical account of the waning of enlightenment. We know that, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in spite of considerable resistance and many contradictions, it succeeded for the most part, with its sights set on its own achievements and plans, in dealing productively and progressively with the ferment of self-doubt. In spite of all hardships and setbacks to its development, it could still believe it had the law of progress on its side. Great names of that time bring to mind great achievements: Watt, Pasteur, Koch, Siemens. One can reject their achievements with disgruntlement, but that would be a gesture of mood, not of fairness. The press, the railroads, social welfare, penicillin—who could deny that these are remarkable innovations in the "garden of humanity"? However, since the technological atrocities of the twentieth century, from Verdun to the Gulag, from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, experience
scorns all optimism. Historical consciousness and pessimism seem to amount to the same thing. And the catastrophes that have not yet happened, which are waiting in the wings, nurture the ever-present doubt about civilization. The late twentieth century rides on a wave of negative futurism. "The worst was already expected," it just has "not yet" happened.

First, I want to restrict the theme of dissatisfied enlightenment to one point: the question concerning the means of power available to enlightenment confronted by an opposed consciousness. To inquire about "means of power" is already in a certain way incorrect, since enlightenment is essentially a matter of free consent. It is that "doctrine" that does not want to attribute its success to any pressure other than reason. One of its axes is reason; the other is the free dialogue of those striving for reason. Its methodological core and its moral ideal at one and the same time are voluntary consensus. By this is meant that the opposed consciousness does not change its position under any influence other than that of convincing argumentation.

It is a matter of a sublimely peaceful event, where, under the impact of plausible reasons, old, now untenable opinions are given up. Enlightenment thus con-
tains within itself, so to speak, a Utopian archaic scene—an epistemological idyll of peace, a beautiful and academic vision: that of the free dialogue of those who, under no external compulsion, are interested in knowledge. Here, dispassionate individuals, not enslaved to their own consciousness and not repressed by social ties, come together for a dialogue directed at truth under the laws of reason. The truth enlighteners want to disseminate arises through a noncoerced, but compelling, acceptance of stronger arguments. The protagonist or discoverer of an enlightened thought has taken this step only a short time earlier, usually by surrendering an earlier opinion.

The procedure of enlightenment accordingly has two aspects: the acceptance of the better position and the discarding of the previous opinion. This gives rise to an ambivalence of feelings: a gain and a pain. The Utopia of a gentle, critical dialogue foresees this difficulty. The pain becomes bearable in consciousness so that it can be voluntarily accepted among colleagues as the price of commonality. The "losers" can view themselves as the real winners. Thus, the dialogue of enlightenment is essentially nothing other than a laborious wrestling with opinions and an exploratory dialogue among persons who submit a priori to rules of peace because they emerge from the confrontation only as winners, winners in knowledge and solidarity. For this reason, it is assumed that parting from previous opinions can be overcome.

An academic idyll, as I have said—at the same time the regulative idea of any enlightenment that does not want to give up its hope for reconciliation. That things proceed differently in reality will surprise no one. In the confrontations of enlightenment with preceding stances of consciousness, everything but truth is at stake: hegemonic positions, class interests, established doctrines, desires, passions, and the defense of "identities." These impediments so strongly remold the dialogue of enlightenment that it would be more appropriate to talk of a war of consciousness than a dialogue of peace. The opponents do not submit themselves to a previously agreed upon peace treaty; rather they confront each other in a competition directed at banishment and annihilation; and they are not free in relation to the powers that force their consciousness to speak just so, and in no other way.

Faced with these sober facts, the discourse model reacts in a consciously unrealistic way. It allows the archpragmatic statement primum vivere, deinde philosophari to hold only conditionally; for it knows at least this much: Situations will recur repeatedly where "philosophizing" is the only thing that can help life along.

It is tempting to poke fun at the "methodological antirealism" of the dialogue idea, and part of this book indeed tries to help the derisive laughter about every torm of foolish idealism get its due. However, when all contradictions have been taken into account, one will return here to the beginning, of course with a con-
sciousness that has gone through all the hells of realism. To preserve the healing fiction of a free dialogue is one of the last tasks of philosophy.

Of course, enlightenment itself is the first to notice that it will not "pull through" with rational and verbal dialogue alone. No one can feel the faltering, the distorted assumptions about life, the ruptures, the miscarriage of the dialogue more keenly than it. At the beginning of ideology critique there is also astonishment because the opponent is so hard of hearing—an astonishment that quickly gives way to a realistic awakening. Whoever does not want to hear, lets others come to feel. Enlightenment is reminded how easily speaking openly can lead to camps and prisons. Hegemonic powers cannot be addressed so easily; they do not come voluntarily to the negotiating table with their opponents, whom they would prefer to have behind bars. But even tradition, if one is allowed to speak allegorically about it, initially has no interest in granting equal rights of speech to enlighteners. From the dawn of time, human sentiment has regarded the old as the true, the new always as something questionable. This "archaic" feeling for truth had to be subdued by enlightenment, before we could see the new as the true. Earlier, one took for granted that political and spiritual hegemonic powers were allied in a conservative front, disinclined to all innovations. Wherever spiritual reforms took place (I have in mind, above all, the monastic movements of the Middle Ages and the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century), they saw themselves as "conservative revolutions" obeying a call for a return to the roots. Finally, in addition to hegemonic powers and traditions, people's minds, already too full, constitute a third authority that does not really care to listen to the spirit of enlightened innovation. They counter enlightenment with the resistance of ingrained habits and established attitudes that firmly occupy the space of consciousness and that can be brought to listen to a reason other than conventional wisdom only in exceptional circumstances. However, the vessel of knowledge cannot be filled twice. Enlightenment as critique recognizes in everything that is "already there" in people's minds its inner archenemy; it gives this enemy a contemptuous name: prejudices.

The threefold polemic in a critique of power, in the struggle against tradition, and in a war against prejudices is part of the traditional image of enlightenment. All three imply a struggle with opponents disinclined to dialogue. Enlightenment wants to talk to them about things that hegemonic powers and traditions prefer to keep quiet about: reason, justice, equality, freedom, truth, research. Through silence, the status quo is more likely to remain secure. Through talk, one is pursuing an uncertain future. Enlightenment enters this dialogue virtually empty-handed; it has only the fragile offer of free consent to the better argument. If it could gain acceptance by force, it would be not enlightenment but a variation of a free consciousness. Thus, it is true: As a rule, people stick to their positions for anything but "rational" reasons. What can be done?

Enlightenment has tried to make the best of this situation. Since nothing was
freely given to it, it developed almost from the beginning—besides the friendly invitation to a conversation—a second, combative stance. It receives blows, so it returns them. Some exchanges are so old that it would be senseless to ask who started them. The history of ideology critique comprises to a large extent the history of this second, polemical gesture, the history of a great counteroffensive. Such critique, as theory of struggle, serves enlightenment in a twofold way: as a weapon against a hardened, conservative-complacent consciousness, and as an instrument for practice and gaining inner strength. The refusal of the opponents to engage in dialogue for enlightenment is of such enormous significance that it becomes a theoretical issue. Those who do not want to participate in enlightenment must have their reasons, and they are probably not the alleged reasons. Resistance itself becomes a topic in enlightenment. The opponents thus necessarily become "cases," their consciousness an object. Because they do not want to talk with us, we have to talk about them. But as in every combative attitude, the opponents are from then on thought of not as egos but as apparatuses in which, partly openly, partly secretly, a mechanism of resistance is at work that renders them unfree and leads them to errors and illusions.

Ideology critique means the polemical continuation of the miscarried dialogue through other means. It declares a war on consciousness, even when it pretends to be so serious and "nonpolemical." The rules for peace are in substance rescinded. At this point it becomes clear that there is no intersubjectivity that could not equally well be interobjectivity. In hitting and being hit, both parties become subjective objects for each other. Strictly speaking, ideology critique wants not merely to "hit," but to operate with precision, in the surgical and military sense: to outflank and expose opponents, to reveal the opponents' intentions. Exposing implies laying out the mechanism of false and unfree consciousness.

In principle, enlightenment knows only two grounds for falsity: error and will. At best, only the latter can possess the dignity of a subject, for only when opponents consciously lie does the "wrong opinion" possess an ego. If one assumes error, the wrong opinion rests not on an ego but on a mechanism that falsifies the right opinion. Only a lie bears responsibility for itself, whereas an error, because it is mechanical, remains in relative "innocence." Error, however, quickly splits into two different phenomena: the simple error (which is based on logical or perceptual delusion and can be corrected relatively easily) and the persistent, systematic error (which clings to its own conditions of existence and is called ideology). Thus arise the classic series of forms of false consciousness: lie, error, ideology.

Every struggle leads necessarily to a reciprocal reification of subjects. Because enlightenment cannot give up its claim of imposing better insights against a self-structuring consciousness, it must basically "operate" behind the opponent's consciousness. Thus, ideology critique acquires a cruel aspect that, if it ever really mits to being cruel, claims to be nothing more than a reaction to the cruelties
of "ideology." Here it becomes clearer than anywhere else that "philosophical" ideology critique is truly the heir of a great satirical tradition, in which the motif of unmasking, exposing, baring has served for aeons now as a weapon. But modern ideology critique—according to our thesis has ominously cut itself off from the powerful traditions of laughter in satirical knowledge, which have their roots in ancient kynicism. Recent ideology critique already appears in respectable garb, and in Marxism and especially in psychoanalysis it has even put on suit and tie so as to completely assume an air of bourgeois respectability. It has given up its life as satire, in order to win its position in books as "theory." From the lively form of heated polemic it has retreated to those positions taken in a cold war of consciousness. Heinrich Heine was one of the last authors of classical enlightenment who literarily defended, in open satire, the rights of ideology critique to "just atrocities"; here, the public has not followed him. The bourgeois transformation of satire into ideology critique was as inevitable as the bourgeois transformation of society, in general, together with its oppositional forces.

Ideology critique, having become respectable, imitates surgical procedure: Cut open the patient with the critical scalpel and operate under impeccably sterile conditions. The opponent is cut open in front of everyone, until the mechanism of his error is laid bare. The outer skin of delusion and the nerve endings of "actual" motives are hygienically separated and prepared. From then on, enlightenment is not satisfied, of course, but it is better armed in its insistence on its own claims for the distant future. Ideology critique is now interested not in winning over the vivisected opponent but in focusing on the "corpse," the critical extract
of its ideas, which lie in the libraries of enlighteners and in which one can easily
read about their grave falsity. Obviously one does not get any closer to the oppo-

ten in this way. Those who previously did not want to engage in enlightenment
will want to do so even less now that they have been dissected and exposed by
the opponent. Of course, according to the logic of the game, the enlightener will
at least be victorious: Sooner or later, the opponent will be forced to respond
apologetically.

Irritated by the attacks and "unmaskings," the counterenlighteners will one day
begin to conduct their own "enlightenment" on the enlighteners, in order to de-
nounce them as human beings and to associate them socially with criminals. They
are then usually called "elements." The word is unintentionally well chosen, since
wanting to fight the elements does not sound very promising. Eventually, it can-
not be avoided; the hegemonic powers begin to talk indiscreetly. Then, increas-
ingly irritated, they reveal something of their secrets; universally acknowledged
cultural ideals are thereby cunningly retracted. In the compulsion of the
weakened hegemonic powers to confess, as remains to be shown, lies one of the
roots of the modern cynical structure.

Without wanting to, "dissatisfied enlightenment" has, in turn, entrenched itself
on this front. Threatened by its own fatigue and undermined by the need for seri-
ousness, it often remains content with having wrung involuntary confessions from
its opponent. In fact, in time, the experienced eye will see "confessions" every-
where, and even when the hegemonic power shoots instead of negotiating, it will
not be difficult to interpret bullets as the revelations of a fundamental weakness-
that is how those powers express themselves that have no imagination and that'
in order to save themselves, cling to nothing more than their strong nerves and executive organs.

Arguing behind the back and through the head of the opponent has become common practice in modern critique. The gesture of exposure characterizes the style of argumentation of ideology critique, from the critique of religion in the eighteenth century to the critique of fascism in the twentieth. Everywhere, one discovers extrarational mechanisms of opinion: interests, passions, fixations, illusions. That helps a bit to mitigate the scandalous contradiction between the postulated unity of truth and the factual plurality of opinions—since it cannot be eliminated. Under these assumptions, a true theory would be one that not only grounds its own theses best, but also knows how to defuse all significant and persistent counterpositions through ideology critique. In this point, as one can easily see, official Marxism has the greatest ambition, since the major part of its theoretical energy is dedicated to outdoing all non-Marxist theories and exposing them as "bourgeois ideologies." Only by continually outdoing the others, can ideologists succeed in "living" with the plurality of ideologies. De facto, the critique of ideology implies the attempt to construct a hierarchy between unmasking and unmasked theory. In the war of consciousness, getting on top, that is, achieving a synthesis of claims to power and better insights, is crucial.

Since, in the business of critique, contrary to academic custom, ad hominem arguments are used unhesitatingly, universities have, probably deliberately, moved cautiously toward the procedures of ideology critique. For the attack from the flank, the argumentum ad personam, is strongly disapproved of in the "academic community." Respectable critique meets its opponent in its best form; critique honors itself when it overwhelms its rival in the full armor of its rationality. For as long as possible, the learned collegium has tried to defend its integrity against the close combat of ideologico-critical exposures. Do not unmask, lest you yourself be unmasked could be the unspoken rule. It is no accident that the great representatives of critique—the French moralists, the Encyclopedists, the socialists, and especially Heine, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—remain outsiders to the scholarly domain. In all of them there is a satirical, polemical component that can scarcely be hidden under the mask of scholarly respectability. These signals of a holy nonseriousness, which remains one of the sure indexes of truth, can be employed as signposts to the critique of cynical reason. We will find a reliably unreliable traveling companion in Heinrich Heine, who displayed a knack, unsurpassed to the present day, for combining theory and satire, cognition and entertainment. Here, following in his tracks, we want to try to reunite the capacities for truth in literature, satire, and art with those of "scholarly discourse."

The right of ideology critique to use ad hominem arguments was indirectly acknowledged even by the strictest absolutist of reason, J. G. Fichte, whom Heine aptly compared to Napoleon when he said that the kind of philosophy one chooses
depends on the kind of person one is. This critique intrudes into the conditions under which human beings form opinions with either compassionate serenity or cruel seriousness. It seizes error from behind and tears at its roots in practical life. This procedure is not exactly modest, but its immodesty is excused with a reference to the principle of the unity of truth. What is brought to light by the vivisecting approach is the everlasting embarrassment of ideas confronted by the interests underlying them: human, all too human; egoisms, class privileges, resentments, steadfastness of hegemonic powers. Under such illumination, the opposing subject appears not only psychologically but also sociologically and politically undermined. Accordingly, its standpoint can be understood only if one adds to its self-portrayals what is, in fact, hidden behind and below them. In this way, ideology critique raises a claim that it shares with hermeneutics, namely, the claim to understand an "author" better than he understands himself. What at first sounds arrogant about this claim can be methodologically justified. Others often really do perceive things about me that escape my attention—and conversely. They possess the advantage of distance, which I can profit from only retrospectively through dialogic mirroring. This, of course, would presuppose a functioning dialogue, which is precisely what does not take place in the process of ideology critique.

An ideology critique that does not clearly accept its identity as satire can, however, easily be transformed from an instrument in the search for truth into one of dogmatism. All too often, it interferes with the capacity for dialogue instead of opening up new paths for it. This explains, leaving general antischolastic and antiintellectual feelings aside, a part of the current dissatisfaction with the critique of ideology.

Thus it happens that an ideology critique that presents itself as science, because it is not allowed to be satire, gets more and more entangled in serious radical solutions. One of these is its striking tendency to seek refuge in psychopathology. False consciousness appears first of all as sick consciousness. Almost all important works of the twentieth century on the phenomenon of ideology do the same thing—from Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich to R. D. Laing and David Cooper, not to mention Joseph Gabel, who has pushed the analogy between ideology and schizophrenia furthest. Those stances are suspected of being sick that loudly proclaim themselves to be the healthiest, most normal, and natural. The reliance of critique on psychopathology, although probably well justified, risks alienating the opponent more and more deeply; it reifies and diminishes the other's reality. In the end, the critic of ideology stands before the opposing consciousness like one of those modern, highly specialized pathologists who can, of course, say precisely what kind of pathological disturbance the patient is suffering from but knows nothing about appropriate therapies because that is not his specialty. Such critics, like some medicos corrupted by their profession, are interested in the diseases, not in the patients.
The most humorless reification of every opposing consciousness has grown out of the ideology critique that bases itself on Marx (I will not go into whether this is proper use or misuse of Marx). The radical reification of the opponent is in any case of factual consequence of the politico-economic realism characteristic of Marxian theory. However, here an additional motif comes into play: If all other exposures trace false consciousness back to seamy features of the human totality (lies, nastiness, egoism, repression, split consciousness, illusion, wishful thinking, etc.), the Marxian exposure runs up against the nonsubjective, the laws of the politico-economic process as a whole. When ideologies are criticized from a politico-economic perspective, one never really gets down to "human weaknesses." Rather, one hits on an abstract social mechanism in which individual persons, as members of classes, have distinct functions: as capitalist, as proletarian, as intermediate functionary, as theoretical hack for the system. However, neither in the head nor in the components of the system is there any clarity about the nature of the whole. Each of its members is mystified in a way corresponding to its position. Even the capitalist, in spite of practical experience with capital, finds no true image of the total structure, but remains a necessarily deceived epiphenomenon of the process of capital.

It is here that a second offshoot of modern cynicism grows. As soon as I assume, in Marx's formulation, a "necessarily false consciousness," the spiral of reification is turned even further. There would then be in the minds of human beings precisely those errors that have to be in them so that the system can function—toward its collapse. In the gaze of the Marxist system-critic, there glitters an irony that is a priori condemned to cynicism. For the critic admits that ideologies, which from an external point of view are false consciousness, are, seen from the inside, precisely the right consciousness. Ideologies appear simply as the appropriate errors in the corresponding minds: the "correct false consciousness." This echoes the definition of cynicism given in the first preliminary reflection (chapter 1). The difference is that the Marxist critic gives "correct false consciousness" the chance to enlighten itself or to be enlightened—through Marxism. Then, in the critic's opinion, it would have become true consciousness, not "enlightened false consciousness," as the formula for cynicism says. Theoretically, the perspective of emancipation is kept open.

Any sociological system theory that treats "truth" functionalistically—I say this in advance—carries an immense potential for cynicism. And since every contemporary intellect is caught up in the process of such sociological theories, it inevitably is implicated in the latent or overt master cynicism of these forms of thinking. Marxism, in its origins, at least maintained an ambivalence between reifying and emancipative perspectives. Non-Marxist system theories of society drop even the last trace of sensitivity. In alliance with neoconservative currents, they proclaim that useful members of human society have to internalize certain "correct illusions" once and for all, because without them nothing functions properly. The
naiveté of the others should be planned, "capital fix being man himself."3 It is always a good investment to mobilize the naive will to work, for whatever reason. System theoreticians and maintenance strategists are from the start beyond naive belief. But for those who should believe in it, the aphorism holds: Stop reflecting and maintain values.

Those who make the means of liberating reflection available and invite others to use them appear to conservatives as unscrupulous and power-hungry good-for-nothings who are reproached with "Others do the work." Very well, but for whom?

Notes

1. [This is a variation of Habermas’s formulation of the "zwanglose Zwang des besseren Arguments." -Trans.]

2. In this book I designate consistently any power that dominates as hegemonic power to indicate that this power never is or has power by itself, but always "rides," so to speak, on the back of an oppositional power. In a realistic theory of power, omnipotence and impotence occur only as quasi-mathematical ideas of power, as the infinitely great and the infinitely small in power. Omnipotence and impotence cannot confront each other, but hegemonic power and oppositional power can. What "exists" possesses power, a positive quantum of energy, that is centered in conscious bodies and extends itself to appropriate tools and weapons. For this reason, the logic of all-or-nothing is dangerous, indeed fatal, in politics. In Sièyes’s statement—"What is the Third Estate? Nothing. What does it want to become? Everything"—a disastrous self-characterization of the oppositional power comes into being, a false logical treatment (Logisierung) of political struggle through which the part wants to make itself into the whole. In substance, this false all-or-nothing logic is repeated in Marxism, which wanted to make the proletariat "everything." Is this inverted concept of power a universal legacy of leftist opposition? Even the French New Philosophy, straying into old ways of thinking, comes to grief on this concept by confusing omnipotence with hegemonic power and imposing a Manichaean ontology of an evil state power.

3. [This phrase is taken from Marx, who in turn quotes the French term for fixed capital. — Trans.]