

# GEGENSTANDPUNKT

## Psychology of the Private Individual Critique of Bourgeois Consciousness

© GegenStandpunkt 2003–2009

Introduction .....	3
The mistake of bourgeois psychology, and the object of a materialist psychology .....	3
Part I. The moral individual — How does an abstract free will work?.....	5
On theoretical and practical abstractions .....	5
The subservient use of free will.....	5
Chapter 1. The phony materialism of permissible success .....	7
1.1. Psychology denies free will, thereby denying that subservience is the principle of the bourgeois psyche.....	7
1.2. Hegel's concept of free will as the idealism of being allowed .....	8
1.3. The individual's class position as the individualism of his worldview .....	9
Chapter 2. The idealism of self-control that pays off .....	10
2.1 Rule as the sum of good and bad opportunities .....	10
2.2 Calculation and disappointment, comparison and criticism .....	10
Chapter 3. Hypocrisy and complaining about the world .....	11
3.1. Striving for success in the name of the Good .....	11
3.2 The one-sided benefit of hypocrisy: must, should, can, may.....	11
3.3. Separation of the theory and the practice of decency .....	11
3.4. Decency as lived ideal: Politeness .....	12
3.5. Moral materialism. Envy and Schadenfreude .....	12
Chapter 4. The righteous person .....	14
4.1. Self-confidence: The virtue of failure and pride in success .....	14
4.2. Conscience: Shame and impertinence .....	15
4.3. Practical feeling as the organ of prejudice .....	15
The morality of pluralism in science .....	16
4.4. The virtue of prudent submission: “Reason.” Heart versus mind, and vice versa .....	16
4.5. Virtuosos of good conscience: Nietzsche and the Christian individual.....	17
4.6. Weltanschauung as an honorable substitute for knowledge. Superstition, daydreams and role models.....	17
4.7. Morality philosophy-wise: Where would we be, then? .....	18
4.8. Moral mania in literature .....	19
Part II. How the bourgeois individual proves himself in his homeland, capitalist society .....	21
The “secret” of “second nature”: Accommodation.....	21
Chapter 5. Bourgeois spheres of life as viewed by the righteous person.....	22
5.1. The democrat’s servile spirit: Self-confident championing of prevailing conditions .....	22
5.2. The citizen as Mr. Clean.....	22
5.3. Criticizing one sphere with the ideals of another.....	23
Chapter 6: Politics — Democratic servile consciousness .....	24
6.1.....	24
6.2. Self-assured submissiveness: the political “we” .....	24
6.3. Constructive criticism.....	25
6.4. Nation as sentiment and character .....	25
6.5. Radical dissent: The fight for the right to criticize .....	26
Crime I: Terror as a just use of force, autonomously.....	27
6.6. Education for freedom and responsibility .....	27
Chapter 7: Job — Competition and performance .....	28
7.1. From the pressure to compete to the willingness to achieve.....	28
7.2. Materialism in competition: the hard worker’s claim to a fair wage .....	29
7.3. How people cope with the results of competition.....	29
7.4. The ideal of usefulness and the stages of life.....	30
7.5. Crime II: The prohibited way to legitimate success.....	31

Chapter 8: Private life — on happiness and its failure in pleasure and love.....	32
8.1. The ideal of compensation, and yearning for happiness.....	32
8.2. Consumption and leisure time: The right to pleasure, in practice.....	33
8.3. The big compensation: Love as the right to be unconditionally understood.....	34
8.4. New paths for proving true love.....	36
8.5. Competition in love: “So test therefore, who join forever” (Schiller, Song of the Bell).....	37
PART III: From failure to self-destruction — The realm of psychology.....	39
Going-along-with-things as method.....	39
9. Character.....	40
9.1. Life is a struggle.....	40
9.2. How one forms a character.....	40
9.3. A character at work.....	41
9.4. Alternatives of dissimulation: Good and bad character.....	41
9.5. Ignorance as knowledge of human nature.....	43
9.6. Characterology based on the ideal of fitness for real life.....	43
10. Psychological self-criticism: Techniques of self-assertion.....	45
10.1. Contentless self-criticism: “I’m a failure”.....	45
10.2. The impertinent self-assurance of the damaged ego.....	46
10.3. Psychology in everyday life.....	46
10.4. Psychological training.....	47
10.5. Bourgeois psychology: A scientific parasite of self-assertion.....	48
11. Madness and normality.....	50
11.1. Self-assertion as a purpose: Distinguishing oneself.....	50
11.2. Demeaning oneself as service: The happiness of the Christian individual.....	51
11.3. Totally mad.....	51
11.4. Psychiatry.....	52
12. The enforcement of psychological self-criticism: suicide.....	55
12.1. Self-pleasing in despair.....	55
12.2. Ridiculous respect for “voluntary death”.....	55
12.3. Calculation in suicide: The idealism of spitefulness.....	56

## Introduction

### *The mistake of bourgeois psychology, and the object of a materialist psychology*

There is really no lack of psychological theories about what it is that individuals or “the masses” do. What psychology as a scientific discipline has promulgated about man's inner nature enjoys an enormous popularity beyond the circle of experts. By employing its principles, people obtain “insight” into the deeper motives of human activity — in everyday work life, in sports and games, in politics and the fine arts — and by applying psychological wisdom to their own lives, and the lives of others, they expect benefits. Every variety of psychology is “in.” And what a variety it is: from “serious” therapy, which has become an elaborately learned trade plied by professionals; to popular magazines which regard every single thing done by anyone today as a psychological case; to practical guidance for the anxious who want to make progress in their careers or in the “art of loving!”

Nevertheless the principles of psychological thinking are as simple as they are wrong.

The first principle is to deny an objective content and purpose to the ambitions individuals harbor and the actions they carry out. A psychologist will insist that no matter what they do, people are always grappling *with themselves*, with forces and agencies that belong to their nature, but operate in such a way as to be wholly or partly beyond the control of the conscious will. On this score such contrasting schools as psychoanalysis and behaviorism see eye to eye. It was no problem for Freud to deduce the literary production of Dostoevsky from his psychic life plus childhood. For him, love and work, study and communism were equally valid as strategies for avoiding frustration. And to Skinner, thought and speech, state and religion appear as nothing but special cases of behavior conditioned by all kinds of variables — processes and mechanisms which nobody knows about except behaviorists.

This already reveals the second principle. People may think they have a conception of themselves and the world, set goals for themselves and find and create the means to achieve them. They may imagine they not only have a mind, but actually use it all the time. However, psychology knows better: *free will* is a fiction, *it does not exist*. In view of the actual achievements of free will, which are indeed somewhere between fairly contradictory and outright idiotic, a psychologist is pleased to warn that the “role of the conscious” must not be overestimated — so says Freud. He “explains” everything mankind does as the uncontrolled manifestation of “unconscious” and “subconscious” forces. In this he is not swayed by logic. With no further ado he foists on the “unconscious” the powers to judge, to reason and to dissimulate that are precisely what characterize a thinking subject's conscious and calculating dealing with the world. Behaviorism even goes so far as to campaign explicitly against “mental concepts,” and to declare “will” to be non-existent by putting it in quotation marks, since a “scientific view of human beings” presupposes that “behavior is determined by laws.” By this, Skinner, for example, heads straight for the result that also appears at the other end of the spectrum of psychological thinking, that only a person schooled in psychology knows the true reasons and mysterious motives for why people work, eat, play, love, obey or commit crimes. Whereas everyone else goes wrong in assuming he is just doing all the various things that are his everyday responsibility or strike him as being called for.

The third principle is quite simply that psychologists officially *fight every explanation* of perceptions and feelings, of consciousness and speech, of free will itself. *The dogma* of the psychological outlook on the world is that the continually cited techniques of self-control — even though not even applied consciously — are themselves the key to knowing the “real” purpose of every deed and misdeed. This dogma not only denies the objective purpose of what people do, it also shows the greatest disinterest in the psychological ways people go about their business. *The determinations of subjectivity*, whether in general or in the specific form they take in bourgeois society, invariably interest a psychologist *as what they aren't* — namely, as “*motives*” and, therefore, as the *reasons* for everything and anything. On the one hand, the exponents of the discipline do not at all mind admitting they can only offer “hypothetical models” of intelligence, consciousness, speech, thought, etc., and proclaiming publicly that there might actually not even be a specific object for them to study. On the other hand, Freud's three-province theory of the mind and Skinner's conditioned reflex quite satisfy the needs of modern scholars for a worldview. They regard buying, working, sexual, and political *behavior* as psychologically *explainable*. Some even think they are being pretty critical when they see through advertising to discover manipulation — cunning conditioning or luring of the subconscious — or when they explain fascist fellow-traveling, the failure to engage in class struggle, etc., by the helplessness of individuals who have no choice due to their lack of ego strength and such.

It is thus quite called for, not only to expose the mistakes of this science, but also to set aright the upside-down world of official psychology and its supporters in politics, especially the “emancipatory” kind. One should put an end to the prattle about the “subjective factor” and the baseless rumor that Marxism neglects psychological dimensions, which is invariably the opener to an attack on its “merely” economic theory of the bourgeois world. Why should a correct theory about how modern individuals practice their subjectivity contradict the critique of political economy? Or, to anticipate the results of this book: when people put their definitely *free will* into practice on the basis of false consciousness, they are doing nothing other than making their individuality *obedient* to the dictates of capital and state in any number of different ways. One need by no means deny individual freedom, much less conjure up an elaborate power of the unconscious, in order to explain how political rule and exploitation achieve global success. And the fact that the critically acclaimed “individual” is a party to all

this and puts up with so many things that his admirers abhor, is not so much a reason to admire him as to have doubts about his and his admirers' state of mind. Showing *understanding* for false consciousness is the very opposite of knowing the reasons, the necessity, for it. As long as those damaged by the bourgeois order behave merely like so many little “ensembles of social relations” (Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*), they logically have to be the object of criticism.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the moral consciousness analyzed here and the techniques of morality it invents are nothing more than the ways individuals grapple with bourgeois rule in order to endure it. It is a joke when people's achievements in this sphere give rise to the “conclusion” that the bourgeois order *conforms* precisely to “human nature” just the way it happens to be. This is a simple interchange of cause and effect, which has been part of the standard ideological repertoire for a long time. But it is no less silly to invert the joke and say capitalism *contradicts* “human nature,” is terribly “inhuman” and stifles true individuality. One can easily gather from the present work just what there is to say against both ideologies from the standpoint of a rational psychology.

## Part I. The moral individual — How does an abstract free will work?

“... and to make abstractions hold in reality is to destroy reality.”  
(Hegel)

Abstracting is with good reason taken to be an obvious activity of intelligent individuals. When we distinguish the determinations of a thing, we know very well that the parts, differences, qualities, and aspects we perceive constitute the object under consideration precisely in their unity. When after separating the various sides we then proceed to judge and draw conclusions, what we are concerned about is the connection between the separated arsenal of determinations found, not in the form of an enumeration but logically ordered. The how and why lead us to an insight into the nature of the object of our mental efforts, to the reason why it exists, functions, and acts in the way it does and in no other. Through abstractions, we find out about laws and purposes that are valid and prevail in nature and in society. If mistakes are made in the process, they can be recognized in the logical contradictions of the theories. By thinking through arguments, we determine whether they are correct or false, and whether the abstractions made are justified. There is a difference between occasional errors, and real mistakes that are “consistently” continued in the modern human and social sciences to the point of forming entire, theoretical edifices. This invariably occurs when the creators of theories follow interests that require the object of thought to be determined with bias, brought into relation with all sorts of well-meaning and not-so-well-meaning intentions, and that inspire them to make assertions about the characteristics of their object that have nothing whatsoever to do with its reason and purpose. But the fact that modern science makes abstractions without any commitment to objectivity is not an argument against abstraction per se and no reason to condemn “abstract thinking,” which for many a critical soul is the source of all evil in the world. “Abstract” and “concrete” are actually two perfectly innocent logical categories, and the way they are ordinarily used in the vulgar scientific vernacular to mean bad and good, dead and alive, unreal and terribly real, is stupid, since it is an argument against thinking, and therefore always a contradiction in terms.

### *On theoretical and practical abstractions*

Hegel introduced the manner of speaking about abstractions being brought to bear in reality or carried out *in practice*. Marx saw no problem in characterizing in just this way certain features of bourgeois life that he discovered. He found money to be the abstract form of wealth characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Value exists separately from all real wealth, independent of and in opposition to use-value, its basis, which in times of economic crisis is sacrificed for the sake of value and its accumulation. In wage labor Marx saw the expenditure of abstract labor which serves the purpose of accumulating capital and which rests on the separation of the workers from the means of production. This degrades the workers to their lifelong function of labor-*power*, which is worn out according to the needs of capital — this being the form taken by wealth that has become independent of its producers — and whose self-preservation is constantly in jeopardy. The two cases cited here make it clear that “abstractions brought to bear in reality” are not exactly the most pleasant states of affairs. Certain people are *separated* from the means of existence peculiar to them, a situation which can hardly be brought about even by the most incorrect of theoretical abstractions. In the world of capitalist commodity production, money really *is* the means for getting hold of all necessary or pleasurable objects, and this same means hinders a whole class in its efforts to partake of society's wealth. Being excluded from the means of production, which serve as alien property for their profitable utilization, wage workers are forced to work for capital as the only way to make a living. The performance and the consequences of this work make it clear to them, firstly, that their wallet is always empty; secondly, that their health is continually being destroyed, because it is not at all good for a person to be reduced to performing the services necessary for capital; and, thirdly, that their mere employment is not even guaranteed.

### *The subservient use of free will*

The economic relations of capitalism, and thus all the manifestations of a real, practical abstraction performed on real live individuals, are the concern of economics. The violent force necessary for maintaining this sort of economic activity is the concern of the theory of the bourgeois state, the political power that ensures that the people caught up in the economy always put up with everything properly. *How* the beneficiaries and, above all, the victims of the capitalistic economy and bourgeois politics manage to exercise the free will conceded to them solely to *go along with everything as best they can* — this is the focus of a *psychology of the private individual*.

Such a theory does not deny the freedom of modern democracy nor of its victims, so it does not deny free will (a redundant term, as Hegel already noted, since every will is free). It explains what this freedom consists of, how little there is in it to brag about, and which lofty purposes it serves (having indeed little to do with the petty interests of ordinary people). A psychology of this kind does not once more explain surplus value, piece rates, fixed capital and interest. Nor does it explain the constitutional state, its financial sovereignty and its legislature. Since it is *psychology*, it explains only the subjective procedures: what a freely deciding subject achieves with his feelings, perceptions and thoughts to make his subsumption under the capitalist circus, his going along with it all, continually appear to be solely the well-founded work of his will. This

science is psychology of the *private* individual in so far as it does not grind out the formal determinations of subjectivity in its generality, as they have been developed at other times and under different circumstances. It explains the specific way people use their minds in the capitalistic mode of production and the particular sorts of feelings they have, the *content* of these feelings that is normal here and now.

The present book, which is written in the form of a derivation, deals with the manifestations of the contradiction contained in the concept of *abstract free* will. That is, how does a (free) will manage to adapt its own preconditions — feeling, consciousness, language and intellect — in such a way as to give itself up? *How* do individuals, whose training gives them all kinds of knowledge and skills that enable them to realize *their* interests by all types of performance in the bourgeois world — or, to put it the other way round, that enable them to *make themselves useful* out of self-interest — how do these individuals manage to cope with all the restrictions of capitalism and modern democracy, and stay with it so faithfully? *This* is the question to be answered, and it should not be confused with the completely different one addressed by the above-mentioned theories of the capitalistic economy and its matching political power, namely: *why* does the world work the way it does? Anyone who sees individuals' moral and psychological techniques as the *reason* for the production of noodles, autos, and armaments, for the construction of subways, reservoirs, and schools, has at best a *view of human nature* that authors all the decisions and activities that come about in the world. That anything happens *because* people “are like that” and the subjectivity of homo sapiens just happens to “be that way,” already disqualifies itself as an explanation in view of the simple fact that those who make the decisions that make the world such a cozy place are quite different people from those who have to go about putting these decisions into practice, and who celebrate the most idiotic opinions about it as their freedom...

Of course this does not mean that there will be no mention here of the objective conditions in which the present-day individual is so terribly individualistic. The bourgeois circus will continually crop up as that *to which* the individual *adapts himself*, as that arena in which he is out to prove his worth. Even in the first part of this book, which faithfully proceeds “from the abstract to the concrete” in analyzing the general principles of free, bourgeois *obedience*, which are continually present because they are “followed,” those subjects of history currently in sway, namely capital and state, have not been completely forgotten. On the one hand, they appear as *the* precondition for the poor behavior of the “popular masses,” whom not only Brecht — by way of poetry — would crown the “real” subject of history. On the other hand, false consciousness with all its dodges cannot be portrayed in even its most abstract determinations without mention of the social relations that make it necessary. However, as best we could, we have refrained from specifying *what* these individuals are grappling with, simply in the interest of determining the pathetic “laws of motion” of the present-day psyche in their (for the last time!) *abstract* form, laws which remain “untouched” when carried out.

## Chapter 1. The phony materialism of permissible success

What a person can gain by his own individual skill in class competition, in the hierarchy of occupations, depends on other people's interests and the means at their disposal. However, people no longer test their abilities against each other directly once a state equipped with a monopoly of force sees to law and order. Not only does its system of bringing up individuals produce considerable differences in the extent of their education and direct them into their careers — the public power, whose only reason for existence and therefore purpose is the useful advance of competition, also makes clear to its citizens from the start what is *permitted* and what is *forbidden*. Their materialism is recognized, but only within the limits of necessities imposed on them to make them useful to the state and to capital.

The bourgeois individual adapts himself to the freedom to compete as specifically defined by his particular place in society. He takes the practical constraints of his position in the world as the unquestioned starting point for all his striving. In so doing, he cultivates the special bourgeois use of the mind: *he plots his success within the framework of what is permitted*. He regards all the institutions of the capitalist world — and all his “fellow men,” too — as conditions for getting ahead, thereby seeing some as positive and some as negative. Such an individual continually assesses and praises or condemns the acts of others and the manifest “performance” of higher authorities according to the *criterion of permissible success*, or, what is the same thing, by the *standard of successful decency*. The practical dealings of a subject<sup>1</sup> intent on seeing and using a world filled with obstacles as a means for himself, give rise to a view of the world that has nothing objective about it. The consciousness that goes along with abstract free will is based on the principle of integrating the circumstances under which the will is exercised into its own agenda, even though these circumstances are independent of the will and actually stand in its way. Bourgeois individuality reinterprets the forced decision to adapt to the world as it is, to move only within prescribed paths, as a free judgment about the world; it answers its own question about every object it encounters: to what extent does it suit me and my intentions?

### 1.1. Psychology denies free will, thereby denying that subservience is the principle of the bourgeois psyche

The concept of bourgeois individuality given here differs sharply from the constructs of psychology, which takes some pains to deny free will. Psychology invariably manages its proof by first *presupposing* a subject making a *decision*, fully *conscious* of his intentions and purposes, in order to subsequently cite the presuppositions of the decision as the crucial “factors” and thereby argue against the conscious execution of the action.

Freud starts out by determining slips of the tongue and other blunders (*Fehlleistungen*) as “the opposing action of two different intentions.” But he is so dissatisfied with this that he presents to his audience the power of the “*un-conscious*” as the reason for the phenomena he is dealing with. As an example, Freud takes dreams — activity of the thinking mind at a time when it is truly not too alert, and thus not occupied with judging sensations and feelings, not making any distinction between self and objectivity; where all waking experiences are “remembered” by the sleeper in wildly associated images. Using dreams, Freud develops the model of an un- and subconscious that operates by the logic of the active, calculating mind. He develops these errors further into the three-province theory of the mind, which takes “moral restrictions” (the real restrictions appear right from the start in their subjectivized form!) to be part of human nature, as a *superego* inherent in every human soul, and which is taken as the starting point and means for “explaining” the behavior of diverse sex fiends. Besides this, the great analyst also scores a big hit with the twin principles of “pleasure” and “reality.” Freud's arguments in this connection could have easily put him on the right path; namely, that the state of mind of the “sick” as well as “healthy” subjects who came his way displayed something quite different than a war between three provinces and two principles.

Today's psychology, no longer following Freud because he was too critical of morality, has an easier time of it. Its denial of free will goes like this:

“...from what has been explained above, it follows that volition arises from a situation of choice. For that reason, the question of whether the human will is free is, precisely formulated in psychological terms, the question of whether a human being can arbitrarily choose any of the possible behaviors in a given choosing situation; or, more precisely, the question: can a human being decide on any possible choice in a given situation? If he can, then he is *free*; if he cannot, then he is *not free*. The word “freedom” can hardly be taken in any other sense, psychologically speaking.

---

<sup>1</sup> Subject: a self; a thinking and acting being.

With this precise formulation, the answer is simple: *no*; a person cannot arbitrarily choose any possible behavior in a given choosing situation. The drives, interests and emotions arising in him in this situation induce him to prefer one definite behavior to all other possibilities, and to decide on it. Wouldn't he have *been able* to make a different choice? Only if different motives had arisen in him."

Nobody is put off by such brilliant achievements of modern science anymore, although it is certain that a statement like this requires no knowledge about the purely *formal* determinations of drive, emotion, consciousness, interest and will (as definite theoretical and practical positions of subjectivity toward the world and toward itself), nor attaches any importance to the *content* of emotions, etc. The proof leaps directly to its conclusion, so that the sheer existence of drives and emotions suffices to refute the "freedom to choose." The apparent "helplessness" of a rational, decision-making subject follows quite simply from the fact that he also has an emotional or interested way of dealing with the world. Yet even a psychologist could notice that an absolutely common phrase such as, 'I did it for emotional reasons,' means that a consciously acting person has *decided* to be guided by his emotions in this case, judging it superfluous to study the matter in any detail; i.e., he is by no means presenting himself as a passive victim of the stirrings of his psyche. Whoever maintains this latter view will of course never concern himself with the contents of various emotions and interests. For then he would have to see that judgments arrived at (rightly or wrongly) by the intellect have become habits, going into effect immediately without any new effort of thought — which, by the way, is why emotions often hinder rational calculation, not to mention a reasonable analysis. Instead, psychology chalks up this result of the bourgeois technique of accommodation — 'My heart says yes but my head says no' — to the account of "human nature." It breezily declares the contradictions that a moral consciousness impresses on people's actions, i.e., on the practical expressions of their state of mind, to be a fixed component of subjectivity itself. Logically enough, the only thing bourgeois psychology has found out about the act of thinking is that it is barely relevant; while of course never neglecting to mention that thinking is relativized by a subject's motives, which arise beforehand and are much more important. Instead of determining the morally calculating activity of the mind that makes up the specifically bourgeois *false* consciousness, psychologists dream up the problem of what "predominates" in an individual making a decision. Thinking itself appears to this science merely in the form of "its" *function* as a means for helping the individual to deal efficiently with himself, as a technique of accommodation, which, although welcome, can't accomplish a whole lot:

"Thinking only performs an auxiliary service. It finds out what the possibilities are, and their advantages and disadvantages. The result of these findings is customarily worded as if it were itself crucial for the decision: 'It's wiser if I do such and such.' This only means, 'I will reach my goal more safely, faster, with less effort, trouble and unpleasant risk if I act in such a way.' The goal is always given; and the decision is brought about by drives and interests or by previous resolve, not by thinking. Thinking only clarifies the possible ways of reaching the goal."

With this "insight," psychology proves its worth as a much-appreciated counterpart to the idealistic notion from philosophy of man as a "*rational animal*." Psychology indulges in a few dozen theories of subjectivity that always end up portraying its *activity* as the effect of all sorts of *capabilities*. Depending on the school, these capabilities involve a *functional way of coping* with external constraints and preconditions and/or internal dispositions. The behaviorists reduce active intelligence to the dumbest sort of "problem-solving behavior," in which the world consists of "stimuli," and the person consists of "behavior" that he would like to see reinforced. The Freudian "ego" likewise struggles with both external and internal demands, the "mental personality" providing an *image* of the self-relativizing free will that is no less false than Skinner's "organism":

"The proverb tells us that one cannot serve two masters at once. The poor ego has a still harder time of it; it has to serve three harsh masters, and has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three. These demands are always divergent and often seem quite incompatible; no wonder that the ego so frequently gives way under its task. The three tyrants are the external world, the super-ego and the id."<sup>2</sup>

The dubious accomplishment of the discipline of psychology (to anticipate what will be said in the following chapters) consists in turning the *false consciousness* and corresponding *techniques of self-control* that characterize the bourgeois individual into a *picture of human nature*. Rather than explaining this consciousness and these techniques, psychology constructs models of individuality and its "behavior" that make them the *reason* for, and *content* of, everything bourgeois individuals do the livelong day.

### 1.2. Hegel's concept of free will as the idealism of being allowed

Bourgeois individuality also differs fundamentally from the concept of self-consciousness conceived by Hegel, who develops the formal determinations of the subjective mind in his *Encyclopaedia*. For Hegel, individuality is soul, sentient and perceiving consciousness. It develops conceptions of the world, describes them, forms judgments and draws conclusions,

---

<sup>2</sup> Freud, S. *Introductory lectures on psycho-analysis* in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XV. J. Strachey, trans. & ed. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

reasons with them, thinks. As reason, it works its way forward to the identity of the objective world with the contents of subjective thought, becoming the practical mind that can then make society suitable to *itself* — i.e., objective mind. Oddly enough, the world's last, useful philosopher manages to fabricate a logical transition from the purely *formal determinations* of subjectivity to *bourgeois* society and its state, of all things.<sup>3</sup> The transition is just what one might expect: for *reasoning* subjects to desire private property as their world, free will must make itself rather abstract from the start, taking the principle of exclusive ownership as its proper “sphere of its freedom”; otherwise it would not be the Hegelian “idea,” that is, the unity of concept and reality!

The truth here, as elsewhere with Hegel, is a matter of “standing him on his feet.” The *bourgeois* subject certainly acts as “soul,” consciousness and intelligence, but, at the same time, he starts out from social relations created and maintained by force, in which he must somehow make his way. He accommodates both his mind and his actions to the practical restrictions he runs into as soon as his interests take on their objects. He *relativizes* his will according to the limits imposed on him — and this relativizing enters his *consciousness* in such a way that he takes the world to be at the disposal of his already self-controlled will, rather than the other way around; that this is the way, in fact the only way, he enjoys individual freedom: the individual acknowledges bourgeois relations in what he is *allowed* to do. He reinterprets the difficulties he is saddled with simply by sticking to the point of view that he is at least entitled to do what is not prohibited.

### 1.3. *The individual's class position as the individualism of his worldview*

The judgments concocted by the bourgeois intellect about itself and the world inevitably show certain differences. Although the principle is the same for all individuals, what success the free, yet relativized, will actually obtains in its striving to carry out its objectives varies considerably from one person to the next depending on economic class membership, i.e., on the means disposed over. The simple fact that some people have every reason to be satisfied, while others do not, leads to some differentiation in consciousness of the world. When interests and the restrictions they encounter shape the use of the intellect, then success and failure, expectation and disappointment, are necessarily reflected in the individual worldview — a very well-known phenomenon, but one that devotees of the bourgeois order waste little thought on. It is taken as normal. For one thing, that is the freedom everyone does have, to hold an opinion of *one's very own* about how the world works, whether one is a beneficiary or a victim of it. Secondly, it is self-understood that consciousness couldn't possibly ever be objective, “since” it is obviously *individual*, i.e., guided by personal interests...

---

<sup>3</sup> A few errors “occur” in Hegel's formal determinations: compare, for example, the notorious, psyche-based definition of national character, or the derivation of master and servant from self-consciousness in his *Phenomenology*, etc.

## Chapter 2. The idealism of self-control that pays off

The bourgeois subject adapts himself to social circumstances, however full of rule and exploitation, murder and mayhem they may be. Since his interests are not denied in principle, since his materialism is served at least conditionally, he considers the world to be one big *offer* for himself: *inasmuch* as he adapts to this world and pursues his own interests in the framework of what is *permitted*, he enjoys nothing but liberties.

However, since submission to the regimen of what is allowed, i.e., conceded materialism, in no way guarantees success, the individual is presented with many a *problem* by his beloved freedom. With his experiences now good, now bad, he comes to a somewhat divided opinion about the rule that he wants to bow to for his own advantage. Depending on whether or not the pursuit of his interests works out well, he applies now the standpoint of *success*, now that of *decency* — and whenever he examines the personal prosperity of other people, bourgeois man sees *one* of the two criteria at his disposal either fulfilled or violated; while in certain cases *decency* and *success* actually go along with each other, both higher up and lower down in the social hierarchy. But, from the viewpoint that interests mustn't show themselves without the trappings of morality, success often enough appears to have been purchased at the expense of *decency*; while conversely, *decency* is seen to be the reason for many a setback, especially for oneself. The moralistic subject does not let his negative experiences lead him to either “whole-hearted” endorsement or to “destructive criticism” of the rule that concedes freedom to him. Rather, he maintains the standpoint of *self-control that pays off*; that is, his consciousness *judges* by a *double* standard. To the standard of material prosperity, he adds the standard of virtue; he reflects each in the other, considering materialism to be just as permissible as obedience is necessary.

### 2.1 Rule as the sum of good and bad opportunities

In going back and forth between his two standards, the bourgeois individual gets his peculiar position toward, and conception of, *rule*. It consists in no way in such rock-solid arguments as capital, labor and state power, but rather in an — economically and politically “organized” — sum of good and bad *opportunities*. All the constraints of the bourgeois world appear to him to be — permissible — paths to success. It is certainly true that by considering and handling objective relations as “opportunities” that one “grabs” or “lets slip” *in case they are offered*, he has long since backed away from the notion that there is a profusion of means at his disposal for achieving his purposes. But it is precisely by scrutinizing the circumstances of life for *chances*, i.e., through the logic of possibility, that he maintains his *positive* outlook on the world. The moral individual wants to prove himself *in* bourgeois society; he calculates his success while acknowledging its limits, and subjects the results of both his and other people's efforts to never-ending interpretation. In the process, he sees no *antagonism* as such; instead, he finds nothing but *differences* regarding individual skill in exploiting the chances that arise. On the one hand, every difference in individual prosperity confirms that “it can be done,” that opportunities are actually offered. On the other hand, just such a difference calls for moral scrutiny with the question of whether successful characters behave in the same manner as less reputable citizens. Or whether the latter have only reaped their just reward for poor conduct, and so on.

### 2.2 Calculation and disappointment, comparison and criticism

The resolve to submit out of self-interest leads, on the one hand, to a continual refutation of the calculating dialectic of *decency* and *success*. However, the efforts of *such an individual* are not apt to rattle it. For the bourgeois individual, everyone who has advanced further than he is evidence that some things work — while he can draw quite a bit of solace and confirmation from his superiority to those who have done less well. With his respectful, or even servile, dealings with those better off, as much as with the liberties he takes regarding his less successful “fellow men,” the bourgeois subject denies the objectivity of class society.

Due to the fact that his well-being is only partially realized, the decent citizen also starts criticizing the comparison by which, in his opinion, individuals distinguish themselves. To this end, he now separates, now crosses the two miserable standards at his disposal: “Not every rich man is decent” can signify both a reproach and a recognition of cleverness; while dopes draw the compliment, “He's a good fellow.” This compliment presents its cynical side when used to congratulate the downtrodden on their morality — along with this, one finds contempt for pushy people. The incompatibility of the two standards becomes apparent in the thousand variations of all possible and unsuitable differences. So the moral individual has a bit to do to maintain the illusion inherent in his principle: if he holds that the objective limits to his achievements no longer exist because he has declared them to be a matter of how they are dealt with subjectively, i.e., because he has subjectivized them, then he hopes to be able to clear them away in practice. And he doesn't find it hard to use not only his mind but also his morality in a *calculating* way — so as to be a materialist *all the same*, along with his obedience.

## Chapter 3. Hypocrisy and complaining about the world

As the world is rather sparing with its opportunities, and self-control does not pay off, the moral self continually tries to have his *claims* honored, for this is the form his rejected interests take so as to be maintained. Because he is *committed* to making his own materialism match the principles of what is permitted, he *refers* to these principles whenever he wants to succeed with his own concerns. He stages every purpose and every act *as a right* of his subjective will, continually pleads and swears that his deeds conform to the standards he acknowledges — and represents his individual success as the public interest: *hypocrisy*, moral materialism, by which he criticizes other people as *egoists* for “*only*” thinking about themselves.

Power, the actual, forcefully imposed restrictions of everyday life, appears to the moral subject, who insists on his rightful interests, neither as class antagonism (i.e., as competition based on private property) nor as submission to the state’s monopoly on force. If one’s own interest is legitimate, but nevertheless comes off badly, then the bourgeois world must be a heap of *injustices*, not adhering to its own lofty standards; therefore, it is particularly a decent person who is “forced” to constantly consider violating these standards *in practice*, however much he may hold to them *in theory*. At the same time, he feels as if he were *restoring* their validity when he employs the pathetic ruse that constitutes the habit of hypocrisy. Whenever there is a collision of interests, he seeks to exploit the general respect for law and morals by claiming the reason for *his* conduct is to realize rights and duties, setting himself up as the keeper of ethical standards, because “*this is the only way*” the world allows him to get by. And for the sake of the credibility of his hypocrisy, he constantly exhibits *his* decency, and is a master of *good conduct*, which of course he also demands of other people.

### 3.1. Striving for success in the name of the Good

The moral personality *demonstrates* his regret that decency in no way guarantees success, but he doesn’t mean this as a notice to withdraw his consent. Although it is common wisdom that nice guys finish last, this does not form the prelude to opposing the permitting authorities, but rather to practicing the foolish technique of self-assertion that poses as materialistic: “The world wants to be deceived.”<sup>4</sup> The whole deception, though, consists in the bourgeois paragon of virtue giving all his intentions the *appearance of the Good*: by pointing out that his actions are important not only for him but above all for others, therefore rather well-intentioned and consequently in line with what everyone would surely agree to be his duty, he *justifies* the advantage he has his sights on, i.e., his interest. Hypocrisy thus keeps to decency as a means of success, albeit as one that has to be separated from practice and employed as legitimation for one’s own materialism.

### 3.2 The one-sided benefit of hypocrisy: *must, should, can, may*

But at the same time, this attitude also justifies power, crediting it with permitting a breezy life to *those* individuals who are cognizant of the discord between the two maxims and display the proper skill in handling them. This skill in dealing with others, however, doesn’t just meet worthy equals, who hold one to one’s pretended sense of duty and affectation of righteousness; it quite obviously fails when more tangible means are lacking, so that the trick of hypocrisy, cultivated by all classes, only works in the hands of the *rich and powerful*. It doesn’t even seem to require any special effort on their part, being rather just their ordinary self-assurance displayed in public. People who’ve made it to the top ranks of public service are never doing what they actually do, rather always just doing their *duty*; and when someone like this chalks up another advance in his career, he is never increasing his power, just his *responsibility*. When other people complain, a real superior and office bearer notes the consequences of the decisions and measures he takes with an “unfortunately” — by which he would have the *necessity* of his actions proven; when criticized, he asks for alternative *possibilities*, which he can’t see anywhere in sight — especially as he *must* not order anything other than what he personally doesn’t *want* to order. No wonder that modal verbs, which express the will’s position toward the subject’s action, have become the preferred aid for hypocrisy in everyday dealings.

### 3.3. Separation of the theory and the practice of decency

But in his habitual hypocrisy, the lesser subject, the “little guy,” also thinks he is pretty free because enormously smart and crafty; although he demeans himself by fawning on higher-ups and mastering all sorts of pretense, he really thinks he is only pursuing his materialism. In the process, he readily forgets how unsuitable a means it is for him — so that many a ridiculous thing is to be heard from the mouth of an average Joe. When someone like this wants to push through a matter of concern to him with the help of the obligatory “us,” it just doesn’t sound the same coming from him as it does from the boss. Some people then make up for this in areas where they have something to say, readily tormenting the kids, whose good

---

<sup>4</sup> “Die wellt die will betrogen syn,” Sebastian Brant, *Narrenschiff*, 1494.

behavior they demand, with the weighty words, “I’m doing it for your own good.” And when someone is reminded that he himself is not sticking to the standards he always upholds, he actually comes up with the idea behind all this fuss: what’s demanded of him is all right “in theory,” but hardly works “in practice” — this being how he alludes to both his real and his hoped-for advantage. The *separation*, expressed in this way, between *principles* one approves and the mean *life* that prevents one from keeping to them, is anything but a secret in bourgeois society — someone attracts attention at best when he *fails* to separate them: Freudian slips and worse are normal when self-control on the field of public pretense doesn’t go right.

### 3.4. Decency as lived ideal: Politeness

Though an honest hypocrite readily admits the separation by accusing himself with the deepest of deep regrets of inconsistency in matters of morals, he *practices* it in all his dealings in the certainty that they won’t work out otherwise. As little as decency *determines* the way people deal with each other, all the more do they obey the hypocritical need for reciprocal recognition over and above the real purposes that bring them together. If decency as such cannot be kept up, it is *lived* as an *ideal*: since everyone thinks he can facilitate the success of his interests by proving he is entitled to everything he wants; since conversely everyone must be prepared for an examination of his concerns, and has to justify himself with respect to his claims — 1) Do they stay within permissible bounds? 2) Are they merited? In plain English: 3) Isn’t he getting in my way? — then under these circumstances there is no shortage of *politeness*. Every form of dependence, every opposition of interests turns into a question of *manners*, which decide whether someone is even granted a hearing out. In the techniques of good form, individuals grant each other recognition in principle, separate from everything they have to do with each other, are planning, and want from other people.

They expect the show of respect from others as a virtual promise not to be up to anything improper, and by keeping to and mastering the rules of deportment, they profess their own morality, *self-control as a ritual*; following this ritual appears to be the *sine qua non* for any success. Nevertheless, a little courtesy can by no means be relied on to go a long way. That politeness is made the *condition* for consideration of an interest does not mean that it *replaces* the usefulness of a service for others. What really matters is what someone actually has “to offer” after greetings have been made, besides appropriate clothes and a clean shave— a pearl of wisdom often pointed out by people who professionally treat others as material for their economic and political success. The institutionalization of calculatingly friendly dealing, which is already drilled into children like the times tables, includes not only the general suspicion that there might be nothing “behind” it, but also the freedom to insist on “protocol” to very different degrees according to one’s social position. While politicians and employers, but also teachers and instructors, attach enormous importance to their subordinates displaying impeccable behavior, they themselves can cultivate the rudest manners without meeting with criticism — except behind their back. If such people are in the mood, they can, on the basis of their position, even make themselves popular with an unconventional “style,” blithely disregarding “appearances” and advocating a casual atmosphere. The other way round it’s not so easy: many a breach in matters of “tact” has led very quickly, at universities or otherwise after the arrival of dignitaries, to the breaking off of diplomatic relations, if not in fact the deployment of police. In any case, it is advisable, even in the twentieth century, for those of lesser means, who depend on being useful, to keep to the original meaning of greetings like the Austrian “servus” (from Latin slave, servant) and “ciao” (from Medieval Latin *sclavus* slave) and strike the tone that behooves them. After all, they can use pamphlet distributors and waitstaff to obtain the *compensation* required by their otherwise greatly hampered materialism.

### 3.5. Moral materialism. Envy and Schadenfreude<sup>5</sup>

The bourgeois individual is a skilled hypocrite. Thus he knows from his own experience all about what is driving other people, what they mean when they’re being friendly — and he discovers without difficulty the divergence of decency, as it is proclaimed, from the calculating, i.e. conditional, handling of it. Therefore, he is also capable of carrying hypocrisy to extremes, convicting other people in the name of morality of an *ambiguous morality*. Actually, there is nothing at all ambiguous about moral standards: if they weren’t separate from practice they wouldn’t even exist. In “interpersonal relations,” though, it is not too advisable for bourgeois individuals to start *criticizing* their equals or “betters” for their conduct or their interpretation of it — with equals, the exposure of errors would be based on the interests of those criticized; the same goes for “betters,” with the one difference that it would result in a declaration of opposition. Rather, to show decency just means to play the faithful upholder of the appearances betrayed by the deeds of everyone putting them on. Then one can enjoy *Schadenfreude*, which arises as an exceedingly justified feeling whenever other people’s hypocrisy is crowned with failure. It is customary to condemn others in the name of decency: for their bogus and calculating display of morals as well as for simply offending them. The need for “information” about abortive attempts in both directions feeds an entire branch of mass culture that looks after documenting the aphorism, “Ill-gotten gains never prosper.” In this world, there are logically also *good* — while clever and warm-hearted — *criminals*, who cut a good figure along with completely law-abiding people who have run into some “bad luck through no fault of their own.” The idealistic use of a subordinate mind knows no

---

<sup>5</sup> Enjoyment obtained from the troubles of others.

bounds — unlike the material success of individuals who *agree* with bourgeois rules and intend to get something without *having* anything. A moral subject, who has banished his materialism to the conditional tense, would rather cultivate his interests in the form of *envy*, which demands that others get as little as one gets oneself, than reflect on the objective barriers that condemn his wishes to stay wishes. The experience of failure with the ruse of hypocrisy is, for such an individual, only cause for asserting himself without even scoring any runs.

## Chapter 4. The righteous person

Submitting to what is allowed in this aggressive way, claiming a *right to one's own welfare*, still only involves success in economic and political life for a minority of people, and hypocrisy is not the reason for this either. But this minority see some reason to think the world of their proper personality, which they do with the appropriate combination of modesty and pride: their own *righteousness* — together with a bit of luck — has brought about the fulfillment of all their material needs, making these needs appear virtually irrelevant in light of the spiritual and aesthetic pleasures that transcend them.

However, losers, too, particularly in view of their crappy situation, need not do without this *ideal of themselves*. The fact that their voluntary commitment to the principles required to participate in society doesn't pay off for them confronts them with a clear alternative. Either they take an objective look at the world in which they come up short, hit upon the reasons why, and struggle against the contradictions they are saddled with; or they hang on to their moral point of view, *believe in their own hypocrisy*, and adopt the attitude with which they can continue in all freedom to chafe under the rule they accept. In the second, and these days the normal case, they then consider themselves decent, hardworking people, who just can't afford anything because they've had some hard luck and landed in a world that completely fails to honor their hard work and decency. In view of the modest yield it brings, they accommodate their daily renewed resolve to go along with everything by having a *good conscience*. Of course, they can only have this by continually struggling against the *bad conscience* they get when comparing the requirements of bourgeois life, its criteria for success, with their "failure" to meet them. In their characteristic combination of self-incrimination and consolation, the subordinated individuals of modern society reflect on *themselves*. They take shelter in the idea of being *excellent personalities* despite all their more or less useless efforts — and judge themselves and others with this idealistic criterion that is mocked in practice by the importance of every ordinary person. In this way, the free will comes to have the sorry pleasure of constantly deciding between being *ashamed* of its own failure and cultivating the *appearance of enormous merit*. It confronts the rest of humanity as a judge, enviously accusing everyone of pretending to a nonexistent greatness and advising that they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

### 4.1. Self-confidence: The virtue of failure and pride in success

Educated people, but not only they, think that a person needs self-consciousness. They aren't referring to the simple fact that people are conscious of *themselves* as beings distinguished from the rest of the world, and reflect on their consciousness of objectivity — they really mean *self-confidence*. Even those fully unacquainted with psychological theories are well aware of the quintessence of the relevant doctrines; from the arena of political agitation, where the nation's favorite leadership zealots get lots of publicity showing off their fine characters; from the sports scene, where the people's darlings always lack self-confidence when they blow it — and from "their own experience" at school, at work and in their love lives. What is always meant by this ominous psychological possession is the customary manner in bourgeois society by which the moral self declares himself responsible for his achievements and what they have gained him, or for his failures. He thinks more or less highly of himself in view of the practical thwarting of his ambitions — and most people regard their self-confidence not as the product of their conforming, but as the indispensable *precondition* for success.

On the one hand, by thinking this way, a self-aware subject escapes the scathing judgment that he is simply a nobody when he acts *in agreement* with social requirements, *at the same time* that some of his wishes fall by the wayside. For this, he distinguishes between his *real* achievements and successes, and his *abilities*: he claims to know that he is *capable* of more than he has actually achieved. On the other hand, he can't help noting that he has always practiced truth and probity, and will do so until his cool, cool grave,<sup>6</sup> even though he falls flat on his face. In this way, he adds the idea of the goodness he exudes to that of his fine capabilities. In everyday, practical life, most people's merits are rated rather low and each working day presents a tough settlement of accounts; yet individuals, with the self-confidence they've gotten, indulge in a balance sheet of the reverse kind, at least theoretically. The bourgeois self has made the standards of society its own so perfectly that he credits himself with meeting them, even and particularly when it doesn't pay. He takes comfort quite simply in being a great guy, and even lets this consolation be administered by those who exploit him. At regular intervals, the gentlemen at the top of the democratic hierarchy say how important craftsmen, farmers, plumbers and guest workers are, and that it doesn't matter at all if they don't have any higher education.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Hölty: "Üb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit / Bis an dein kühles Grab." Set to music by Mozart.

#### 4.2. *Conscience: Shame and impertinence*

In cultivating the ideal that the individual forms of *himself*, he blithely stands up for his freedom. When he insists on his righteousness, he declares his willingness to continually meet the standards of bourgeois society, and in his pride, he regards himself once and for all as responsible for everything that comes as a result of his acts. This has consequences for the “interpretation” of the failures he ends up with: a moral person immediately discovers his deficiencies and defeats in the form of direct self-incrimination. He takes no stock in self-criticism; instead, he is used to translating all his mistakes and failures into a *guilty conscience*. The *shame* that befalls a jerk equipped with this “self-confidence,” i.e., any brought-up individual, no longer requires the judicious distinction between an effort thwarted by a competitor, the government or some other important authority, and the poor execution of a plan, clumsiness, or a wrong course of action arising from a lack of knowledge or practice. No such distinction is required because shame is not based on a *judgment* of one's own doings, but on the application of the official standard for success to what one has accomplished. Someone who has made a maxim of life out of his will to reap success *in compliance with the constraints* of capitalistic life and only in that way, and who idealizes himself in fulfilling this maxim, *disgraces himself only before his own principles* — which he regards as anything but subjectivized constraints.

In the feeling of shame, which arises in the wake of a mistake as well as on the occasion of a violation of the manners one advocates, the individual discovers the truth of his “calculating” character, which he otherwise asserts with the saying, “You can't argue with success!” He stops his calculating behavior; and in the interest of his interests, which he really cannot keep neglecting so dreadfully, he then quickly turns to *impertinence*. This, rightly, does not refer to the methods of hypocrisy, but to the failure to use them. The methods a person uses to change his bad conscience into a good one are accepted and common: that compilation of a thousand good reasons why he had absolutely no choice but to act so as to actually displease his conscience. This is how a person *excuses* himself to himself and to others, who obviously harass themselves with the same ideals and apply them as a standard to everyone who gets in their way. *Demonstrating* one's good conscience, presenting one's excellent attitude and abilities, makes it unnecessary to take the tiresome detour of exhibiting the shame one drags around because one constantly notices how little reality there is to the ideal of the righteous character. This is how modern individuals run around, not only with a lot of self-doubt but also as *braggarts*, creating before all and sundry the semblance of being really something else and managing one great feat after another. False consciousness appears here directly as a lie: about one's own achievements, success and merit, about one's honorable intentions and about the big plans one is pursuing, while one is just managing to get along in the world in the most ordinary way, as this world order dictates.

#### 4.3. *Practical feeling as the organ of prejudice*

The fine achievements of the bourgeois mind, on becoming *habitual*, constitute the firm stock of the emotional life available to a moral individual. *Practical feeling*, the form in which willing intelligence directly appears, acts as the judge of everything that an individual experiences, by making one *comparison* after another — between his own *attitude* transformed into judgments about objectivity, and what the rest of the world says and does. It is not just only when he introduces his commentary on the world with the popular phrase, “I think...,” that he turns his “self-confidence” into an *organ of judgment*, which means only that the bourgeois subject assesses friend and foe, law and order, wage, price and profit, man, woman and child using nothing but *prejudices*. The bourgeois righteous person takes the liberty of appraising every gesture and pronouncement of his contemporaries according to whether it complies with his moral materialism, or is nothing but a damn nuisance. In the process, the few criteria that he employs as a proponent of successful decency get so thoroughly jumbled in accordance with his principle that one could think he had no principles.

Thus others can always be sure of being suspected of hypocrisy, bragging and definitely egoism, no matter what they actually say — but sometimes suspicion is also suspended, and then the stupidest specimens of the species enjoy the trust of their fellow men. A public office, their privileged position, maybe even their inferior one, will work wonders. Politicians, superiors and influential relatives enjoy a very different assessment basis for what they achieve and represent than some ordinary creature, who might make the same pronouncements as a cabinet minister or scientist but isn't one. What is respectfully accepted from the one is considered presumptuous or insulting from the other — and this is due to the fact that a moral person takes it for granted that there just are differences between people, and “consequently” also in what should be thought and demanded of them. The moral opportunist calculates his dependencies, those that already exist or are expected, and pushes the appropriate button with the certainty of a sleepwalker.

The *valet's perspective*<sup>7</sup> is no longer the prerogative of spiteful historians, but enjoys widespread application — as it should in a democracy without privileges. Quite ordinary people knock other people's deeds as they see fit, without making the slightest argument, and make no secret of their envy; they brag about acquaintances in better circles while at the same

---

<sup>7</sup> The valet's perspective: Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (VI. C. c.), mentions a French saying, “there is no hero for his valet (il n'y pas de héros pour son valet de chambre).” Modern historians, in the spirit of the valet, are enamored of presenting the ordinary aspects of the lives of their “great men.”

time making malicious remarks about those who trigger their pride. They bestow on subordinate figures around them the compliment of being “nice” — but when someone comes along and asserts the opposite of what they think without an introductory “I think” or “I feel” so as not to have really said anything, i.e., without expressly expressing his most uncertain taste, he has gambled away all sympathy without his opinion being scrutinized at all — unless of course he's a statesman. Then he is not only allowed to trumpet fascist phrases without qualifying them in the least; if he announces with no trace of self-doubt that the people in the country must live healthier and work harder, then that's just the better part of a party's election program. If, in a break between his legislative or governmental activities, he comes out with the slogan that anyone who simply insists on his opinion, and has a critical one at that, is first of all *dogmatic*, and secondly must expect to be suspected of being a *violent criminal*, well-bred citizens do not, for instance, return the accusation of violence, but are instead enormously pleased with the important man's pretended insecurity. It's not hard to make out what is driving the democratic soul here; it's the materialism of ordinary little people who would like to prescribe *their willingness* to submit as *a duty for others* (cf. Chapter 6).

#### *The morality of pluralism in science*

Even in the area of science, manners like these are the only desirable ones. Here, too, arguments are not brought forth freely on the assumption that other scholars are surely also interested in correct statements about their subject and therefore attach some value to proper criticism. The psychological-moral side of *pluralism* in science consists in the remarkable achievement of individuals actually intent on the authority of knowledge inventing all sorts of idiotic *arguments for skepticism*: they make politeness and hypocrisy *comme il faut* even in the intellectual domain by fundamentally suspecting their own ideas of being in error, in order to confront everyone else's theories with the same fundamental reservation without a trace of sensible objection. The point of thinking like this is to obtain *recognition* for any rubbish one can get printed — and no one means recognition for the *objectivity* of the thoughts, of the *knowledge*. The “possibility of error,” the widely feigned concern about hubris and dogmatism, is used as a weapon by every hypothesis or “model” maker to secure a place within the treasured spectrum of free intellectual achievements. There is no disputing about the truth, but rather an organized exchange of very interest-driven, and for that reason interesting “concepts,” and this “dispute” over *knowledge interests*, i.e., over a barbarism, has its own jargon and imperatives. Here too, disinterest in knowledge and in the criticism of errors is not what is considered impertinent, but rather the intention to eliminate falsities and replace them by truths. Any argumentation that is not offered dubiously and thereby taken back the moment it is put forth is considered (a harbinger of) violence. Sentences like the following from a review, incidentally also found in the author's preface, are the universally binding practice: “All in all, more questions are raised than answered, which is important and good, since of course we still have no absolutely certain knowledge about this topic.” Hence, books are written *and* welcomed as proof of ignorance, and it never occurs to anyone that an unclear point might be cleared up and knowledge gained. In this business, it is not even necessary to acquaint oneself with the object under debate — the object is introduced and dispatched as a *problem*, which equally satisfies both the writers' modesty *and* greatness...

#### *4.4. The virtue of prudent submission: “Reason.” Heart versus mind, and vice versa*

The moral individual thinks nothing at all of reason, because in his righteousness, he celebrates himself as the incarnation of reasonableness. His self-confidence demands that he dismiss every insight into something as “dull theory,” and fend off every materialistic impetus to oppose the conditions he wants to comply with as an attack on his freedom. Any such stirrings in the vicinity of a decent citizen are automatically met with the admonition, “Be reasonable!” — and this *definition of reason* of his as prudently going along with things has masses of fans even in wartime, when it is a matter of life or death for one's own country. He shows this definition to be legitimate by referring to the slim prospects of success in swimming against the tide, and in normal times also with a variant of the commandment to practice *tolerance*. A person willing to conform is quick to set himself up as an advocate of principles he declares to be his own, without ever having come up with them himself despite all his unmitigated inventiveness — he even defends the political power he “tolerates,” certifying it is a mere “reaction” to the “unreasonableness” of others. If everyone behaved the way he did, the good man claims, there would be no need for any restrictions on anybody, because everyone would control themselves on their own. This is how righteous people, who have found contentedness with their discontent, blithely claim the title “reason” for themselves when, in terms of what they are actually saying, they legitimate every proceeding against their recalcitrant contemporaries. And from the standpoint of this reason, other people's rebellion appears to them as an act of “*mere*” emotion, of uncontrolled *indignation*, even as unjustified “morality.” Conversely, the same people are also ready to make the opposite accusation when those attacked in such a way account for the content of their concerns, showing that they are reasonable. Then they *refer* to the immediacy of *their feelings*, acting as if the mere attempt to convince other people of something, to win them over with arguments instead of ingratiation, were rather “inhumane.” In the name of the “reason” they practice, which they understand to mean the “natural” acceptance of the conditions imposed on them, they pose as *feeling* individuals, while their critics are *unfeeling* deadbeats, and in the end they invent the danger of a “*cold rationality*” — which means about the same thing as “ruthlessness” and “claim to power.” The moral subject, who with his discontentedness become habit ends up esteeming

himself, being content with the “reasonableness” of his opportunism, thus easily comes up with the *conflict between heart and mind, between emotions and intellect*. Depending on whether he is defending the *content* of his views and deeds as an emotional attitude befitting human beings, or propagating it as a generally widespread and “therefore” reasonable use of his mind, this subject takes the liberty of celebrating emotions one moment and in the next breath demanding calculation. And indeed both in the name of reason. So it is not at all surprising that communists are one time dismissed as idealistic nutcases with good intentions, while other times foamed at as dangerous guys who are out to dupe people with the intellectual trickery of dialectics and have no reverence for anything, because they would like to put a gag on mankind. A personality convinced of his righteousness will of course not stand for either thing and insists on the freedom he so thoroughly enjoys — and since this enjoyment is not to be had without remorse, it takes place as a self-righteous demonstration of one's own excellence that proves itself so nicely on women and children, foreigners and minorities. This demonstration looks somewhat different towards those who call the shots; and even in the face of successful competitors, the materialism that people so decently deny pops up in the form of both a bad *and* a good conscience: as shame and envy...

#### 4.5. *Virtuosos of good conscience: Nietzsche and the Christian individual*

Nietzsche, who hated morality and the resulting techniques of self-denial like poison, hit on the mistake, in view of the ubiquity of such a dreary kind of individuality, of placing the *will in opposition to morality* — as if a (free) will were not at work in the moral subject. Hence he paid homage to the “genuine” will, conceiving an ideal of freedom to be enjoyed by mankind once it were to shake off the “shackles” of morality. The adulation of a free will not subject to any imperative, of the vigor of uninhibitedly decisive individuals, brought him the stupid accusation of being a forerunner of Hitler. This accusation, leveled above all by leftist upholders of “the social aspect” (yet another formula for the abstract commitment to cooperation), testifies to how enthusiastic about morality the intellectual giants in the academic community of professional scholars are: when Nietzsche declares that he couldn't care less about values and intends to revalue them all, the only thing that occurs to them is that this would be a mortal sin. So also in this case, they don't bother raising a proper objection, because they favor the beneficial effects of ethical repression.

Yet, in the attacks of a Nietzsche on the moral subject — summarized in aphorisms such as, “What is the seal of attained freedom? No longer being ashamed in front of oneself”<sup>8</sup> — one might notice two things.

Firstly, that although the decision about freedom is fully up the individual here, it's not just that he is restricting himself, but rather incriminating himself on the basis of a conflict with an entity that is foreign and hostile to his will; for Nietzsche, there exists no *objective reason*, power or rule, that constitutes the starting point for the practice of self-control. This critic of morality has a very psychological way of thinking, in that he resolves the morally operating will into an underlying free will and the shackles confining it. This spares a thinker who calls for the end of being ashamed from any thought of the higher authorities that exist independently of the individual, dispose over means for applying pressure and dictate to the free will the good conduct that the individual then displays in his righteousness and corresponding conscience. Secondly, that the motto, “Don't be ashamed anymore!” is expertly followed by moral subjects, precisely because they are moral. The *Christian*, for whom Nietzsche has so much contempt, is nothing short of a virtuoso in the art of ridding himself of shame. A Christian makes a clean sweep of his bad conscience in a rather cunning way, detaching it from all his individual misdeeds at once by calling himself a sinner as a matter of principle. First, he extends it to everyone — “We humans are sinners!” — only to raise himself above all nonbelievers by precisely this confession. With penance and confession, he casts off the burden of conscience and qualifies for the realm of the just at Jesus' side. Then, on the workdays that follow, he becomes aware of his sinning nature again, in order to set out once more on his inner way to salvation with the usual self-righteousness...

#### 4.6. *Weltanschauung as an honorable substitute for knowledge. Superstition, daydreams and role models*

The Christian seesaw of opportunistically up- and downgrading one's own and other people's sins is admittedly also mastered by average citizens less versed in the Bible. If someone actually does criticize something about bourgeois dealings, he is without further ado a communist and ought to put his own house in order — and before he knows it his own house lies at the foot of the Ural Mountains. One can say whatever one wants to a person who focuses on his righteousness and is even proud of it, because he is firmly convinced he doesn't need to listen to anything from anyone anyway. He preserves his freedom to imagine the course of the world *his way*, virtually as a matter of *honor* he will not be deprived of. Conversely, that does not mean that he *sets any store* by his *judgment*; rather, from among the opinions offered him every day by newspapers and television, he adopts as his own those opinions that best correspond to his opportunism along with the attendant disappointments. He gauges every remark another person makes 1) according to the importance of *who* is speaking, and 2) by the potential consequences that it, were it true, *would* have for his own way of life, which is otherwise settled. In short, he *believes* the interpretations of capitalistic events that agree with his attitude — and, conversely, he maintains his attitude to be the necessary consequence of his *weltanschauung*, which he likes to present as a proven insight into human nature, as his *concept of man*.

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Gay Science* (Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft) No. 275

This already betrays the point of the respective edifices of ideas: despite all the low opinions that a modern person concocts about his contemporaries, he does not fail to make out the *necessity* for all institutions and customs alongside his own exceptional status. At the same time, it hardly bothers him that the measures for order he welcomes do not prevent the transgressions he despises. As a stout reactionary — and this means everyone with a *weltanschauung* — he makes do with the construct, “Where would we be if ...” and shows himself to be very understanding of all the constraints he submits to — of course only because of everyone else, who otherwise wouldn’t be able to control themselves at all. Showing his usual skill in hypocrisy, he agrees “in theory” with idealists of all stripes while maintaining that their fine intentions are obviously not to be realized “in practice.” They run aground on “human nature,” which is the ruin of all good ideas. When construing the necessities that lend plausibility to the correctness of the way he lives, no idea is too stupid as long as it somehow serves to “explain” why he can’t accomplish anything that great — but for the same reason gives him the solace of knowing the secret of the ways of the world and their unpleasantness. Rather ordinary citizens hold to conspiracy theories in matters of world politics, to obscure hypotheses about their illnesses, and to fabulous knowledge of all the reasons *behind* public life. In the middle of the twentieth century, not so long after the era when Enlightenment struck certain minds — who were convinced that knowledge was a useful thing — there is not only *faith*, by which people imagine a God after their own image, but also plenty of *superstition* and expertise in the stars.

The same subjects, who harbor ridiculous notions to come to terms with the fact that they count for nothing much but are theoretically full masters of the situation, additionally indulge in pretty fantastic *daydreams*, in which they accomplish really great things, showing themselves and everyone else how well they conform to the ideal of their ability and virtuousness. And they discover their dreamed-of achievements as reality in other incarnate personalities who represent something, serving particularly for youth as *role models*, so that some people get on the nerves of everyone around them as dopey copies of their idols, a movie star being just as suitable as Dad.

#### 4.7. *Morality philosophy-wise: Where would we be, then?*

The unequivocally highest subdivision of freedom, freedom of thought, shows a touching concern for good morals. These are on principle a concern in all the human and social sciences, in which the bourgeois world, i.e., everything a modern individual declares his agreement with in his attitude and his good conduct, is portrayed as being absolutely necessary and natural and human. And especially a concern in a branch called “ethics” or “practical philosophy,” which deserves to be called very impractical. For it seeks to *justify morality* as a technique suited to “man.” In today’s think shops, this is not taken as explanation, whereby the moral handling of all antagonisms — between state and citizens, the classes, old and young, man and woman, and so on — is traced back to a *reason*. Ethical philosophizing undertakes no less than to deduce morality as the indispensable foundation and purpose of all social life, *over and above the real reasons* that after all exist in practice and have long since been made known in explanations of the economic and political rule of capital (cf. Karl Marx, *Capital I–III*, and GegenStandpunkt publications on *The Democratic State*, *Imperialism*, and *Fascism*). These enthusiasts of moral authority do not ask questions of the caliber, “What may man do?” or “What should we do?” etc., in order to shed light on prevailing morality, both as obeyed and violated; they act completely as if the world had been waiting for them to discover the principles of decent conduct, so that our earthly existence could receive a Knigge<sup>9</sup> worthy of “Homo sapiens,” “zoon politikon”<sup>10</sup> and “cogito ergo sum.”<sup>11</sup> They see the achievements of free will rather *a priori* in its self-restraint — quite as if it had nothing more important to do! They are fanatics of *conditional nonviolence*, of peace on earth that *would* come if only “people,” all of them, *would* practice restraint toward others. None of these philosophers has ever been rude to a politician ruthlessly pursuing peace, a foreign minister addicted to development aid, an army general, or a capitalist trading and investing in the East or South — instead they constantly lecture all *people* as such, since people are *all the same* to an idealist. For philosophical exercises, all sorts of tiresome borderline situations are dreamed up in the area of conflict between right and duty, situations that constantly revolve around murder and mayhem, and forever portray the world as a problem of legitimatizing self-defense — everything from euthanasia to war is gone through, but of course only in terms of exquisite pangs of conscience, never as judgment about state mandates to kill.

At universities, people pore over the brilliant question of whether one should lie! — and waste not one spark of intelligence on why people lie like mad, while at the same time are convinced of the short legs of knowingly false statements. The problem is tackled “concretely” in advanced classes: everyone imagines a person on his deathbed who you may tell in all conscience that he will win the next six-day race. (Why should one take one’s dozing grandpa, of all people, seriously when one does not even deal honestly with normal people who still brush their own teeth?) When all problems of this caliber are happily solved, that is, the code of good conduct suitable for mankind is finally finished with help from Kant and Christian

<sup>9</sup> Knigge: etiquette manual. After Adolph Freiherr von Knigge 1752–1796, *On Human Relations* (Über den Umgang mit Menschen) a treatise with the reputation of being the authoritative guide to behavior, politeness and etiquette.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle: “urban/political animal.”

<sup>11</sup> Descartes: “I think, therefore I am.”

compassion, some crusaders for the humanity that comes from morals remember or notice something else: that in the name of morality, power is exercised and quite a few things tend to be done that are neither healthy nor uplifting. So the fellows from the ethics front do end up giving some thought to reality, in their own abstruse way. With all their idealism, they demand that state terror (which of course has to be: *homo homini lupus!*<sup>12</sup>), which neither in war nor peace stops at the will of insufficiently righteous individuals, present itself *legitimately!* The arch-democratic idea of a morally impeccable supervision of individual materialism (= egoism) might then even include a philosophical critique of rule — that turns out accordingly: following Plato, a longing is expressed for kingly philosophers or philosophically versed rulers whenever the exercise of power of past or present regimes is not to the taste of the ethicist who always stands up for rule qua morality, whenever it puts a strain on *his* good conscience when it comes to humanity. Or he warns against “overestimating” human reason and — while sublimely abstracting from all the terror that gave birth to democracy and that democracy spreads around the world — argues for democracy in the name of “critical rationalism.” The “argument” being that democracy is *based* on the insight into the human, all-too-human propensity to err! The relevant nuances of this fairly impractical position of “practical philosophy” toward the world are well received; philosophers, because they speak out for the state as a *moral* subject, are never suspected of subversion — even though their theoretical humanism now and then reaches different conclusions than do practical and “responsible” politicians when it comes to the environment, abortion and nuclear power. Politicians in turn pick up bits of argumentation from the philosophy shop to exhibit their bad conscience, which thereby recovers its good standing. They simply act as if rule and business were the same for them as for the intellectual elite: a *moral mission*.

#### 4.8. Moral mania in literature

The presumptuousness of *philosophical minds*, who justify ethics for their contemporaries, is fed by a luxurious ignorance of the reasons why a considerable majority on the globe have neither food nor morality, and why the majority of the civilized minority have morality guaranteed and thus food only conditionally. However, these practical philosophers have a substitute for knowledge in stock that does the trick: a low opinion of “human beings” and their nature, but a high one of themselves as genuine humanists. Their gift of reflecting about everything that could make “our coexistence” tolerable is proof to them of their exclusive humanity, which they then bestow on people intent on higher nonsense: they are the professional representatives of good and bad conscience, taking loving care of the ideals of bourgeois society apart from its real life, and discovering an imperfect Eden of human rights and duties in the mores of the Free West.

Unfortunately, the thinkers are almost outdone by the *writers* when it comes to morality. As people who consider their *subjective* impressions important enough to give them an objective existence in a beautiful form separate from their innermost experiences; as admirers of the power of their imagination, which continually “compels” them to convey their personal images of the world to utter strangers; as most exquisite individualists who think their sensorium<sup>13</sup> has managed to cull the secrets great and small of the *conditio humana*,<sup>14</sup> and so in their own way — without the detour of science — maintain the identity of their thoughts with what goes on in the world — as subjects of a special literary history, these artists have invented quite a few plots and conflicts. However, they have but rarely succeeded in showing in their stories what is really driving the protagonists they have thought up. Their characters are usually involved in contradictions of by far the noblest caliber, so that their morality is not shown as such, but as the highest purpose and life-and-death problem of the literary figures. The canon of national bourgeois literatures, from the classics to the modern, consists mainly of elaborate illustrations of some constellation or other of conflicting principles: right, duty and inclination are at loggerheads; honor, love and country get in each other’s way; knowledge and power, life and death, or simply good and evil, are at each other’s throats, so that the poor dramatis personae run around as mere *allegories*.

This suits the professional literary interpreters just fine, because anyway they are always only searching for “meaning” in the “heritage” that they argue about classifying; but — to make another across-the-board judgment — it also testifies to the fact that most artists subject their imagination to the very personal requirement that it enable them to “come to terms with their state of mind.” This technique, which has become a profession in bourgeois society, of seeing one’s own creative soul as a very *special form of righteousness*, as deeply felt *humanity itself*, and palming off its problems on the reading public for their edification, is evidenced not only by the works of this luxurious species, but also by their forewords, prologues in the theater, their methodological writings on art, their exchange of letters, and the madmen and suicides among poets. There is a complete scale here: from the romantic soul who despairs of the world but still loves it; to the artist constantly problematizing himself, worrying about his integrity as much as his recognition; to the bards of social misery, which they notice to be a contradiction to the wealth of a society that pays for poets, so that they get a bad conscience and lament poverty with verses — all the way to the modern prattling on about the poet’s social roles, missions and responsibilities, where eyeing the public has become the socially acceptable desire to get a message across, the literati have provided lots of evidence that they and

<sup>12</sup> Latin: “man is a wolf to man,” Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

<sup>13</sup> Sensorium: entire sensory apparatus.

<sup>14</sup> Latin: human condition.

their business are what really matter to them, and that they on no account intend to abuse their minds making a free judgment about the world. So to this very day they are still grappling with the pathetic alternatives of their fancy, whose sole freedom consists in deciding whether to present *the impossibility of happiness or its realization* in their edifying opuses. After Brecht's simpleminded achievement of explicitly making the failure of morality, human goodness that has no place (yet) in the world, the object of his writings, there was only one transition left to make: to illustrate the psychological "problematics" by putting the war between heart, mind, real self and screwed-up will on the agenda, and impress the stamp of modern theories of man and his striving for "self-realization" on the products of artistic imagination once and for all. The story of literature's moral mania is not amusing, not even in its inevitable attempts to be immoral; and not terribly uplifting either, unless it comes along without pretension: as a western, a mystery or a work of science fiction, where there is no need for any doubt about what message is being conveyed by a sheriff, a criminal or a robot...

## Part II. How the bourgeois individual proves himself in his homeland, capitalist society

Bourgeois individuals obviously do not first acquire their manners, and then try them out in the world. They do not bring their minds into line with the principles of good conduct *before* developing these principles into a program of adapting to every situation. This separation carried out here is a theoretical one, which aims at portraying the “logic” of the workings of an abstract free will. So there is no reason to suppose that this logic exists apart from the individual’s continual restricting himself to the circumstances that he considers a means to his success.

If the determinations of bourgeois individuality so far portray “only” the *general* techniques of accommodation executed in both everyday and Sunday words and deeds, this is surely no objection to their *objectivity*. And since the principles of bourgeois good conduct are taken from the concrete forms of intercourse laid out in Part II, this section can read like a collection of “examples” of the “method” of a calculatingly self-restraining will.

### *The “secret” of “second nature”: Accommodation*

However, we have no interest in a “catalogue” of evidence. What is to be shown here is nothing less than what the heading implies: that the moral individual, with his consciousness of his freedom, *feels at home* in bourgeois society. In all his concerns he is forever mobilizing his forces to reinterpret every restriction as a permission, the permission as an opportunity, the opportunities offered as the freedom to make use of them; and whenever he is dissatisfied with the results of his freedom gained in this way, he has the consolation that he is even conceded the right to be dissatisfied — with himself and others. The four chapters that follow therefore deal with *how* the bourgeois subject brings his self-consciousness to bear in all spheres of life, so that he takes every critique of bourgeois life and dealings as a direct criticism of *himself* that he “doesn’t need to put up with”; they deal with what sort of *criticism* his *assent* does lead to — and with how he thereby progresses toward considering himself a beneficiary or a victim. This is not a proof *that* bourgeois individuals behave in the way stated in Part I; rather, it turns out that their efforts at self-control must have *solidified into “character”* in order to function again and again in the face of what people are forced to do. Thus what is “proved” is only that the techniques of the moral person — who prides himself on the fact that “only” his self-control but not “he himself” is monitored, rewarded or punished — that these techniques *exist* as habit ever ready to be applied, as “second nature”; and that he so values this second nature, acquired through his upbringing and through limited experiences of bourgeois life, that additional or worse experiences leave him no wiser...

## Chapter 5. Bourgeois spheres of life as viewed by the righteous person

An individual who, with the consciousness of his freedom, arrives at the ideal of righteousness allows himself a quid pro quo in the carrying out of all his dealings that is really something. *His attitude* toward social relations, his readiness to conform, makes him see the bourgeois world as one set up precisely for him *as an individual human being*. It accommodates him with its rights and concessions, with its dictates and offers, it actually only organizes everything he feels as needs, duties and inclinations.

The expedient arrangement of the world already becomes clear to the moral subject in the division of the spheres of life:

— *Political rule*, carried out as *democracy*, creates order while at the same time granting him — alongside “indispensable” restrictions — freedom of opinion, the sovereignty of the subjugated person, whom nothing ever suits when he goes along with things; who goes along with everything of his own accord and enjoys this — so much so that he remakes *his assent* to state force into the fairy tale that force is not a political means and he lives free from force.

— *Competition*, the way the citizen’s working life, his work, is organized, is not considered to be a comparison *made with him* and against him. For him, it is the fulfillment of his need for fairness that is his due. He is extremely conversant with the lie that an individual’s performance determines his income, his share of wealth, and his social position overall. He is equally conversant with the wish, expressed in the pose of protest, that this is how it really *should* be. He just insists on holding his own in the comparison with others.

— Finally, *private life* is regarded by a citizen — despite the detailed regulations imposed on it by the state — as the sphere of life where he can do whatever he likes *without* interference from annoying authorities and other people, his sole purpose being to please *himself*.

Thus the bourgeois subject, in agreement with the dictates and restrictions that oppose his interests, by no means submits to the force and obstacles he continually encounters out of “insight into his powerlessness,” gnashing his teeth. What he does, even and particularly if he belongs to the majority who fail miserably, is something quite different. A citizen *idealizes* the harsh conditions for success as the *means of success* — and the complaint that these conditions do not correspond to his ideal circulates as *criticism*. In each sphere of life, critical people discover the imperfect realization of principles they think *should* be valid — and they especially like to try improving one sphere by transferring the ideals of another to it. Their conclusion: things are not *quite* all right yet, but...

### 5.1. The democrat’s servile spirit:<sup>15</sup> Self-confident championing of prevailing conditions

Bourgeois society can come up with an amazing achievement: the exploited and ruled majority are of the free opinion that they are getting a good deal. The democratic servile consciousness justifies one’s own willingness to submit more or less continually, and particularly when others show certain signs of rebelling, with the “argument” that it wouldn’t work any other way. On those occasions when an objection to a very precisely defined phenomenon of political life, conditions at work, etc., is made, a decent citizen feels challenged to defend the bourgeois system lock, stock and barrel. For this much he does realize: the criticism attacks his way of making himself useful — which is why he swears on the spot that he can’t imagine things any other way. Somebody has got to govern, and if there were no rules everything would go haywire, not just traffic; if there were no wage incentives no one would lift a finger, and without anybody somehow in charge no one could get his act together, other people especially would let it all hang out — and nobody wants that, least of all me... As for communism, it might be a nice idea but unfortunately unworkable. A decent citizen, a dogged freedom fighter to the end, would never put up with anything like what you saw over there in the former Soviet Union and its allies!

### 5.2. The citizen as Mr. Clean

Just because the individual has freely decided to assign his materialism a backseat to his idealism doesn’t mean it has to be pursued in the shadows. For the transfiguration of state, competition and private life into the most expedient institutions for seeing to it that everyone, oneself included, can show off their abilities and their decency to advantage leaves enough room for announcing one’s own interests. However, these interests do not make their appearance simply as such; they are presented precisely as befits honorable things of long standing in the world. The classical form of hypocrisy, making one’s demands in the name of prevailing and accepted rules, is applied in a multitude of ideologies, which are easy for anyone to

---

<sup>15</sup> Ger: “Knechtsbewußtsein.” cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, where it is often translated as “consciousness of the bondsman.”

appreciate and reject as “*constructive criticism*” and “*a useful contribution.*” Any dismay about one’s own situation, just as any discontent with other people’s real or imaginary advantages, is recast as concern about the functioning of an institution, a moral custom or social life as a whole. Any disagreeable phenomenon of competition is turned into a crisis, and the state’s dealings with citizens into a matter of life and death for values that are fairly sacred to us all. Bourgeois journalism leads the way here, because it specializes in the most recent cases for lamenting the erosion and undermining of law and the family, currency and democracy, old-age pensions and public opinion, etc., etc. — all in the name of the citizens, of course, who eagerly learn that this is the only permissible way to get grievances off their chests. This yields the much-praised climate of tolerance, in which the moth-eaten class struggle and its “mindset” withdraw. Alongside the naked materialism of envy, there are therefore also subtler forms used by a bourgeois subject to go after his peers, but never after those who actually land him in the soup with the reason for his righteous concerns. Everyone is a little guardian of public morals, who laments the decay of at least nine principles of occidental civilization per day — and is also proficient at putting this grievance into action in the form of slander and the like.

How pointless it would be to question these shining examples of abstract free will about what good this does *them*...

### 5.3. *Criticizing one sphere with the ideals of another*

Someone who considers bourgeois conditions to be the institutionalized form of his most sovereign human nature also finds in them the standards for criticism when, in spite of everything, he is displeased at times with quite a bit. As a fanatic of democracy and its forms of intercourse — whose substance and purpose, effective rule, is totally irrelevant — he comes up with all the democratic ideals when he thinks he has discovered something amiss outside the world of politics. In the sphere of competition, i.e., at work, one is ignored and never has any say since others call the shots unilaterally; in private life there is genuine discussion with everyone voicing an opinion on an equal footing and even full recognition of women and children — so much for “making changes” these days. But then too, the harshness of competition also works as an idealized principle. As soon as such a critical citizen discovers how comfortably political party careers advance in comparison to getting ahead on the assembly line, he gets to thinking — and demands a proper selection process in politics for political pros. And in private life, many a bad decision can be noted among one’s own and the opposite sex if one applies the criterion of comparative performance: “She’s dating *him*,” that loser...? But the nicest thing of all is to apply maxims of private life, which of course are construed as terribly humane in utter opposition to nasty politics and to the work/business life where everyone has to assert himself, to the other branches of bourgeois society: there needs to be more leniency and you-know-what-I-mean in politics, lots and lots of solidarity in the working world and above all more humane workplaces. It’s so easy to scale the heights in borrowing ideals with this to and fro: the *separation* — so goes the argument — between private life, career and politics hinders humaneness; the humane motto: in all circumstances be *responsible, always a good citizen!*

## Chapter 6: Politics — Democratic servile consciousness

Bourgeois individuals are “politicized” when they are *positively* concerned about the organization of the political rule they are subjected to. They are completely at ease speaking of the compulsory national relationship they *have* to obey as a community they *want*: “we.” All the annoyances the state causes them is the starting point for *critical* opinions aimed at improving its rule. Hostility to rule is not declared in these opinions; rather, politics is constructively confronted with alternatives for carrying it out.

In all their variety, the critical judgments of responsible citizens achieve in substance only one thing: they split off the negative *effects* of politics from its *purpose*, so that those affected act *disappointed* — which can only be done by consistently disregarding the economic *reason* for state power. As far as the formal side of civic opinion forming is concerned — the *attitude* displayed — one cannot fail to notice in all the griping the *pretended* disappointment, the separation between expressed complaint and practical intent. Even the most indignant and disparaging opinion is recognizably the utterance of an individual who attaches no importance to his own judgment and is not refusing obedience, who is not the least bit serious about looking for ways and means of putting his objection into practice.

When arguing as “we taxpayers,” those affected *feign* an attitude of *entitlement* — the pack of journalists is busy acting for everyone in this way — an attitude that is always completed by the “demand” for others to be restricted more thoroughly. Statesmanlike recipes for dealing with all those who “go too far” — always sparing the ruling class — rank alongside scornful findings on “one’s” *representatives*, “one’s” trampled-on *rights*, and innappropriate *social, economic and foreign policies*. Civil servants incur the sincerest hatred from the regulars at the local pub, while a career in the civil service would be just the right thing for one’s own children, and the nation’s highest civil servants are shown a respect that can easily compete with the *worship* of pre-bourgeois ruling figures. A citizen will let a presidential candidate talk about things, and prescribe them, as “objective necessities” in a way he would never let his neighbor get away with. *Election campaigns* are conducted, and *decided* by citizens entitled to vote, according to criteria that show not even a semblance of “rational” (= calculating) reflection, so that election campaigns are subject to fierce criticism of their style on the part of their central figures.

The democratic state thus always includes a minority of disappointed devotees of a *stronger* state, whose “arguments” are admittedly shared by the majority. They inspire anti-Fascist fans of a *just* state to try to rescue and expand the substance of democracy — and there is also the oppositional alternative of a “life without repression”<sup>16</sup> that begins here and now.

For the rest, both rightists and leftists can feel *entitled* to commit *crimes* as political practice, claiming that the power exercised by the state doesn’t do justice to their notion of justice. The former want order to be properly established at last; the latter personally declare war on it. And neither line of terrorism needs to worry about its “breeding ground.” It’s the same one.

### 6.1.

The critique of democratic consciousness and the analysis of political practice is *not* a psychological matter. It aims at refuting the arguments that political adversaries bring to bear for their cause, showing the untruthfulness of their arguments, and denouncing the interests their arguments are meant for. For that reason, this chapter does not describe democracy and misguided struggles for and against it,<sup>17</sup> but merely the feats of the mind that are performed by a submissive free will. It deals with the attitude of individuals who are confronted with the effects of the power of the state “superstructure” while agreeing to it, and who moreover always judge their own economic experience by the standard of fair treatment of a righteous citizen.

### 6.2. Self-assured submissiveness: the political “we”

In the civic “we” that he insists on using when discussing every affair of state, the modern individual aligns himself in all his righteousness with the rule he submits to. He generously overlooks society’s antagonisms and discusses *himself* and *his* interests as the actual purpose of political power. While those who have a say and benefit from the relations of power that protect person and property always say “we” when making *demands* on the losers, the latter allow themselves the noble gesture of *consenting* by merely complaining that this “we” is poorly realized. The *submission* they have carried out

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Karl Held and Audrey Hill, *The Democratic State: Critique of Bourgeois Sovereignty*

customarily becomes an argument for the right to make critical comments, so that these comments never lose their character of expressed disappointment. The ploy of being a *taxpayer*, with which one proves oneself definitely entitled to get worked up over some government measure, illuminates the desolate need of citizens who are so smug about their blasé attitude toward power: their declared interests always boil down to their wish that the state not bestow so many favors on others, or as the case may be, that it has to be stricter in dispensing justice to them, while the complaining individuals pose as its legitimate victims. When regulars talking politics at the pub resort as citizens to badmouthing injustice from those “on top” like this, their objection *ends* all debate: they don’t find some deplorable state of affairs, get incensed about it and then seek the reasons for it; much less ponder the question, “What is to be done?”<sup>18</sup> because the pride of a righteous person displeased with his government has been fully satisfied with his expressed disappointment. Statesmen of all orders of magnitude are well aware of this and “explain” their every action as helping to assert the inalienable right of taxpayers. No matter whether they are putting up nuclear power plants or building up the army and celebrating public tattoos to swear in drafted recruits — they always land at the satisfaction being given to the esteemed taxpayer.

### 6.3. *Constructive criticism*

So there is actually some truth to the rumor that political power in a democracy lives on the *criticism* of those who feel the brunt of it. For the criticism mustered by all responsible citizens — responsible because they’re concerned with getting recognition for their righteousness — amounts to nothing more than the formal accusation of the state of failing to comply with *its* principles, which they wholeheartedly share; not exactly a declaration of war on the public power. Those *affected* do not quarrel with their state on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation; rather, they act as if they were starting this calculation anew every day and discovering their commonwealth hardly paid off any more. Being on the receiving end simply *is not* their argument, because they insist on the standards set by the state for its “mission,” deriving from this above all else the moral authority to throw their disadvantage into the discussion. Instead of registering an objection, they untiringly *agree* in their accusations with friend and foe alike on principles against which “one” allows not a single word to be said: the entirety of democratic criticism is made up of offensively puffed-up hypocrisy, the insistence that one is being cheated out of accepted values, out of the reward for one’s righteousness.

When disappointed individuals, so self-assured in their disappointment, follow up their “criticism” with the answer to the question of guilt, they always end up finding the state and its representatives *not* guilty. After all, their agreement when it comes to “principles,” by which they legitimize their indignation, represents an abstraction they have carried out from the purpose of all politics, so that the accusation that accepted purposes have *not* been carried out can be productively elaborated. Many a statesman must put up with being attacked as a would-be benefactor because he is unable to cope with his party, this or that force, or just “developments” per se. Such phantom issues, which make ruling so difficult, are conjured up in reams by an “ordinary person” — without a first-class diploma or professional license — when he certifies one politician as being “incompetent” while announcing his trust in another for being equal to the “problems”: the arms race, wage-price spiral, bureaucracy, technical progress, growth, political apathy, national debt — and whatever other things one might dream up that politicians have to cope with.

The harsh criticism with which the individual, fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, finally resolves to make his choice at the polls always goes essentially along the same lines: *incompetence* in achieving everything the citizen thinks matters in politics. As a *voter*, the self-assured citizen either allows that his rulers “know their business” or else denies it, and in this method, which reflects little knowledge of what goes on in politics, the loyal subject achieves his finest quid pro quo: he manages to act as if *he* were the inspector and touchstone of a political power solely out to *use* him — but only by once again making the refutation of his standpoint part and parcel of it. He votes for the “lesser evil” and even thinks he’s clever for realizing that his wishes will *not* be fulfilled by the future government. That is why he attaches little importance to the dim view he takes of politicians — he simply votes for the “evil” that most appeals to him personally, because it presents itself entirely the way he as a citizen *would* act if he *were* a politician!

### 6.4. *Nation as sentiment and character*

A righteous person won’t hear anything against the “we” in whose name alone demands are made and criticism is voiced in a democratic community. After all, this “we” is the point of view from which he in all seriousness judges everything that happens to him, i.e., organizes down to the last detail his view of the “forces” that make this world go round and his worries and pleasures concerning them. In *nationalism*, the citizen’s *hypocrisy* turns *honest*, and indeed all the more so, the more consistently the calculations of personal gain he pins on it are wrecked by the authority’s actual deeds: he shows pride and indignation in the name and in the interest of the rule with which he, as a self-assured subject, both knows himself to be, and feels, joined in solidarity, even and especially when its momentarily topmost executors do not suit him.

National sentiment is never at a loss for occasions to express itself, even if its holder’s notion of how the nation’s interests are faring has nothing much to do with how they are actually being carried out. In his view, the way the age of

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lenin’s *What is to be done?* in which he outlines the tasks of the workers’ movement and the revolutionary party.

imperialism has happily so completely seen through the dividing up and sorting out of mankind according to citizenship is the result and the expression of a kind of a fairly natural diversity of the various *peoples*; and just as the righteous citizen, who in other contexts regards many a national comrade to all intents and purposes as enemies and wants them treated as such, might now forgive(s) them in the name of their common nation — unless conversely he crowns his proclamation of justice for them with the utmost accusation of *national treason!* — he finds foreigners suspicious simply because they are not natives: doesn't the disposition to comply with a rule other than one's own have to entail a different and *therefore* inferior or at least questionable sort of righteousness? Although the citizen, thinking open-mindedly along the same lines as his government and its public opinion, lets them dispel worries of this kind as soon as reasons of state dictate a higher degree of "friendship among peoples" with a neighbor, he is very quick to be reminded of them again — and not even the most dizzying swings in the configuration of this ethnology for the people will make a decent person draw the conclusion that he is making himself the useful idiot for his rulers' diplomacy by his multiply varied and embroidered aversion to foreign peoples. Every difference to the rest of the world that he discovers in his own national "we" makes him proud, even if he knows nothing about the matter in question and doesn't even think much of it himself. When this absurd comparison becomes a public event, masses that otherwise never come together for a normal demonstration then readily demonstrate how much the nation's honor actually means to them quite personally. Everyone, in Germany for instance, has cobbled together some conception of *history* from won or lost soccer games, wars waged by past rulers and tyrants, the "lost" Second World War, and the regained international standing of German industry, cobbled in such a way that it does the holder, be he professor or hairdresser, the desired service, that is, provide his imagination with the means for producing pride and indignation in just the mixture and with the thrust required by the international situation of the moment — and for his own efforts to keep up with the march of history. When a war is finally on the agenda again, its organizer has always been able to rely on its subjects' habit of regarding even their own existence with considerable aplomb from the point of view that the national "spirit of resistance" is without doubt historically justified. And it can rely equally on its intellectuals, who normally cultivate their national pride chiefly or exclusively on the lofty level of the nobler cultural riches, and therefore like to combine it with plenty of scorn for the "crude" nationalism of the common people and a cosmopolitan attitude fed by this scorn and a special preference for particular peoples; concerning the lie and the brutal truth of the general heading "defense" under which modern states carry out their worldwide terrorism, the national intelligentsia at most come up with fastidious doubts about the "unpolished" *style* displayed by the national authority in this area.

Naturally, the everyday effort of enjoying or suffering along with the presented successes or failures of one's own nation also bears its fruits in the inner life of individuals so intensively occupied. Someone who makes it a habit of especially esteeming or disdaining specific idiocies of bourgeois life in himself and others under the heading of national characteristics, and thus in either case cultivating them as such, does not first need to take such a radical step as marrying from the point of view of racial hygiene to end up actually producing a "*national character*" in himself and his children. It is not naively, but with a calculating orientation of their own prejudices and preferences according to the customs esteemed or disdained as national, that modern citizens devote a good part of their lifetime to the all too successful effort to develop, quite beyond all real regional differences in living conditions, a special narrow-mindedness that makes their fatal wish come true: of their own free will being character masks of that national "we" that they celebrate in their national anthem with a pleasurable shudder.

### 6.5. *Radical dissent: The fight for the right to criticize*

The intention, easily seen in all critical grumbling, not to overly embarrass one's own self-esteem with the submission one practices, that is, to at least accompany it by opinion that testifies to a free will — this obviously *pretended* insistence on one's own interests constitutes for the citizen the starting point for various *actions* within the framework of a "*movement.*" After all, the contradiction between more or less vociferously proclaiming one's discontent and political pussyfooting quite logically provokes the accusation that he should *either* keep his mouth shut *or* give his opinion credibility by "getting involved."

Of course there is nothing good about his resolving to get serious about his critical attitude toward the state. It matters to the utmost what sort of discontent in which movement with what goals is overcoming *the* "contradiction between theory and practice"! When self-assured citizens and nationalists lament the decay of their political rule and think all their righteousness and willingness to make sacrifices deserves better appreciation and utilization by the state, they can "get involved" in a fascist organization, blame just about everything that displeases them on the state being too lax and degenerate — and become violent models for friends of the people who have not yet "gotten involved." When disappointed citizens judge their political rule by the entitlements it "really should" concede to its righteous subjects but "actually" denies them, the result is a "fight for rights," for purchasing power and working-class children at universities — that is, a movement opposing "state monopoly capitalism." The point of view of needs that are refused recognition by state "repression" can also be applied to the transition from mere griping to a "practical" movement, and a look at "meaningful" and "alternative" living shows that opposition put into practice occasionally turns into a new sort of contentedness as well as a line of business.

Ideologists of democracy firstly will not hear anything about the *differences* that come about when criticism stops being the theoretical accompaniment to practical submission; for the mere difference to good conduct suffices to draw the line

between the opposition's "world views" and democrats' "reason." Secondly, this legal finding is at the same time very well suited for making "deviant behavior" and "psychological dispositions" responsible as the *reason* for such entirely incomprehensible practices, so that the democratic foundations of the extrademocratic spectrum are made to disappear *psychologically*.

#### *Crime I: Terror as a just use of force, autonomously*

Finally, the question of the *breeding ground for terrorism* would be taken care of if something other than the *criminal* nature of the *deviance* were attested to. For it is the hypocritical demand to "get involved," with which especially political reps on the campaign trail try to induce young people to join in constructively, that is taken dead seriously by terrorists in their own way. They are also quite taken with the thinking of politicians that a juster use of force can achieve a lot of good. They even appreciate the advice, "If you don't like it here, get lost!" which attests to democratic longing for appropriate treatment of leftists: some people just "deserve" freedom and others don't. Since terrorists of "leftist" origin are thus by no means *cynical*, instead directing the *weight of morality* against its hypocritical beneficiaries who always use force, they turn into advocates and engineers of quite exquisite crimes that are committed not out of self-interest but for the people.

Terrorists from the "right," who condemn the people in the name of law and order and are not squeamish about executing their verdict, complete the wealth of alternatives exhibited by the democratic reconciliation of "theory and practice," discontent and action. So there is no lack of opportunities for true democrats, who consider their submission to be a nonviolent state of affairs, to be alarmed by "the use of force as a means of politics" — otherwise, especially in wartime, they don't have time to be.

#### *6.6. Education for freedom and responsibility*

In their efforts to make children into useful adults, schools and parents are exceedingly economical with the knowledge and ability they pass on to the new generation — unerringly producing precisely in this way the correct views and attitudes in the young mind. In mom and dad's compliments on going to bed and getting up early, which is known to make a man healthy, wealthy and wise, a quick child soon enough hears the message that even with sleeping, the crucial thing is to prove some virtue in order to *earn* the next "pleasure"; the next day the same lesson is repeated. For a child just starting school it therefore represents as a rule nothing new for his first arithmetic and writing efforts to be immediately acknowledged in the form of praise or reproach, i.e., as proof of those virtues such as "learning aptitude" and "eagerness to learn," "independent thinking" and "group spirit," that developmental psychologists have long since theoretically expounded as natural determinants of the school-educated mind. For a pupil accustomed to regarding and exercising his mind not as such but as a test of his special "personality," the requirement to hold forth in essays on arbitrary subjects, as untroubled by any knowledge of them as possible, in such a way as to declare one's own personal sympathy for or aversion to them with a successful semblance of reasoning — this requirement poses no intellectual problem, but solely this problem of proving himself. Raising up the gradually maturing personality to "share responsibility in shaping" school life complements an education of heart and mind that makes it a habit of mind to ferret out in every topic presented an opportunity to demonstrate a critical *ability*, sense of *responsibility* and *independence*, that is, to practice knowledge as a matter of *intellectual hypocrisy*. The subsumption of learning under the rules of the art of entering into an important *relationship* with the objects of learning — enforced at school under the pressure of grading by ever so understanding teachers — is given some refinement by the ideas of communication science, which, in its thinking and argumentation, right from the start excludes the matter under discussion and the effort of comprehending and explaining, taking the mere fact that language occurs and communication happens as the occasion to declare all sorts of partnership-based virtues of tearing into each other to be the "actual" matter at hand — so that in the end one can even abstract lightheartedly from the facts of speaking itself. Translated into action, this madness leads to all sorts of successful techniques for accustoming both young and old to the illusion of being called upon to take responsibility for the way things go, without the slightest detour via the semblance of an intellectual examination of the world. Free and easy, the individual "experiences" himself in *role play* as potential capitalist, unemployed person or head of government, thereby attaining in any case one thing: the standpoint of a profound understanding for the world whose prime mover he pretends to be. And what's good for the flower children with their kindergarten notions has long since been good for today's university students.

## Chapter 7: Job — Competition and performance

For the righteous individual, the *world of work* is not simply the tough business of earning money in which he is faced with all kinds of conditions that make his pay an extremely doubtful matter. In his job he *proves* himself with all the supposed and real *abilities* by which he distinguishes himself. He accepts his duty, as well as the fact that he is measured and compared while doing it. For the bourgeois individual, the *pressure* to achieve put on him in this way is transformed into an opportunity to test his *willingness*, and his *ability*, to achieve.

However, the *ambition* that spurs him on to work, the will to make calculated efforts, does not prevent the mediocre results that, for the great majority of job holders, prolong this hardship their whole life long and make them look old pretty soon. These results provide an even less lucrative sideline for a mind that, in the ideology of *fair pay*, comports itself as a master of competition. Depending on where a person has landed in the hierarchy of the capitalist division of labor — and even governing and giving bad lectures *count as labor*; whatever a *job* involves — he can construe his position as being a matter of chance, as the result of either tremendous or lackluster efforts in the comparison of performance at school, as the consequence of the differences between people, or, from the point of view of idealized competition, as an injustice he suffers due to poorly realized equal opportunity and ill will. So he soon starts *demonstrating* his abilities alongside his day's work, often also *pretending* to have them — until *modesty* sets in among those souls who know they have missed the boat.

One's position in, and attitude toward, competition are thus considerably modified in accordance with one's *stage of life*, which has precious little to do with biological age. In the criticism with which rebellious youth, aided by achievement tests, reform ideologies and energy, express their right to get ahead, the end is already in sight — the disparaging and aloof know-it-all attitude of the old, who have “sowed their wild oats” and advise the young to do the same.

However, when a thwarted materialist is convinced of the impossibility of earning a passable living from work, he can also take a different path — provided he is really convinced that he is entitled to a thing or two. The transition to *crime* is the scornful verdict on the fairness of the relationship between pay and performance — among ordinary people it results from privation and humiliation, while among the higher ranks of society it so engagingly embodies the finesse of the *fast path* to success in the form of corruption and “white-collar crime” that the scales of justice are well balanced in the weighing of these offenses.

### 7.1. From the pressure to compete to the willingness to achieve

When someone measures himself from the point of view of his capability, compares himself with others according to the criterion of hard-earned success, and considers the result to be important information, then he has made competition entirely his own concern. By asking whether he and others always deserve what they get, he affirms the comparison that *is made with him*, that his existence is made dependent on in practice. The *necessity* to make himself useful for a type of wealth whose accumulation involves the perpetuation of poverty for its useful human resources, and even endangers their continued utilization, is regarded by him as an *offer* — and he refuses to see *the* alternative that exists: if everything depends on him and his peers letting themselves be used, then he and his peers actually have the means in their hands to abolish the necessity to perpetuate their poverty. But as long as workers value the demands placed on them as an offer and test for their *willingness to achieve*, they are bent only on acquiring through their special usefulness an unchallengeable *right* to their *pay*. They do not weigh the toilsomeness of their work and its benefit by their need for a good life; they instead consider it proof of what they are “worth.” Work, which many quite often curse, is at the same time a matter of honor one doesn't stint on, one's “*merit*.” As if out of an inherent need they had discovered competition to be the most human “behavior,” they turn the hierarchy of jobs into an arena for their *ambition*, and their failures into a reason to be *ashamed* and to look for *excuses*.

The claim to a right to success goes on the offensive when critical fans of a retributive state justice propagate the ideology of an unrealized equal opportunity, but this only garners limited support. What stands in the way of its popularity is the circumstance that it is to apply to everybody else at the same time, by which means a person's own relative value is measured. The whole to-do has, and quite rightly, remained a mere position within education policy, which also puffs itself up in progressive environmental pedagogy on the talent and gene front. Meanwhile, demands for solidarity (among the weak of course!) are more popular, and theories about the inevitability of certain personal reversals have never lost their charm, as proven by the art of astrology flourishing in all mass-circulation papers.

Satisfied ambition causes far less ideological trouble. Particularly in academic life, where it is proper to show contempt for titles and the “significance of exams” — every guy with tenure has a joke to contribute about his own exams — particularly there, it holds without exception that success equals individual ability. Every last idiot derives an exceptionally high opinion of himself from the exams he has passed and been rewarded for; even if he has noticed somehow that he doesn't know anything.

### 7.2. *Materialism in competition: the hard worker's claim to a fair wage*

As virtuosos in the art of wanting exactly what they are *entitled* to, bourgeois individual competitors zero in on *themselves*, on their ability, as the only permissible standard of their success. They stand up for justice as a principle that has to apply to *them*, thus insisting that their income be determined by how they perform. And what do they stumble upon but the hierarchy of jobs, which involves many things but not the proportionality of effort and effect in one's working life. However, this does not shake mistaken notions regarding the comparison of pay and performance, a comparison people wish to face up to. On the one hand, the ideal of fair pay can be used for complaining about injustices of every kind, while on the other hand, it challenges people to come up with ideas that are good for *explaining* their position within the hierarchy of the social division of labor. Anyone who has learned to regard himself as a *means* to success is also familiar with the "insight" that he — due to a lack of skills that have already manifested themselves during his march through the education system — simply doesn't have what it takes for some of the loftier activities, just as others simply don't have the requirements for his trade: envy and superior airs, modesty and pride take care of answering the question of why one ranks just where one does. People's various "*abilities*" legitimize the hierarchy, and it is a matter of making the best of whatever qualities one happens to possess. After all, what one gains still also depends on one's willingness to *demonstrate* one's abilities — a decision of the self-confident "associate" and one that those who actually make the comparison in the working world greatly appreciate. For every individual *tries hard* to have justice for himself; after all, he does not dispute the *extent* of his performance, but performs in the conviction that he will be rewarded for his effort.

So capitalist factories and offices are full of people who regard the pay structure only as one big sequence of occasions to *demonstrate* their ability and usefulness — and to make this demonstration known when key authorities fail to notice it.

The fact that the will to succeed in competition with others is equivalent to submission becomes obvious in the way people deliberately jockey for position to be compared:

- some do their best to demonstrate their prowess as skilled workers to the foreman, and point out the carelessness of others to beg for consideration at the next awarding of opportunities;
- others recommend themselves to the same foreman with voluntary extra performance, supplementing their work with purposeful attestations of personal sympathy and confidence-building leisure activities;
- still others pride themselves on how much they can take; in piecework departments there are "good" and "bad" workplaces, so that one can wear oneself out to prove one's qualification as the most useful pieceworker;
- and most workers inevitably tell leftist agitators who hand out leaflets at factory gates that they should come inside and do some hard work instead — a feat of submission for which proles are praised by all politicians.

### 7.3. *How people cope with the results of competition*

Anyone out to prove himself on the job in the lower and numerous categories of "working people" won't get around some bad experiences of the toughest kind. So it is understandable that there is the silly custom of distinguishing between "ordinary" times in a worker's life, when wages and health permit the regular fulfillment of a job contract, and "hard times." At all events, the calculation of effort and earnings turns out positive *relative* to the old days, and if certain negative trends over recent years cannot be glossed over, then the comparison must be arranged differently: compared to others the appeasement of one's own discontent works out then, too. With sayings like "We're doing fine!" many a prole assures himself that he hasn't done anything wrong, i.e., that he intends to remain righteous.

Whenever a worker with an attitude like this is saddled with an additional burden, he brings himself to utter critical slogans of the caliber, "They think they can do anything with us!", which may well be continued into contemptuous remarks about "the bosses' profits" — such utterances having nothing whatsoever to do with the class consciousness or fighting spirit that Leftists are all too eager to make out. When management orders extra shifts and overtime, and then short time and dismissals again, no class struggle crops up in this country, but rather a public and very law-oriented debate about whether it is truly unavoidable. Labor unions and works committees *confirm* that such measures are within reason, or they might dispute it, which comes down to the same thing in either case — and their "having a say" provides the discontent with its well-deserved and official recognition. That's why they get round of applause at works meetings!

This way of dealing with the boundless demands faced in earning a living is not abandoned when the *consequences* of being ready to make oneself as useful as possible appear as components of accident and illness statistics. The doubt that this is a matter of "*bad luck*" is not dispelled by the official language; this only follows from a way of looking at things according to which it is not immediate necessity that is held responsible for what becomes of the working individual, *but rather* his careful managing of the "constraints" of functioning for work. In any event, the most common notion is that it is people's own *mistakes* that cost them their health, a notion that can also be nicely enlisted for settling the question of guilt. Of course, the laid-off also have their moral problems, and if they do not see any fault of their own, and do not immediately make themselves available for the next job offered, they will get straightened out right away by their fellow compulsory unemployment insurance contributors. The question quickly becomes one of whether they are really *willing* to work — and it is clear to everyone, contrary to all experience, that unemployment is a political *problem*, but by no means the unavoidable result of economizing on wage costs.

In this way, the victims of capitalist accumulation, in various interpretations of their journey through life, accept the fact of being the “variable parameter” of business with all its ups and downs: they consider it their *duty* to fulfill this destiny of theirs by *adapting* to the “labor market,” to the nation’s “economic situation,” and to “technological progress.” The social sciences, with a positive nod from the unions, have raised this attitude to an ideal in their theories: by the second term, every college student today favors flexibility, mobility and lifelong learning.

#### 7.4. *The ideal of usefulness and the stages of life*

Individuals comply with the pressures of competition by chasing after the *ideal of their own usefulness*. They act as if they were actually the architects of their own fortune, which gives the successful minority plenty of opportunity to derive a snappy self-image from their office and wealth. They have a positive attitude toward all forms of competition because they’ve made it; they offer themselves as proof that anyone who wants to can make it, too. They rely, not without general approval, on their success proving them right, and they launch the stupidest remarks on the market economy, the elite, the pernicious *Zeitgeist*, talent and environment, the masses and justice. The unsuccessful majority — as long as they don’t reflect on the truth of competition — get to pick out their *role models* from the ranks of *deserving* figures in business, politics and culture, and to critically or resignedly interpret their own position in the world. At the same time, the ideal of hard work paying off is always the inspiration behind people using their *experience* as an argument: for experience is only an argument when people with a common outlook seek and find material to support it in what they have been through. Conversely, what people “explain” by experience is never any *knowledge* of the purposes and principles of the society they subserviently submit to. What experience “teaches” everyone is some moral of the story, and armed with this he presents himself as somebody who can’t be fooled (any more), even when uttering the most idiotic things. However, confidence can also be gained, and not even only from those who have had good experiences. From them one can learn how to get ahead, and pass on these experiences to the younger generation. As a matter of principle, parents cull from the adversity of their careers very firm instructions for their children, who should have an easier time of it one day.

The standard applied to every experience from childhood on, the perspective of striving to get what one is *entitled* to as a *special* person, conversely turns into attitudes toward the world modified according to one’s experience, which distinguish the generations from each other and which they use to go at each other.

*Young people*, who are constantly maltreated with the advice of how much it’s up to the individual to make something of himself, take these lessons to heart under the pressure of the parental home and the state’s educational institutions. For many youth, idealism about one’s own future, about the occupation that one “chooses” to fulfill one’s calling, the illusion that one’s career has to make the world a better place somehow — all this turns the process of being groomed to become useful adults into a full-blown *search for meaning*. And the unavoidable disappointments, far from bringing this search to a halt, give it a real push. Alongside the conforming majority, there is a minority of young people who conform *but* “get involved in social issues.” Their own ideals inspire them to discover numerous injustices, which they enumerate to the world and take so much to heart that they vow never to become like adults. They even go so far as to hold older people in contempt, not because they make a mess of asserting their interests all their lives, but because they, firstly, don’t approve of ideals (anymore) and, secondly, are dead against young people being treated as special cases. Respect is shown for the exceptionally successful people who offer themselves as living confirmation of one’s own dreams. Young people choose stars from football, show business, and the political scene as their role models because they and their stupid pronouncements so unmistakably convey what special personalities they are. Imitative self-confidence is a small contradiction, but a very widespread one, because young people have yet to *become* deserving little individuals, they *imagine* their integrity being rewarded in the future, and enlist the help of real paragons of virtue and success to do so; the cultivation of one’s own specialness, the attempt to have one’s ideals and lofty plans *acknowledged* by the world, rightfully draws the suspicion of representing a *phase* of development toward adulthood. After all, either the notions of a better world are *illusionary*, which one learns from “experience” in one’s career, or the image of one’s future career is chosen so *realistically* that the righteous person who does his duty in “his” place is already apparent. Usually it is a bit of both, so that idealism does its job as false consciousness of the world and for coping in it. This is not contradicted by the fact that today, when competition in education and training quite obviously keeps young people’s opportunities scarce, a good part of each age group drop out before they drop in, wishing with all their dramatic fashions to be respected as exceptions and special “problem cases” of society.

*Adults* have settled into the routine of their working, i.e., gainfully employed, lives, and only those in the higher ranks of the job hierarchy indulge in the conceit that they in particular are making an important contribution to social progress. Otherwise they confine themselves to demanding *recognition* at least from younger people, who aren’t good for anything yet. Their usefulness *is* the achievement they are familiar with, which they want to take credit for whenever they are confronted with criticism. When they occasionally make themselves out to be “the twits” that other people profit from, this is not in the least intended as revolt; it’s more like a hint that they consider the fact that their virtue comes from the necessity imposed on them by others to be an argument for the “reasonableness” of being obedient. And the longer adults work at their jobs, the more firmly they settle into the narrow-mindedness that is imposed on them. They accept the wear on their bodies as the result of their age; the comparison with others that they were so eager to take on at twenty loses its zing, as does the striving

for satisfaction and honor. The assessment of their own competitive position exhausts itself in the stereotyped expression of discontent and disappointment, which is interrupted only by equally stereotyped exercises, at home and at the pub, in which they confirm that they don't need to be shown anything or have anything said against them. Those taken out of service prematurely through accidents or illnesses ordinarily accelerate the ruination of their intelligence by taking "comfort" in alcohol, which already proves its worth as a constant companion of a monotonous working life.

*Old age* is characterized accordingly by a wealth of experience and a poverty of thought. Old people act like connoisseurs of human nature who give themselves a lot of credit for having been through everything imaginable, advise youth not to think too much of themselves, absolutely do not understand succeeding generations, and prove with their gestures of refusal to be fully worthy of the contempt, and the gratuitous respect, with which they are pushed around. The better preserved among them deliver up memoirs with the dreariest philosophy of life about their successes, while in humbler circles grandpa tells all his grandchildren about his war experiences. Otherwise, he doesn't know what the world is coming to, harks back to the days when a dollar was worth a dollar, and with his pension proves to be a nuisance because he's so useless. And if older people have not yet completely lost their calculating tricks, they try to reduce the contempt shown for them by demonstrating a whole lot of appreciation for changing times and younger people.

### 7.5. *Crime II: The prohibited way to legitimate success*

Since the mode of production guarantees an antagonism between poverty and wealth that is codified in the protection of private property, it's not surprising that theft, robbery, embezzlement, etc., enjoy a certain popularity, which in turn requires constant, forceful regulation by the state with its laws and law enforcement agencies. If not for deprivation that cannot be remedied in permissible ways, if not for wealth on the other side that can be gotten hold of in impermissible ways all the same — if not for the separation the state enforces between individual needs and socially available means, nobody would at any rate need to stress that "crime doesn't pay."

However, following one of the numerous paths to illegal acquisitions does not by a long stretch make anyone a critic of those conditions that ensure the flourishing coexistence of privation and abundance. Rather, the numerous lawbreakers, permanently reckoned with in the judicial system, constitute a minority of righteous people who differ from the majority in merely one way: they turn their consciousness of having unfairly come up short into an occasion, not merely for sad and offended commentaries, but for making some practical corrections to the way things work out — their excuses let them go on the offensive, which the law calls an "extenuating circumstance" and the public uses as an argument whenever no such circumstance can be substantiated for the crimes committed. So it is usually said that people steal without "having gotten into difficulties through no fault of their own," and you don't bash in a granny's head for twenty bucks. For fanatics of a good conscience must not show any deep sympathy for certain people who actually get serious about their belief in a right to greater material success and flout the actual law. At a minimum, one must follow up the clandestine confession that the villain really only does what one doesn't dare oneself with indignation over the criminal's taking the liberty to disavow one's own abiding by the law as stupidity. And while the "little guy" may put certain large-scale "white-collar crimes" under the heading of general injustice on earth, and admire the cunning of some pros (at the movies and in magazines), he regards any breach of law by an equal all the more decidedly as an atrocity that he would never be "capable" of himself and that thus reveals the inner badness of the perpetrator. As long as their pleasurable indignation does not suffer, the public is very receptive to the discovery of a natural and/or "environmentally" stimulated criminal energy in humans — to psychological reflections on crime in which the law is not once mentioned. But even without any elaborate bits of interpretation, righteous people still figure out the explanation of widespread shoplifting: "People are too well off!"

## Chapter 8: Private life — on happiness and its failure in pleasure and love

An objective examination of the *sphere of private life* quickly reveals it to be very much a means for most people, and a rather mean one at that: economically, wages and the nature of labor point to the need to re-produce one's useful individuality; politically, the welfare state administers compulsory "self-help" without guaranteeing its "success." But in the subjective view of the righteous and subjugated citizen, this is worth a small lie. He lives according to the *ideal of compensation*, feeling entitled to regard his leisure time and the pleasures and relationships left to his individual "responsibility" as his *true purpose in life*. At the very least he seeks to *recoup his losses* in the domain that, apart from a few legal and pecuniary restrictions, overflows with unlimited *freedom*.

Here, everyone attempts to live according to his own maxims and needs, so that the attempt itself testifies that the sphere of private life represents nothing other than the *sphere of happiness* opened up by the bourgeois world.

It is no wonder that the corresponding pleasures do not quite live up to the high expectations. On the one hand, the utter necessities that one *has* to afford reduce the share of "self-determined" flings of individuality that one *can* afford, so that every act of consumption must be thought over thrice. The pleasures one nevertheless indulges in often prove to be incompatible with what the job has made of one, a situation that endlessly pleases those who preach moderation, from the Department of Health to ecologists: it's where they obtain their evidence for healthy living. On the other hand, the second grand freedom, also subject only to the two above-mentioned restrictions, namely freedom in the *relation between the sexes*, likewise can't withstand the *entitlement to happiness*. The mistaken idea that the world of love has room for the free exercise of individuality, that the other person *exists* to love and be loved, is asserted as a demand and, logically enough, sorely disappointed. After all, how can a relationship based on one's feelings towards a member of the opposite sex be capable of compensating the wear and tear of the daily grind? This high expectation, which always boils down to an insistence on services, sacrifices, and unswerving faithfulness and bestowal of happiness; the demand to be perpetually understood, so groundless and yet very much a matter of principle — all this guarantees the disasters both big and small after which some reaffirm the sense of their own excellence while others take leave of theirs. Crimes of the third kind are due to the conviction that one can't let one's happiness be snatched by the very person who is supposed to guarantee it, and these crimes are independent of the hierarchy of occupations and classes since everyone is chasing after the phantom of happiness.

### 8.1. *The ideal of compensation, and yearning for happiness*

No one will readily admit to the sad truth that when most people shape their free time by consumption, entertainment, and very "personal relationships," they are re-producing their usefulness. Each and every person sees his freedom of action here, and is most unwilling to talk about the limitations he runs up against at every turn: after all, *in comparison* to the written and unwritten rules of the workplace, the private sphere opens up a veritable Garden of Eden for the art of individual improvisation. However, while this mentally construed relation between work and private life matters little, the real connection between the two spheres makes itself felt with a vengeance. It is felt in very original ways within the ruling class and intelligentsia, for starters; by people who let their money do the working, torture themselves to the point of "stress" with meetings about profitable decisions, and scurry from one social obligation to the next, both meetings and amusements are spiced with extravagances, and pleasures can never be hot enough. This scene is a proving ground for the taste of people who will stoop to the lowest vulgarity to display office, power and affluence as attributes befitting them as exquisite individuals. Where money is no object you will find everything from fine English club manners to high-class prostitution, and the pack of artists and intellectuals also make their appearance, provided they have risen to the status of VIP. Meanwhile, ordinary intellectuals, from secondary-school teachers to editors to professors, live out the crazy ideas they advance in the name of the mind at the site of their professional activities. They nurture their egos in their circles while engaging in discussions devoid of a single correct statement, but abundant in ideas revealing their receptivity to pleasures of the lofty kind. Indifferent to anything in politics or the economy that actually *determines* the way the world works — including their own business — they moralize away in the lofty realms of their *weltanschauungen* and, thanks to their university-buffed minds, find *pleasure* in all the philosophies about ultimate causes and supreme virtues that are packed into some work of art. They casually celebrate their enthusiasms as proof of their expertise, which they never mean to be actual knowledge of a bit of the world of the mind, but rather the art of taking something momentous out of a thing for oneself by reading some nonsense into it.

What they are taking is the *intellectual liberty* granted to them, with which they utilize professionally taught or learned ideologies as an instrument for the voyages of discovery they find so exciting — for only *in this way* can reading the likes of Thomas Mann and Freud, John Updike and Erich Fromm, Thomas L. Friedman and Kant give rise to those pleasures one is so proud to experience.

Unfortunately, the relationship to working life inscribed in the private life of the working class makes sure its members lack not only a feel for the *exclusive nonsense* of the elite. On the one hand, the realm of necessities usurps an enormous part of consumer subsistence, due to the beneficent effects of the small-scale circulation of money,<sup>19</sup> the only circulation of money accessible to ordinary people. On the other hand, the work itself has destructive “side” effects. Pay and performance definitely have their effects on the individual shaping of their private freedom. This does not mean that proletarians have to go without the decisions that make the consumer king — indeed they become *especially aware* as consumers, people who have good reason *not* to be *indifferent* to their purchased pleasures. They economize on their purchases because the variegated world of commodities holds in store many things that are “not absolutely” necessary but that one might very well have a need for. Distinguishing daily *needs* from *luxury*, something that people with property would never think of doing, becomes a habit. After all, one has done honest work, toiling away without letup, so *in return* one would like at least a taste of the opulence displayed in all the shop windows. The ads even offer it as something one can and may and should *treat oneself* to!

For those of lesser means, the ideal of compensation substitutes for uninhibited pleasure — so much so that what emerges as judgment of taste about an item one desires but cannot readily afford is the notion that one *deserves* it. Only those whose work keeps them poor — but every last one of them, if they do not renounce the ideal of justice — get so far as to claim a *right to compensation* in view of the renunciation of worldly things required of them and to live beyond both their objective and subjective means: borrowing money, and eating, drinking and vacationing more than their damaged physiques can handle. People who “indulge” themselves like *this* will never become gourmands or gourmets; instead, they must bear the full costs of the proceedings they were hoping to win, since they are trying to prove an impossible case: that *their* pleasure is included in the price of their labor!

## 8.2. Consumption and leisure time: The right to pleasure, in practice

So there definitely is such a thing as insisting on the *right to pleasure*, but only because pleasure is in short supply; the sphere of reproduction of usefulness also becomes for many the proof of what they can treat themselves to — because in clinging to the fairy tale of fair wages, they insist on seeing something for their work. But this is nowhere near proof that everyone lives in grand style, has dedicated himself to accumulating “status symbols,” and has succumbed to “consumer terror.” Such ideologies, which are in no way aimed at George Clooney or Jimmy Carter, exploit the *lack of success* of a defensive, compensation-demanding “materialism” because they hit home so wonderfully that materialism ain’t never leading to no “social well-being.” And in the name of *that* ideal whose realization the little guy always *falls short* of in shaping his leisure time and consumption, this ideology even celebrates some cheap triumphs in the minds of those affected. Overlooking their lack of means, they instead castigate the *fulfillment* of their wishes, which supposedly proves to one and all that *this* is not the way to happiness.

There is, though, good reason for the variations on the antimaterialistic theme of “We’ve got it too good,” including the nice and vulgar Christian melodies about “false idols,” not being dismissed entirely as reactionary nonsense: after all, the picture of *happiness*, that ideal of total contentment detached from and beyond everything deemed expedient and imposed as a burden on the capitalist scene, dominates the “life” that one feels authorized to live in one’s private domain. The age-old yet downright stupid idea of “bliss” — the goal of being totally saturated, of attaining a state in which no definite deeds need be done any longer, no particular purposes pursued, no distinguishable interests realized, because one’s individuality *as such* is *affirmed* and finds peace — this idea has acquired a permanent place in modern society. It is the positive spin given to all the negative experiences that individuals take on in their labor service and subjection to political rule; it is a common man’s philosophy native to the private sphere in the face of which each particular deed and each consummated pleasure is quite logically ruined as “only” a very partial and fleeting *pseudo*-gratification.

This attitude lived by millions of people, of raising a *claim to happiness* that is constantly disappointed, has on the one hand the consequence that they themselves, along with scientists and politicians, think aloud like mad over the proper understanding of happiness: we owe it to them for such choice insights as ‘money doesn’t buy happiness,’ or ‘health is the greatest gift of all,’ or ‘you can’t take it with you’ whereby ‘death is the great equalizer.’ This shows them that true happiness must be distinguished from false; the “question” comes to mind of whether the demanding is not to blame for the disappointment, and whether modesty is not the lone guarantee of happiness; whether the secret to complete happiness does not perhaps lie in work and performance of duties, i.e., in the decent coping with necessities, i.e., whether human “nature” does not attain its utmost “self-fulfillment” in precisely those areas where these fine definitions find primarily restriction and coercion.

And once one has come to see abstinence as the highest form of pleasure, one’s own unhappiness is very quickly explained by the wrong and unrestrained pursuit of happiness by others. People who are otherwise very eager to conform adopt a pretty militant stance in the ecologically and cancer research–bloated effronteries they as nonsmokers have indulged

<sup>19</sup> Small-scale circulation (German: *kleine Zirkulation*): the part of capital paid out as wages in exchange for labor power, and returned directly to capitalists for wage goods. See Marx, *Grundrisse*, Section Two: The Circulation Process of Capital.

in for quite some time now with smokers who supposedly make living and breathing a hell for them, and in all sorts of other squeaky-clean initiatives — but there is little hope of them once declaring the actors in state and economy, who make their “environment” so unsavory, to be the enemy. They would much rather join up with those in charge in a common search for meaning for everyone.

The other consequence of the claim to happiness is performed by the claimants on themselves. They utilize the freedom afforded them outside of working life as best they can to look for activities that will absorb them completely — without obvious calculating, i.e., with *lots of idealism*, which makes it all the more genuine. Without having ever heard of theories of spontaneity,<sup>20</sup> perhaps without even using the word “self-realization,” they follow some modish or traditional way of searching for meaning in all sorts of clubs and sects, for which they sacrifice time and money because they are striving to practice their unrestrained free will.

Youth is divided up into traditional Christian campers who provide the young folks at church congresses, into practicing believers who drone on in Hindi about the whole world being made only of love or that it ought to be, into preppies and punks who find the “meaning” they embrace entirely in the cultivation of dress, into football fans, and — lest we forget — into devotees of a drug-induced “expanded” consciousness, from which one can gather that even a false consciousness of a reality that holds the means in store for “us” to be someone can get in the way.

Older people stand by the Yankees or Manchester United without any great pretensions, avoid excesses that would jeopardize their family lives, content themselves with social drinking, and consider young people to be somewhere between loose and imbecilic in the realm of leisure time, too. In artistic and academic circles, of course, many see human happiness residing, at least in their opinion, precisely where their philosophical and esthetic imagination is honored as a profession — painters, songwriters and philosophy professors are at least partly very happy!

### 8.3. *The big compensation: Love as the right to be unconditionally understood*

Modern citizens would never for a moment think they conduct their love and family lives in accordance with the family-law restrictions laid down by Father State. First of all, they only know the pertinent regulations of the civil code from hearsay and, secondly, they are absolutely firm believers in the liberal principle of the folksong that goes, “...I’ll love who I please.” *How* they do so, however, is a rather sad business, the reason being that they quite shamelessly (though shame plays a huge role in *affaires d’amour*) put the *permission* they enjoy in this sphere at the service of their *idealism of happiness*, to which a decent person is *entitled* because, after all, he puts up with everything else.

As a result, the loved and loving individual is no longer able to distinguish between passion and interest. In all seriousness, and contrary to every experience, he acts as if his entire life depended on the fulfillment that his babydoll gives him or withholds, as the case may be. Although a decent human being dutifully attends to thousands of other things every day as long as a “relationship” is working, lavishing at best a small fraction of his time and energy on the dear creature, he turns fairly totalitarian as soon as the other one takes off: then *everything* depends on the relationship, and with his whole great subjectivity he proclaims in a very practical and hence credible fashion that he is simply finished if the other party is no longer available. Under the motto, “I need you!”, grownup people are not asserting *one* desire that is important to them — to pet and sleep with the other person — but rather allowing this content of the operation of subjectivity to make up their *entire* subjective being, so that they are indeed *dependent* on their other half *being there for them*. In this way bourgeois individuals set themselves up, firstly, for the hot and heavy days of a blossoming romance, during which they do the best they can to *subordinate* all their other business to the *idealism* of love. Secondly, this leads to their organizing their regular get-togethers as a *utilitarian relationship*, which is quite voluntarily developed to the extent of the distribution of rights and duties between the parties that lawmakers have come up with. And, thirdly, the way is paved for the end of love, which proceeds in a dramatic fashion because the other party doesn’t simply clear out but rather destroys one’s *happiness*, that right defining a whole person with his honor at stake.

a) The enjoyment of some pleasant hours, as well as the necessary logistics for keeping them happening — the tiresome matter of who lives where — all this has absolutely nothing at all to do with the way the bourgeois individual conceives and sets up his love life: namely as the part of his existence that is supposed to offer some degree of *compensation* for his decency and obedience, i.e., for his uprightness that doesn’t pay off. Here he expects to be afforded *recognition*, even affection, regardless of what he’s achieved, simply because of the splendid and *special person* he *is*. Here he finally has the opportunity to be “understood”; here the nasty rules of comparison don’t apply and he doesn’t have to play the part required of public life — and he cherishes his mate for appreciating him in all his uniqueness that the rest of the world doesn’t want to know about or value. Here “*my problems*” are in good hands; they become *ours*, and one can act completely spontaneously — as opposed to the usual daily calculating — just as if private life and relations between the sexes were set up as a homestead for one’s otherwise disregarded individuality.

---

<sup>20</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg’s *Theory and Practice*.

This illusion is just as easy to see through as that of voting being an activity by which political power is controlled, or the advertising lie that products are a good buy and only exist to fulfill people's needs and satisfy their tastes; yet this illusion too is very popular, because it supports a *claim* one can live with to judge all of life's experiences, but especially one's dearest, one's "partner." For after all, it is the other's noble duty to live up to the high ambitions of love; it is not a matter of getting a bit of affection and tenderness, but rather of getting the guaranteed *affirmation* for one's individuality that is otherwise denied. Instead of enjoying a few nice hours together, people hatch supreme happiness — love is supposed to bear all the costs incurred in everyday life. So right from round one, people with a moral 'human nature' accost their opposite numbers with all kinds of doubts about their feelings — the question, "Do you still love me?" doesn't investigate the existence of a loving benevolence, but suspiciously scrutinizes whether the other's emotional state will (still) deliver what is it being monopolized for. And little as a feeling, expressed with eyes, mouth, hands and other body parts, can ever live up to the *demands* placed on it, it brings about colossal deeds when two hearts lay the burden of proof on it for their desire for a safe haven where a splendid personality can count on faithful understanding, at all times and regardless of "weaknesses" or "merit."

b) The *fulfillment of happiness* consists simply in the lovers furnishing *proof* that they *are there for each other*. They "commit" to each another by making the promise quite formally that they have already made ninety-six times informally: the *vow* that is initially always made casually out of enthusiasm and in order to put the other person in the right mood becomes a solemn *obligation*, and the bride and groom never get the least bit suspicious of the fact that the rules of the love contract have been laid down, not by themselves, but by the state. As a consequence of the not so noble interest that one's dear pussycat should be always and totally at one's service with love, couples promptly comply with the state's need for lots of nuclei of itself. The passion that takes hold of the sexes can truly not be described as easily satisfied: possession is taken of services "in good times and bad," and the nature of these services is decided by the laws that the state enacts and those that the labor market follows. In *this* way, boys and girls with a bit of fondness for each other end up making the state-decreed *utilitarian relationship* their own very personal concern — and in light of the power of their two-fold love, they never once feel they are submitting to a third power. But the testimony to love sworn before witnesses is only the beginning: if their desire to sleep together hasn't already led to concrete results, married couples act as if they had been messing around with Hegel. They insist that their love be "objectified" so that they get to see its work as the unity of flesh and spirit in front of them. *Children* are put into this world by people who harbor many a poor opinion of it and garner a few new disappointments every day; by people who, for love, strangely take hope that they can clear the way to a great life for their little ones, of all people. That's why they start right away by treating them to the drill that will make the parents happy. Pride and disappointment change by the hour; with the awakening of an independent will, children develop that powerful dialectic for their parent's pedagogical idealism, whose *pay-off* — truly *grateful* kids — is constantly at risk. On the one hand, children are a joy, a gift of God and a delightful burden; on the other hand, they deserve to be thrown against the wall. Beatings are given out of love.

So couples prove their love, to one another and in the care of their offspring, with a vengeance, which is in turn not too surprising. After all, the responsibilities within the alliance for happiness end up diverging — not for psychological reasons, yet requiring a certain attitude from each party. It is not a "division of labor" that takes root seemingly automatically without any great deliberation. The *husband* customarily holds his wife to the *ideal of compensation*, being fond of her because and to the extent that she is there for the family and thus for him. The *wife*, for as long as she can bear it, sees her task in the realization of this ideal through her actions. It does not take long for them to become very dissatisfied with each another, each discovering the dreary *narrowness* of the other, who suddenly no longer understands, which is confided without reservation to lovers on the side.

c) The *destruction of happiness* is definitely on the agenda, and not only in marriages employing every trick in the book, but whenever decent couples torment each other with the demand to make *life* wonderful. Even people in a relationship without a marriage certificate or heirs pay the price for designating the other party as the permanent source of a love that is supposed to satisfy the moral hunger of a righteous individuality that gets no satisfaction. For the demand that one's darling's affection should give satisfaction to the whole soul of a person undervalued in everyday political and working life leads to the constant threat of its being *turned around*, this being the secret of the "dependence" commonly found in private refuges. The incidental occurrences that are inevitably a part of falling in love — who sees, meets and speaks to whom in what kind of mood! — endanger not only one's shared home and sex life; they challenge the *honor* of a complete individuality, which now deems the other's parting to be a complete and negative judgment about itself — just as being loved was "more" than that before. The claim to love is followed not only by a bit of lovesickness; jealousy ensues, a spirited comparing and fighting begins — after all, it's not that somebody is departing because he feels like doing something new or is simply fed up with carrying on the old business: no, he is stealing someone's happiness that it's his job to bring about.

This subsumption of everything that really goes on between a man and a woman under the function of providing a bourgeois mind with its *ultimate* fulfillment also means that the above-mentioned happenstance is not at all necessary for ending a relationship or only makes the disaster officially erupt. When doubts about the reliability of one's own and the beloved's feelings, when complaints and suspicions have long since *put* an end to love, this does not mean the separation

from bed and board is carried out in a sober and rational way — and for the same reason. For the adverse decision is not taken simply as the end of love, but as a momentous message about whether one is *loveable* or not — and this has dire consequences.

#### *Lovesickness and crime III: Out of passion*

Some people conduct their lovesickness in such a way that they take the rejection by their ex-happiness as a personal condemnation that is actually quite justified. Effective immediately, they therefore regard themselves as the disgusting and pathetic loser they were called in the heat of battle — under the motto, “If this is what the person says whose understanding I had the privilege of enjoying ‘til the cows come home, well...” — and start soul-searching, with psychological consequences. An element of certainty about one’s own inferiority is reached, which intellectuals can confirm by reading Erich Fromm and even dumber theories, but it really depends on whether the one to suffer is out to apply such deep insights into psychological techniques to himself only or to others as well, in order to conquer someone new to understand him. In any case, a great many people draw the “conclusion” that the reason must lie entirely with them and their character if they’re sold down the river even in matters of love, that things are hopeless, and they go mad if they don’t actually try to kill themselves.

Others defend themselves vigorously, quite in keeping with the high standards they have always set for love. They immediately take the offense in the quarrel, letting the former light of their life know just how much he has disappointed them, after they have done “everything” for their darling; egotism is the mildest accusation when the “dirty laundry” is hung out on the basis of one’s intimate knowledge of the other’s little “weaknesses,” habitual follies, and nasty tricks. Showing up one’s loved one to third parties, already a popular practice during better times, now becomes a professionally pursued strategy — and once one has thoroughly convinced oneself of what a bitch or bastard one has entrusted and sacrificed years of one’s life to, one is prepared to commit murder, and regardless of social stratum. After all, brawls are commonplace anyway! *Crimes* of the third kind which a woman’s fair hand is also capable of, are actually committed out of *passion* that seizes bourgeois moralists when their love affair, which means the *whole world* to them, turns into *nothing*.

#### *8.4. New paths for proving true love*

Since relations between the sexes as arranged by moral individuals result in few good times but plenty of bad, those concerned and affected have for some time decided to embark on “new paths.” Unfortunately they intend at the same time to continue with the bourgeois arts of love, and the concept of family also remains completely unharmed. The attempt to slow down, if not completely prevent, the destructive effects of “commitment” is called *partnership*. In place of the formerly widespread custom of gritting one’s teeth all one’s life and invoking Christian maxims to take on oneself the sacrifice for the family as one’s *raison d’être*, modern-day women have come up with a new ideal. They take the limitations that their functioning for the aggregate private life of society forces upon them as a reason to insist primarily on *recognition of their efforts*; demands for the remuneration of their managing of the household have been raised, as if the *honoring of this service*, carried out fairly in accordance with all the principles of equality, would settle everything. Some other kinds of discoveries have also conformed to ideas of equality; women’s liberation is suddenly supposed to come about by their getting (even more) work — a wish that is granted in keeping with the needs of the labor market, and of course adhering to the unpleasant rules of “performance-based” pay, which many a woman on the General Motors assembly line can tell a tale about. After all, the fact that *confining* them to hearth and home represents *the* sanctioned way of using womenfolk does not mean conversely that their integration into the hierarchy of labor is a blessing. In view of the truth that men have treated women like servants who have nothing to say and know nothing of the ways of the world, it has also become customary to bank on *discussions* on an equal footing, so that the ideal of competition has been happily wedded to that of democracy, and the two upheld together with great public appeal as a critique of the role of women. *Repression* has become the catchphrase that smothers all the special features of relations between the sexes — while the magnificent battle that is ultimately fought by women’s groups and magazines is against men *per se*, against “male society,” with salvos like, “How many women hold elected office?” It is sad to see how the decision to stop putting up with the costs of private life has become a citizen’s action committee devoted to “I am woman ... I can do anything” — to the point of joyous commitment to motherhood as an experience of the most exquisite naturalness! The idea that there is a right to a specifically womanly happiness, the application of the ideal of compensation that men assert toward women by *turning it around*, the staging of feminine initiative as a special case of “self-fulfillment” — that is all that constitutes the *battle of the sexes*. Meanwhile — at least in upper-class circles — an expert appraisal of the relationship between men and women and an official expression of “understanding” are among the conditions for having a loose partnership, part of the demonstration that one’s own liaison is an exception and works *for that very reason* — until such time as the methodological contortions, the liberalism calculated to make a success of the “one-on-one relationship” can no longer save even this modern form of happiness. Now he is “authoritarian” and “patriarchal,” while she is served the usual “prejudices” with an added psychological twist.

### 8.5. *Competition in love: “So test therefore, who join forever” (Schiller, Song of the Bell)*

Through the need for happiness, which burdens one’s chosen mate with the task of satisfying the fairly extensive demands of one’s selfhood — which wants no less than to be reconciled with the world — a *competitive standpoint* finds its way into the realm of love. It’s like a market where the suitability of the opposite sex is *scrutinized* and budding feelings have to withstand the suspicion that it is wrong for them to exist or that they are only short-lived, i.e., are not being directed toward Mr. or Ms. Right. Hardly has affection been awakened and one fancies someone when the intellect butts in, mistrusting one’s feelings, and reminding one of what they are supposed and will never be able to deliver by critically questioning whether one is not *losing something* by committing to this one person. Everyone knows that when it comes to the “quality” and duration of one’s “affairs,” one has to decide between “spontaneous” affection on the one hand, and the suitability of the person one has landed in a pleasant yet weak moment, on the other. To impartially wait and see how things turn out is neither customary — nor advisable, given the ways moral man tends to handle a “failed” relationship. Thus, the weighing up of the candidates gets downright comical, and the calculations, being devoted to the lofty goal of bliss, acquire exactly those materialistic qualities that make materialism appear so vile before the judgment of morality.

Even the most ordinary way in which someone shows he is interested in or even enthralled by a specimen of the other sex is called into question by one’s own calculating “conscience” and those around one. The much-acclaimed beauty of the other’s face or lower-lying body parts gets prompt and emphatic qualification: “*just*” a pretty face, or “*sure*” she has a nice figure, but ... — as if that *weren’t* actually the source of one’s feelings, just as her way of looking, talking, etc., might be in other cases. No positive criterion simply counts, because a calculating love *creates* its own criteria. Men, whose appetite is primarily whetted by the attributes of beauty, which is known to fade like all roses, indulge in disparaging in the most ridiculous way the “offer” they’ve scrutinized, as if men of today were just brimming over with intelligence and insights into the world, so that it were frightfully important for them to get hold of a congenial mind in the field of love, of all places. Why don’t they just abduct the lady of their heart and impart some of their greatness to her? Then they could have one orgy after another while the woman used the loving criticism of her weaknesses to liberate herself. But this judgment is a lie, turning out to be a permanent condemnation because the “partner” is scrutinized with a view to whether she is really bound to do everything right by them. One does have one’s ideals, after all — and reality matches; since that’s exactly how the inversion of criteria proceeds. And really, these guys want nothing to do with a playmate who knows her Hegel but who gets bad grades in the looks department. The outcome is as common as it is well known. All those exquisite creatures “take” wives who in one point or another come up “short” (the ideal doesn’t exist of course, but remains the yardstick!) or most likely in all points, and are then discontented with their playmates to the point of being *ashamed of them*, and beat them over the head with one comparison after the other — if not with other things: for anyway there is no place for criticism or help where every word one speaks is dictated by self-esteem.

The fact that all the characteristics of potential and/or real partners are classified according to the noble purpose of servicing one’s fine ego is, by the way, also the reason for the *separation of love and sex*, a separation considered impossible and improper. Modern individuals *carry out* this separation with their “ifs” and “buts,” just as if they were devout Christians who consider the “physical union” between human beings endowed with consciousness and will to be something that is somehow improper for man, who possesses morality, and reduces him to the level of June bugs. There is thus such a thing as the explicit intention to *just screw*, this intention even being publicly institutionalized in brothels that are not unimportant in municipal politics — there is as well the idea that sex is *actually* more and higher than that. Sorry to say that we are not in agreement because in actuality and bed, the only thing that might be high or low is the bed.

The separation in question is not only a guy thing, however. Women — the majority of whom anticipate and regard their service as self-fulfillment — carry out their decision-making the other way around. They get their emotional high when a guy shows up who gives the impression that a woman would be in good hands with him and his love services. A man’s attractiveness grows strictly proportionally to how he ranks outside the exclusive sphere of affection; and a woman’s desires are satisfied once she’s *allowed* to call a select — for her “price range” — specimen of this gender her own, so that she lives out her sensuous side by secretly pining over some actor she adores. This unfortunately very realistic generalization is not even refuted terribly often in those circles where women with diplomas, upper-class backgrounds, and whatever can themselves behave like “demand-side” and choosy players on the market. And the criticism by feminists that is rightly sparked off by the usual practices becomes embarrassing when it devolves into the completely irrational ideology that *being a woman* is in itself reason enough to be appreciated, because she epitomizes love in dealing with others — more or less the presence incarnate of a *critique* of the principles of competition and oppression put into operation by men. Even without its feminist refinement, to be acknowledged and *unconditionally* loved “just as I am” is a common demand, because it declares the converse of disparagement and corresponding “treatment” to be the ideal of real love, and is guided once again by nothing but happiness. This sort of thing is just as bad as the efforts women are perfectly capable of making to subsume their “sensuous” features under all their calculations: the capricious *rebuff*, the quite “spontaneous” *seduction* either way around with the morning-after katzenjammer that follows because even those few nice hours were actually totally committed to “true” happiness and consequently cannot after all be regarded as “pleasure without regret” ...

So people have their bad experiences in the arena of love as well, and devise *prescriptions* nonstop for themselves and others for “coping” with one’s partner’s and one’s own strengths and weaknesses. i.e., making do. Considering these well-known disappointments, some very resourceful types add to the traditional words of wisdom — “Love is a strange thing” or (to the youth) “Whatever you do, don’t marry!” — by recommending *promiscuity*, more or less as the appropriate path to take in view of the collected experiences of unhappiness in love. The idiocy of the mission that one sets out on by putting this ideal into practice betrays its origin. Why shouldn’t one enjoy the pleasures of love with one person to the full? If there’s action with someone new or several at the same time, a person will have to see what happens anyway because he notices that *fidelity* is only an empty delusion, a commandment that also falls under the security needs of those stuck on happiness. It is very foolish therefore to make an agenda out of the vanity of the disappointed happiness seeker who “knows” that *no one* is good enough for *him* — and the efforts undertaken in this direction fail ridiculously before the practical difficulties that particularly inverse moralists get into in putting up with people. Unfortunately this way of managing the bit of sex one has in life is another one of those businesses in which normal people are *crazy* enough to take to promoting their exquisite individuality.

## **PART III: From failure to self-destruction — The realm of psychology**

Due to the moral stance with which individuals settle into state, competition and private life, the bourgeois world is full of *character masks*. These are people who freely decide all the time and pride themselves quite a bit on their decisions, even though the whole time they are making themselves useful for purposes that they do not even know and that they hotly deny when someone says what they are; people who march through the landscape of imperialism with a masterful air because they emphasize their *subjectivity* regardless of the *content* they give this subjectivity through their thoughts and actions; who, apart from everything they are forced to do and let *themselves* in for, cultivate their subjectivity by gearing themselves explicitly for being the *means* for a success that does not come about through their deeds — i.e., by striving *beyond* their ordinary occupation for a success (“self-confidence,” “recognition,” “self-fulfillment”) that makes them satisfied.

### *Going-along-with-things as method*

These are people who enjoy their arbitrariness in thousands of idiotic calculations of advantage and disadvantage and find nothing more reasonable than the necessity of rule; who regard a thought as something impersonal due to its generality and therefore, when thinking, insist above all on the specialness of their personal opinion — and who are so hopelessly alike in their views of themselves and the rest of the world. After all, the wild variety of different characters is of course not due to individuals having thought about which general purposes they want to achieve, and for which reasons, and what they consider to be essential or unimportant for them; but rather is due both to the resolve to *assert oneself within the bounds of possibility* — the intention to cut one’s coat according to one’s cloth depending on individual experience — and to lending this going-along-with-things the semblance of shrewd wisdom and *savoir-vivre*.

Nothing testifies to this sad working of bourgeois rule more clearly than the popular catchphrase of “self-realization,” by which people high and low in the social hierarchy affirm what a lofty ideal they have concocted for themselves with their “ego” and how independent they imagine themselves to be from what their dear “self” is forced and prepared to do. They even go so far as to deny the antagonism between their concerns and the twin powers of modern state and business management when they notice that their ideal of themselves is not being met: as true psychologists, they invent character defects, repressions, and inhibitions in themselves that leave nothing of their free will. And similarly when it comes to other people, they refuse to examine the purposes to which their consciousness and actions conform, preferring to look for “motives” such as self-assertion and recognition that they have always already identified.

The pretension of coping in an exceptional way with the world to which one is conforming passes as *character*, as demonstrating “Look how well I know how to master life!” — while the citation of one’s negative particularity, of “Look what I lack for mastering life!” goes under the heading of *illness*. In fact, this citation is something completely different, namely a sophisticated *technique of the moral subject* who is out to assert himself most firmly in his failure, of all things, i.e., a very self-destructive act of free will; and while this refutes the whole of psychology, it nevertheless inspires its apostles to ever new arts of interpretation. The representatives of this science know only too well that it has adopted the medical ethos of providing practical help while having settled down into its helplessness. After all, it has long since succeeded in transforming its “therapeutic problems” into a *weltanschauung* that is at the service of all advocates of a “healthy” moral subjectivity, whether these advocates be football coaches or sanctimonious clerics.

## 9. Character

The undertakings by which a moral self intends to wrest wealth, and happiness to boot, from the bourgeois world according to *its* laws bring about, for the few, prosperity and “room to be free” full of every sort of idiocy and, for the many, a very limited and always endangered budget along with a string of personal disappointments. With each new day, the majority become aware that “*life is a struggle*” that can only be won by those who don’t let go of their high opinion of themselves, who don’t “*give up*.” One mustn’t let one’s dissatisfaction with the world become practical, either by setting out to fight it on good grounds or by becoming *unable to cope with reality*.

So the critical subject gets himself a *character*: he assumes a *methodological* attitude to everything he does *and* to the techniques of his submission, which latter are only of limited value as means of success. The scanty repertoire of such “means” become *strategies of damage prevention* for the individual, which he applies qua experience, of which he is proud, on definite occasions and in the various spheres of his failure. In one area the citizen will set great store on demonstrating his discontent as a matter of principle, in another he will take up the art of showing off, and in a third he will be a stickler for order, thereby enjoying the display of his competence and reliability to himself and others. These individually formed habits, which are guided least of all by arguments for separating the essential from the trivial, are subordinated to the goal of *self-assertion*. Pursuing the intention to be free to hang on to the ideal of righteousness through thick and thin produces those endearing quirks of modern contemporaries as well as a *contentless criticism* of one’s close and wider circles, which doesn’t seriously bother anyone any more: “I don’t like that!” or “You should show more understanding for me (for others!)” or “I feel left out!” and so on — these are the phrases in which the world is treated as if it were set up solely to be a personal service to the person talking this way.

### 9.1. *Life is a struggle*

Bourgeois individuals cultivate a peculiar kind of realism. They do not subscribe to the illusion of being able to count on their colleagues and employers, on politicians, government agencies and civil servants, even on their family and private circle of friends, as being positive conditions or reliable helpers for realizing their plans. On the contrary: from the job where one doesn’t want to be “ridden roughshod over,” which costs daily effort, to the visit to the authorities and the “informal” exchange of views where the same danger looms and must be fended off, from the children who their parents “can’t cope with anymore,” and the spouse who doesn’t adequately appreciate his or her dearest at all, to completely unknown passers-by who one better steer clear of, a modern person calculates his fellow human beings and circumstances as an accumulation of problems that arise from dealing with them. And this does not even require any particular matter of concern in the face of which the world proves to be hostile in a particular way. From the start, the world is considered from the formal point of view of being a potential obstacle that a person has to “deal with”; an obstacle for realizing the equally formal intention, fixed in advance of every purpose, of not letting the world “get one down” but rather struggling every day to “assert” no more and no less than “oneself.”

It is a circular negative prejudice with which the complete bourgeois individual confronts the world; a prejudice that is not at all meant as opposition to the world condemned in this manner, but ascribes to the world the character of being a problem on principle, which one intends to cope with. So it does not even entail the intention to hold any truth about the purposes that actually prevail and their incompatibility with the needs of the people put into service for them, but solely expresses the certainty that *going along with things* is definitely no easy matter in this world, requiring instead constant precautions against impending harm. It is the *will to comply* that here, very much on principle, raises the accusation of “reality” not being of use but actually an impediment to it for *this* purpose. The logical consequence is the resolve, renewed every day and developed into a habit, to wring, with a lifelong “*nevertheless*,” one success from the intractable world: that one does not let up in *paying attention to oneself*, if no one else does, and the world must at least take note of that.

### 9.2. *How one forms a character*

This defensive, contentless, methodological insistence on oneself, or, vice versa, the defiant will to go along with things: this is the viewpoint from which a full-fledged member of bourgeois society arranges his everyday existence. He affects manners that are supposed to lead to a purposeless and contentless interest being taken in his person on principle, where no interest in him exists — or at least to his standing up to his own judgment of taste as fancied master of the situation. With the same aim he emulates role models whose attitudes impress him, conversely forming all kinds of ideas about things that embarrass him, and so he sorts his life more or less exactly according to the ways of behaving that he regards as indicated for a given situation: as the slick ladies’ man who, within the circle of his colleagues and friends, celebrates victory over the other sex in his three adventures — and possibly right afterwards, alone with his wife, as the harassed, love-starved problem

child or as the misunderstood husband; as the perpetual life of the party at work or else, if this doesn't work, as the profound misanthropist or the solicitous complaints box for his colleagues; as the smart aleck who doesn't let anyone tell him anything when it comes to important matters — but as the deferential listener ready to correct his opinion at once as soon as an important person speaks; etc. This continual self-stylizing in all its opportunism does not guarantee the tiniest bit of real success; but it is not intended to. Its purpose is to counteract the failure of one's intentions and the restrictions on one's materialism so as not to lose one's own self-respect — that is, in such a way that there can ultimately be no talk of disappointment and failure. This is the way the average person makes his submission a habit in today's capitalism: not in the form of resigned abdication, but, even when such a pose is chosen, with unbroken pride in himself. In his deliberate, methodological handling of all barriers that confront him in the circumstances of his life and in his diverse fellow men, a handling that becomes fixed as a habit, he acquires a *character*. And with all the self-confidence with which he insists that this character of his really is completely his *own*, he makes himself the fully free and personally responsible fool of the necessities dictated by state and capital under which he leads his existence, achieving with all his voluntary effort only the one dreary trick of transforming the limits of his existence into his own fully autonomous limitedness. After all, the contentless and defensive, i.e., purely negative interest in self-assertion does not offer up any positive purpose; when it is pursued like a positive purpose and made one's mission in life under such fine slogans as "recognition," "acknowledgement," "self-confidence," "ego strength," etc., the necessary consequence is that one subsumes one's existence under a handful of affectations of insisting on one's own importance as a matter of principle.

### 9.3. *A character at work*

The specific interests that a bourgeois character sets out to pursue are carefully *subordinated* to his methodology of self-assertion. Their content does not count as a purpose that someone puts his will and his intellect into, but as a quite personal preference, which one does not want to pit against anyone else's, but which in return one would also like to be conceded without criticism. Such preferences may degenerate into irritating quirks, but never mutate into a well-founded purpose; and when the reason for a strenuous occupation is obvious, an individual equipped with a character never designates it (solely) by the *constraints* he is obeying. He always claims to be getting a personal advantage from it: bricklayers like to be out in the fresh air, living human material fits teachers best, and everyone else also discovers some aspect or other of his job that matches his character. An individual's leisure-time preferences are then important to him as opportunities to make it obvious to himself and others how well he knows how to look after himself "in spite of everything" and what extravagances he will indulge in — and that's also how they are treated in friendly deliberations on whether, and to what extent, this or that inanity might not perhaps be particularly "important" to the person cultivating it. So, in his free activities just as in his enforced ones, a bourgeois character does not simply pursue what matters to him, but rather the ideal that his methods of "mastering" his life embody a most personal *value* transcending actual occupations by far and lending his self-stylizing tricks weight and significance. Notions of a deeper "*meaning of life*" are familiar to every contemporary person striving after a felicitous character; and this will to imaginary compensation has so completely taken possession of a civilized nation's honest populace and intelligentsia that even its immanent opposite, bourgeois nihilism, has died out — while Christianity has become fashionable, and even halfway-grown children master the absurd accusation, so full of character, that "the official church" unfortunately clothes its "offers" to "meaning-starved youth" in an all-too "antiquated, unintelligible language."

The demands with which a modern, distinctive character confronts the world thus boil down in principle to the most important concern of all: the world ought to give him fine opportunities to effectively showcase his own personality consisting of sundry affectations of self-assertion. He assesses his occasional pleasure in the world on this basis — whether enjoying the quantum of sentimentality he has acquired, or that brilliant performance when he told someone "where to get off" — just as he assesses his discontent. The reason for his discontent and the criterion for assessing it are no longer his own objective purposes, whose non-fulfillment would make it clear how little the purposes of all these individuals matter in the real world. On the contrary, this is in fact just the occasion for the affected individual to develop and demonstrate his character strengths by declaring his failure to be a problem for his formal self-assertion, which he is then actually equal to. The poorest wretch, by coloring in the bourgeois mind's basic prejudice about the world as an obstacle and threatening problem complementary to his own methods of "coping" with it: even he can have the satisfaction of making the world look bad and himself look good as its fictitious criterion. And if a man's complaints about the world and his praise of his own manliness do not bring the desired attention, he can draw on longstanding, generally accepted methods of repeating the same contentless and criterion-lacking accusation that others are not letting him "show his stuff to advantage," in order to prove that he has not by any means let things "get him down" and it's basically the wicked world that is a disgrace. For a bourgeois character, discontent is thus something quite productive — at any rate, he doesn't readily see it as a reason for opposition.

### 9.4. *Alternatives of dissimulation: Good and bad character*

The habits that a bourgeois individual develops into his character are not only based on his initial resolve to prove himself in the world, despite its being thoroughly judged as hostile; they are furthermore the result of the experience that proving himself doesn't quite work out, and hence of the lie that in view of this experience he has to appear all the tougher

and more steadfast in taking it and dishing it out, and that the show of such strength more entitles him to be proud of himself than the success he doesn't attain with all this anyway. They are habits of *dissimulation*, calculated to produce an effective semblance of complete domination of the circumstances. At the same time, this calculation is not even a secret from the point of view of self-demonstration. The suspicion that nobody is banking on the validation-seeking posturing is even handled officially; in special affirmations of the point of view "actually" held — "honestly!", "seriously..." — tribute is paid to the ideal of a solid character one can talk to, because it is otherwise considered pure folly to trust sham traces of strength of character. It is no accident that reliability has become a special virtue, the attribute of a fine character, and thus a new starting point for many a disappointment, which can forever revive the complaints about the duplicity of people in the world. After all, the fact that the *essence of character* lies in nothing at all but the *method* — practiced *apart* from the interests one pursues — of promoting oneself, of deceptively proving to everyone at large one's integrity, smartness, superiority, steadfastness, and every other -ity and -ness — nobody is about to admit *that*.

The necessity of showing oneself "up to it" and stylizing oneself as a respectable personality is so taken for granted — in all classes and subdivisions of bourgeois society in fact — that it is not criticized; rather, its more or less successful result is expertly appraised.

So someone can earn the distinctive compliment of "knowing what he wants" — but not by being able to cite good reasons for his purposes or the essential conditions for realizing them. This set phrase is meant to praise the semblance of somebody actually being master of every situation and having a determination that (almost) guarantees that his efforts will have the desired success, i.e., a character to whom the assumed success is credited without further ado as his special strength, namely as "assertiveness." That is why the same semblance can also lead just as well to the opposite verdict: the person admired as being especially "determined" by some is considered "ruthless" by others; where some see a person "making his way in the world," others make out an "unscrupulous careerist."

Such opposing judgments of identical characters are not at all due to differing moral standards of those judging; on the contrary, both admiration and condemnation are based on the same criteria. The differences lie in the standards for subsuming the individual case; and each person possesses these standards in the way he has subsumed himself under the principles of prevailing morality. As each one has construed the world in accordance with his own habitually practiced maxims of life, he judges another person's character as a matter of course from the same point of view but the other way round, i.e., to what extent the other person for his part conforms to the world the way one has envisioned it as the utterly personal problem area for a strong character. And this criterion must unite arbitrariness with sticking to principles. For example, industriousness (thrift...) is without a doubt a virtue; but if someone else's industriousness is crowned with a success one's own efforts have not achieved, then besides some admiration, one also has its critical reversal at one's disposal, by which industriousness actually only proves true strength of character when no success is achieved, otherwise — quite on the contrary — it suggests a calculating character, a climber (miser...). If somebody demonstrates industriousness in an area where one has chosen demonstrative casualness as evidence of the qualities of one's own person, he is due to be accused of ass-kissing — which however has nothing to do with a call for putting an end to the practice of a calculating submission. Anyone who does such a thing may get to hear by way of a compliment that one wouldn't have "dared" do it oneself; but he is more likely to be accused of being alarmingly stubborn and "banging his head against a wall," impudently disregarding the normal order of things and imagining himself as "better" than normal, "ordinary people" who have made a different, i.e., "healthy" mixture of refractoriness and subservience their principle of life at this point.

The general ideal of a "*good character*" is consequently the silly idea of the "golden mean" — and anyone who unswervingly pursues this has some chance of not being counted among those people with a "*bad character*," who allegedly can do nothing but evil according to firm maxims; perhaps some will also regard him as "well-balanced" and, if his harmlessness is beyond doubt, almost everyone will think him "*nice*." However, if he asserts claims of any kind with his "golden mean," he will certainly get to hear the accusation of failing to arrange his life so as to be calculable for others, and therefore of being even worse than bad characters — with whom one at least "knows where one stands": of being in fact unprincipled, of *no character*.

Satisfying the character judgments of the bourgeois mind's reasoning is simply an impossibility. After all, they are not judgments about the *purposes* a person commits himself to, but instead make use of and cite general moral criteria to announce the intention to respect or reject another person for his manner of "coping" with the world. And this question is decided by a person full of character according to the assessment, as firmly principled as it is coincidental, of whether the other person matches one's own personally concocted notion of, and position toward, the never-ending problems of life, or instead has the cheek to stand up for completely different evaluations and maxims and thus demonstrate in practice that he considers one's own "lifestyle" unfit — one can't let anyone get away with that.

The arbitrariness, subjectivism, and specific opportunism of these reciprocal assessments are of course no hindrance at all for completely subsuming one's dear fellow man under the character "traits" thus discovered, and for asserting the character asset or — more often — flaw in question to be his incontrovertible "nature." Everyone is familiar here with the logical mistake of ascribing to a person everything one feels like noticing about him as the expression of a fixed internal "principle" that *determines* everything he does in the way one has noticed, this mistake entirely serving the interest in lending

one's own opportunism in dealing with others the good conscience and practical impact of an entirely objective, worldly-wise insight into human nature, thereby completing one's critical interpretation of the world. Anyone presenting the most emphatic judgment about a third party within the shortest time can reap admiration; but the others also only need to make up their mind about whether he is demanding techniques of self-assertion of them, and which ones, and the character diagnosis is all done. The inevitable "misunderstandings" have a tragicomical quality, precisely because in the judgment of character, decisions of general principle about friendship or enmity are made on the basis of happenstance according to principled arbitrariness — an inexhaustible source of material not only for literature, but also for that specific bourgeois art of living consisting in plaguing everyone with character-filled nastiness, as if there weren't enough plagues already.

### 9.5. Ignorance as knowledge of human nature

When people, certain that the world is constantly causing them difficulties, put all their pride in self-confidently going along with things, and thus turn themselves into character masks of their submission to exploitation and democratic rule; when they constantly check each other on their characters' providing a guarantee of harmlessness and willingness to go along; then the actually prevailing purposes, the harsh realities of capitalist exploitation and democratic rule, are subsumed rather completely under each person's private fantasyland of well-disposed, harmless and hostile characters. Opinion on political machinations of any kind amounts in its entirety to an expression of sympathy for or aversion to the actors involved in political rule, who display their character strengths or defects, as the case may be, in any particular affair. Any absurdity, not only about the Nazi Third Reich, is believed as long as it is apt for making the ruinous aims of national politics disappear into the attitudes of individuals: logically, for the bourgeois mind, there is always above all a big bunch of simpletons with weak characters and a handful of determined villains, alongside would-be revolutionaries and moral cowards, "moderates," and "extremists," but never anybody who is actually interested in the political aim itself. When reality all too clearly contradicts the character astrology generally considered to be the ne plus ultra of enlightenment about the world and human nature, a fine head full of character is rather more prepared to *deny* the interfering world and its well-ordered absurdities from the point of view of "common sense," with the "argument," "I can't imagine that!" than to open his imagination to the real purposes of state and capital, which are not invented by "common sense."

### 9.6. Characterology based on the ideal of fitness for real life

For psychologists, character is a matter for which they can make use of all the inventiveness of their discipline — an inventiveness that plays well with character-laden diagnoses of bourgeois characters. In fact, it is joyfully welcomed as confirmation of the pretend puzzle, "Why ever *is* he (*am I*) *like that*?" The appraisal that one practices on oneself and performs on others is supplied by professionals here with *reasons*, and beauties they are! One *psychoanalyst* is immediately struck by a "chronic change" of the *ego* "which one might describe as hardening."<sup>21</sup> He thinks this allows him to inspect various characters with the help of the theories of drives and id-ego-superego. To him, what an individual with a character *does* is of no importance, and is therefore a question of degree and above all, in keeping with good psychological custom, an *ability* which manifests itself and — depending on how much — gives rise to the qualitative difference between "reality-oriented" (the psychologist's ideal middle course!) and "neurotic" folks:

"The degree of character flexibility, the ability to open oneself to the outside world or to close oneself to it, depending on the situation, constitutes the difference between a reality-oriented and a neurotic character structure."

And how did the "character armor" come about as a "chronic result"? Of course through the "clash" between "instinctual demands and an outer world which frustrates those demands," since man in an important part is instinct, the world restricts him in it, so that the ego, which he also is — "precisely that border-region of the personality which lies between bio-physiological instinct and the outer world" — is the "region" in which character forms. Wilhelm Reich in any case realized that with character, he was dealing with "the expression and the sum of those influences of the external world on the instinctual ego which, by aggregation and qualitative sameness, form a historic whole." As with godfather Freud, the whole thing leads directly to the eternal war between pleasure and reality, a war that is very sexual: "The formation of character occurs as a certain way of overcoming the Oedipus complex." Sigmund already knew that woman's envy, jealousy and bodily vanity come from penis envy; "a capacity, for instance, to pursue an intellectual profession can often be recognized as a sublimated modification of this repressed wish."<sup>22</sup> Nothing at all is recognized here unfortunately, just as little as in the deduction of "orderliness, parsimoniousness and obstinacy" from the "dissipation of anal erotism" and "its employment in other ways" — instead, character virtues and vices have gotten awarded an interesting reason: they are an unconsciously but continuously carried out *substitute* for sexual exploits to which the subject is actually driven but which he denies himself in his conscious existence. Why he chooses *this* particular substitute, and is conversely so unfree as to submissively obey his

---

<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis*.

<sup>22</sup> Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

drives when deliberately tackling every kind of activity rather than to simply carry it out, is something psychoanalysts ought to ponder sometime when they are writing another wrong book and sublimating who knows what, when they are making their distinctions and treating logic as parsimoniously as obstinately.

The people appearing under the company nameplate of *personality theory* get it simpler but nothing righter. The difficulty in getting hold of personality or character appeals to them. Firstly, they claim to be unable to properly distinguish the two: "Neither technical terminology nor everyday language distinguishes with adequate sharpness between the concepts of 'personality' and 'character.' However, the second word relates less exclusively to the peculiarity of human individuals since certain attributes can also be termed 'characteristic' of inanimate objects." Oh well. Secondly, two researchers list "the following *personality factors*: 1. general activity; 2. restraint; 3. ascendance; 4. sociability; 5. emotional stability; 6. objectivity; 7. friendliness; 8. thinking introversion; 9. cooperativeness; 10. masculinity vs. femininity."<sup>23</sup> This likewise has its advantages: the fact that these are supposed to be "*factors*" of personality instantly spares any thought about *what* kind of determinations of personality one actually is collecting here in order to differentiate characters, and one has got rid of the point of character as a scientific object. Instead, one may raise the question of whether one has all or enough factors: "This system seems just as little able as the others to really take account of the wealth of personality differences to be experienced today."

It's a good thing that Skinner succeeded in radically challenging the question of character as put forth by Freud. He would have us consider whether the character of a "personality" is not in fact merely *behavior*! How's that for a falsely abstract question! Furthermore he becomes aware that, in opposition to the psychology before him, it only makes things unnecessarily difficult to "formulate" one "self" as a "response system" for such *different* behaviors:

"If the environment of which behavior is a function" (again there is no subject in view who knows and wants and acts — no matter how crazy!) "is not consistent, from moment to moment, there is no reason to expect consistency in behavior. The pious churchgoer on Sunday may become an aggressive, unscrupulous businessman on Monday. He possesses two response systems appropriate to different sets of circumstances..."<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, if it is "the environment which takes him to church on Sunday and to work on Monday," then one does not even need a catalog of features from the real world of characters to present a psychological theory about nonexistent subjects. This is how beautifully modern science can make an object disappear, one that scientists take full note of and like, to boot.

---

<sup>23</sup> Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey, 1949.

<sup>24</sup> Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior*.

## 10. Psychological self-criticism: Techniques of self-assertion

Also *without content* is the *self-criticism* that follows on the heels of the effort to assert oneself, and for good reason. This practice also comes to no good end, and many a person sees the *absence of any ability to cope with reality* in the judgment that he is simply a *failure*.

This very total judgment indicates that those concerned take the liberty of completely disregarding the real barriers to their success. It is clear to these *self-incrimination enthusiasts* that they are doing nothing wrong because they just can't help it. They have also ceased being content with some limited sphere where they hold their own in their own way and earn *recognition*. The consolation of having kept their nose clean also appears to them to be of no use. Their "insight" runs: I *can* not assert myself, my will is unable to satisfy the standard of righteousness. Summoning up his entire intellect, the individual starts citing *defects* in his own self as the "explanation" — and for these defects he demands recognition. This self-condemnation, which poses as knowledge, gets its justifications supplied later that achieve only one thing: they remove the spur that normally lies in seeing one's mistakes, the spur to rectify them. The theory is one of *impotence*: the *particularity of a damaged self* becomes an *excuse* for being incapable of that which matters so much. This very free way of regarding one's own will as a defective identity that is dragged down by all kinds of inhibitions has, in psychological justifications of "being unable to rebel," taken up the fight against any rational discussion of reasons for class struggle — and it goes around as a new type of *self-assurance* in other areas as well. As a weapon in "interpersonal" relations that is accessible to everyone, the pose of considering oneself a screwed-up moron is good for generating attention. It is a way to get others who master the grace of compassion and psychological thinking to appreciate one as an exquisite problem case and take one to bed with them.

Psychological hypocrisy involving one's excellent damaged psyche becomes most productive when "rational" individuality gets itself *help* in the fight against its hard-to-overcome irrational side. The aim is peaceful coexistence between the love for one's own "problems" and the desire to prove oneself in the world of "achievement." Psychologists of all schools appreciate this mission, and the fulfillment of society's need for *caring* for the mistakes made by abstract free will on a massive scale creates jobs. *Counseling* is provided, and wrongly dealing with oneself is *practiced* at all kinds of meetings, where suffering from oneself is downright *cultivated*.

Professional psychologists are thus quite open about admitting that, for them, the "defects" that bourgeois individuals make up for themselves are something that is simply a part of human *nature* that requires orderly, expert handling. They celebrate themselves as a branch of *life counseling* by declaring the *techniques of morality* — with which bourgeois character masks seek *recognition* — to be the secret, penetrated by them, of every act. And, with this modern valet's perspective, they enjoy the good reputation of a widely popular *weltanschauung*.

### 10.1. Contentless self-criticism: "I'm a failure"

The righteous person demonstrates with his character his *ability* to succeed, his individual *method* by which he is equal to the adversities hitting him from politics, job and private life. He acts in all seriousness as if he had discovered in *himself* the means for meeting the requirements of decency and performance, as if his special tailoring of himself provided the stratagem for wresting from the world the concession of letting him make his fortune.

In light of that, if these characters have the experience that their ability does not lead to success, that their methods are not rewarded, it is only consistent that they do not consider the adverse circumstances that make life difficult for them, but rather hit on themselves as the origin of deficient skill. Anyone who resorts to cultivating his *suitability* separately from, and in addition to what he continually does and takes upon himself, simply holds *himself* responsible for his *unsuitability* as well.

This admission is over and above a moral reflection on one's own person, in fact. While a sense of shame and a bad conscience express that one requires oneself to better meet recognized criteria of goodness and performance — i.e., they show a wrong self-criticism — the 'thumbs down' the character mask gives himself turns into an *excuse*. The negative judgment is not aimed at one's own will but at an imaginary precondition for this will: this precondition is missing, so goes the diagnosis, and that's why just about everything is in vain. The moral verdict of failure appears in the form of a judgment about the fitness of one's own character; the person claims to have discovered a *reason, existing* independently of his will, that prevents him from carrying out the acts he intends — discovered not, however, in bourgeois society and what it imposes on him, but in his character. He announces that he is devoid of the desperately required abilities and methods that make up a proper person; "That's the way I am!" goes the self-incrimination that no longer refers to mistakes or weaknesses in the fulfillment of accepted standards, and there is certainly no further mention of actual deficiencies in expediently carrying out plans to which one attaches importance. *Psychology* thus works as the procedure, familiar to bourgeois individuality, for

turning one's own mind from the moral burden it brings into the world to the search for "objective" causes for one's failure — for causes that remove the odium of accusation from the conviction that one is a *loser*. Now one *is* a loser and has to see to handling one's *defects*, because otherwise one's will is good for nothing — if it can be assumed to exist and be effective at all.

### 10.2. *The impertinent self-assurance of the damaged ego*

The distressed conclusion that one — the way one just happens to be — is incapable of being able to do anything, actually continues the strategy of self-assertion embarked on in character traits. Like the methods of self-promotion that serve to convince others and oneself that one knows what one's doing, the *psychological technique* of self-pity really accomplishes something for one's *self-assurance*, even if it is fraudulently obtained by the assessment of permanent damage. After all, living *with* this damage, proving oneself in the struggle *against* it, is also a program for whose difficulty one owes oneself all due respect. One now "knows" for sure that one need not be ashamed, but may shamelessly be plagued by the damage one just can't do anything about. For even if one otherwise doesn't want to *know* anything about the bourgeois world, because one is keen on finding one's way in it, one holds the "conditions" responsible under the headings of "environment" and "upbringing" — responsible, that is, for the defects one worries about: one counts oneself among the helpless victims as *damaged ego*, and even imagines oneself a social critic when one sees capital and state transformed into nothing but repressive, manipulative, ego-destroying "repression" that breaks the backs all people of good will, depriving their good will of its effects. Adult people maintain, without any *substantive* objection to the teachings of their parents and teachers, i.e., preferably without even the slightest appearance of priding themselves on having *different* views, that they were *determined by others* from childhood on and that's where they got their character defects. The same people who lament their lack of "self-confidence" — *the* ideal of a psychologizing citizen being, of course, the useful and self-asserting and recognized person — and sigh for "ego strength" give themselves *credit* for having noticed how the world denigrates them as conformists! In leftist circles, the revision of Marx by Freud was such a big hit that college-educated people excused themselves "for the time being" from organizations that were out to change things — with whom they agree "on a lot of points" — on the grounds that they are attending to themselves first, naturally for the sake of achieving an *ability* to take action. This doesn't mean they stop "acting": on the one hand, they apply themselves, complete with their psychological self-assessments, to what everyone else is doing too — the necessities of their education and job as well as their pleasures — and, on the other hand, they find time and energy for activities devoted exclusively to cultivating their helpless ego.

### 10.3. *Psychology in everyday life*

The ordinary tasks of bourgeois life are not performed any better or worse by people who have discovered their *individuality to be a problem* than by those few who simply go their righteous way (from the advice pages of magazines, it emerges that nowadays children, housewives and mothers-in-law from all walks of life shrewdly go on about their character flaws and strengths). All the same, they do their daily bourgeois stint with the conviction that it's always all about something completely different — namely, about them, about the prevention or promotion of their personal progress from a subject utterly devoid of "self-confidence" to one who is "finding" himself and "expressing" himself everywhere.

Even high-level *politics*, which is about obtaining the usefulness of people by rule, cannot escape the judging and sympathy of self-determining citizens — and its men of action have long since prepared themselves to take account of the psychological needs of people who no longer make any material demands. In all seriousness, people offer as "criticism" of the political work done by state-supporting parties that one doesn't feel in very good hands with them. This makes voting for the lesser evil agreeable, because it can be decided so nicely according to the criteria of personal trust, according to the *self-image* manufactured by certain personalities, so that one is no longer giving the state one's blessing but supporting a personality who comes closest to one's ideal of a good father of the people. Out of a need to be "active" in a respected way, instead of "passively" always being only "affected but not involved" — that is, out of the highly individual "criticism" that politics should really exist for the people, oughtn't remove itself miles and miles away from the citizen, thus also requires his involvement, that his criticism may ultimately be just as credible as the state, etc. — on the basis of objectives like *these*, grownup people decide on joining up, and then later against joining up, with a local branch of a social democratic party, the Greens, or some other initiative. What actually matters to the crowd in question is an easily neglected factor for people who think they have to "do something" in the interest of their self-respect; alternative-type citizens are at home in a crowd that appears somehow oppositional, where they are spared a discussion about well-founded goals and are allowed the other one, the one about "the way they see themselves": the internal forms of intercourse, the "authoritarian" and "democratic" structures, the back and forth about *mere* theories and genuine practice (which is "fun") — these become their preferred occupation.

Someone will ask to speak in order to say how hard he finds discussing things, but he would like to be able to do it just like someone else, who is holding him back just *by this* ability of his. Meanwhile, he is merrily discussing away, not about the world and the politics being pursued or to be pursued in it, of course, but *about himself*. The psychological art of self-

assertion is not to be denied at least one achievement: it is an act of emancipation — from the reality of bourgeois life, from which one takes the freedom to worry exclusively about oneself while going along with everything.

*Working life*, for a subject committed to his individuality, is all about consistently reviving the childish illusions harbored particularly about one's choice of occupation: about an activity suiting one's temperament, a terribly creative activity that occupies and fulfills one's ego, and turns one's little career into a path of self-discovery. The "feeling of being *socially recognized*" carries at least as much weight as pay and job burden; and if someone is unemployed, he loses not only *meaning* in life but also enthusiasm for living. Everything "socially conscious" is better than the dull professions, which are so *unmotivating*. According to the psychological view of everyday life at work, the tough business of the competition one has to face evaporates into the deeply human task of doing right by *oneself* — and the full force of this self-righteousness hits colleagues, subordinates and superiors: everything they do is subsumed under a spitefully suspected objective, namely, that they are doing it out of a sheer "need for admiration." They are "desperately" eager for confirmation of their vanity, which is why they make one's life difficult, and solidarity is a foreign word to them. So competition functions splendidly with the help of psychological "egoism," which, firstly, is not materialism and, secondly, treats the ideals of competition as character traits. The impression from one's experiences at work, that other people's attitudes aren't much use — which is why one's plans for self-realization continually fail — may then be safely taken home.

There, in *private life*, the program of solving the problems of one's own personality really gets going. The thing that is still disturbing about political and job concerns — that it's about being forced by *others* into submission, "unfortunately" unavoidably so; the whole time with the painful reminder that the individual is barred from coming into his own — this can be safely forgotten here by a self concerned with surmounting *his own* barriers. He is in the world of his completely personal concerns and devotes himself completely to the problem of how to produce *out of himself* a subject *capable* of happiness, love, communication, lust, and pleasure. For this much is clear to a seeker after happiness who shows character while being continually disappointed, who misrepresents the world as an environment for his self-gratification: if it doesn't work here, where only *he* is the one in demand with his needs and dreams, then he alone is most certainly responsible for the poor results — by which he does not mean *his will*, but his *ability*. Question after question overwhelms him: Why can't I make anybody happy? And vice versa: Why do I have so little faith in myself? Why am I afraid? Am I inhibited? Doesn't anyone understand me? Why can't I do it twice a day? What happened to your orgasm? What's wrong with me? etc.

Personalities suffering from themselves *greatly enjoy* struggling with questions of this caliber, which is no surprise. After all, such questions are answers, and they make an individual made *unsure* by his fears and screw-ups very *sure of himself*. Someone who argues this way has actually chosen himself to be the sole object of both his theoretical and his practical efforts, and he wants his whole attitude toward the world to be devoted to "solving his problems." *This* is what has to be discussed and to be responded to. The other person should be aware of what a complicated character he has in front of him, and he'd better realize what special consideration this requires. This is how easy it is to transform self-incrimination, the invocation of one's own defects, into the demand to be recognized, understood and unutterably loved and looked after *with* and because of one's damaged character nature. And when the demanded *recognition* fails to materialize, one may safely proceed from condemning one's own inability to revealing the disorders of the other person, who "represses" and "displaces" his complexes, actually constantly denying his screwed-up sensorium. The confession-happy psycho, who wants every lie about himself to be appreciated as his nature, which he blames on his upbringing, then turns into a model of "honesty" and "self-knowledge," a person who doesn't fool himself and struggles to get rid of his weaknesses. This makes for lovely hours of discussion in which fragile identities are fully appreciated. And when at regular intervals the participants are fed up with the experimental psychological activities because, as *methods* of "understanding oneself," they fail to bring about the desired service of love, one may celebrate one's messed-up private life as an extremely difficult matter which cannot be mastered "in isolation" but at best by "political activity." This matches the domestic nonsense when it takes place "in a group" as *compensation* for it — a luxury that definitely not all people allow themselves!

#### 10.4. Psychological training

Whether demonstrated as a political issue or not: the special activities for cleaning up one's defects, the group fuss of people who want to procure, in addition to their duties, the pleasure of staring into the supposed darkest depths of their own ego and "emancipating" *themselves*, while everything is taking its regular capitalist course in the world — these do pack a punch. They are aimed at the extremely positive purpose of practicing and accomplishing all the things that constantly fail in accordance with the rotten marks one gives one's character. The buzz of activity this triggers is therefore *pure method* — separate from real life where one considers oneself a failure.

To learn how to *discuss* — which one wants to be able to do in order to gain recognition and thereby gain self-respect again — one practices discussing by submitting to the duress of an *encounter* group, where, first of all, everybody gets to tell a whole lot about his feelings and disappointing encounters: here one learns to be quite daring, starts every sentence with "I think," can be pleased to have stuttered it out, and raptly attends to the analogous attempts of the other participants, who think what they think. This kind of thing has become the custom right inside academic education, so that before dealing with any subject, the participants of seminars torment each other with admissions of failure of the most embarrassing kind. In this

setting, group games are played in which the audience watches out that others avoid dogmatic expressions, which are understood to be all modal expressions that signal some bit of necessity in a thought; quite as if a logical connection robbed another person of the honor of being respected in his sacred individuality. *Recognition* — *unconditionally* and without the heartless path of judgment — is *feigned* and emotionally affirmed, which goes like this: encounter team participants, who are completely unknown to each other, paw each other, let it show how difficult this is for them, bursting into tears if necessary — and have the examining psychotechnician confirm how much they are obviously “still” encrusted in completely unfounded inhibitions! In exercises of this kind, in which grownup people train their *sensitivity*, emotional affection for others becomes an order of the day, which one can only carry out properly by tinkering around with oneself until one has freed oneself from one’s “inhibitions.” Completing the relevant rituals initially means *learning skills* — and afterwards the technicians of groundless and contentless understanding go after their fellows accordingly, that they can demand the same “understanding” without the semblance of a criterion.

### 10.5. Bourgeois psychology: A scientific parasite of self-assertion

In the transition to individual psychological care — which many a person will go through all alone, that the specialities of his problem be done justice — the psychological self-help program realizes its essential nature. After all, it is a blatant contradiction if somebody declares himself to be a fairly permanent crisis case and at the same time wants to play crisis manager. It’s definitely better to put oneself in the care of a stranger, where one is the “case” and the other person is the expert in problems of failing individuality. The expert is not the least bit distracted by the circumstances in which one is placed and in which one sees oneself repeatedly coming up against one’s own inadequacies. For him they are “reality,” so he can concentrate totally on the damaged “ego” that is consulting him. He is entirely taken up with *interpreting the defects* that are brought to his attention, thus seeing at first glance *that* a character disorder is presenting; and at second glance he discovers the nature of the disorder, which its owner was unable to determine so exactly. He thus helps the patient “identify” the weaknesses that the latter accuses himself of.

The way this “identification” takes place may be taken as felicitous evidence that psychology is a “*socially useful*” science — though also as an indication that the usefulness of a thing in class society, even when adorned with the general sociological compliment of “social,” represents nothing desirable. The results of an analytical treatment — whose “success” the therapist maintains from the start does not lie in his hands or words — consist in the patient’s self-incrimination, his declaration of incapacity, being taken very seriously, no matter how serious or slight it may be. But it is not taken as what it *is*, but rather as a real shortcoming in the analysand, with an origin that, on the one hand, he admits to himself only in dreams and on the other hand would not even dream of. The psychologist discovers *reasons* for his client’s notorious failure, which suit the latter only all too well because they can all be found in his “life story,” i.e., do not accuse him of dealing idiotically with his rights and duties, but *excuse* him for traipsing through the world like such a moron. He is respected as a *victim* — of having been forced to wrongly cope with borderline situations of childhood in areas of conflict between self and mother, father and lust, reality and Oedipus, etc. — a victim who is plagued, quite consistently and through absolutely no fault of his own, by *conflicts* which are definitely not *his*. It is simply held to the patient’s credit that he can’t be aware of the *world behind* his self-doubts — and Freud’s list of dream symbols gives some information about what this mysterious world known to the psychoanalyst looks like.

Psychology of course consists of various schools, as is appropriate for a bourgeois science. But they all hand out the nasty advice of classical psychoanalysis: to strike a balance *in oneself* between what works and what doesn’t work, to steer a middle course between what is detrimental to one’s self-esteem and what is necessary for it, to generally live neither beneath nor beyond the means of one’s character. And this advice also functions, in the indicative, as a *theory* of people’s mental infirmities. Some equilibrium, some unity in the personality, is always out of order.

Psychology makes itself *useful* in that it quite simply meets a social need. It acts as an *advocate* for the moral subject, who regards himself as more or less suitable to the task of practicing good behavior that pays off; it is thus very partisan: it goes into action in an advisory capacity for the mistakes of the individual *ready* to submit to the constraints of bourgeois society, just as it promises to guide him when he gets down to using his mind exclusively for “learning” this readiness. This is a case of a scientific discipline committing itself without further ado to a *point of view* that supplies the guiding thread to a science merely by existing in society, a society that indulges in the luxury of a theoretical inspection of the world conducted separately from society itself — psychology repays the state for the means to maintain itself by defining as problems of human nature that which well-behaved bourgeois subjects do to themselves because, and as long as, they want to satisfy the requirements of their rule. Psychologists are also not too shy about offering their teaching as the universally applicable teaching of the era, serving up the quid pro quo of the bourgeois mind, which follows the dodges of moral thinking, as the explanation for state, economic, and private events. They present the *valet’s perspective* as a modern *weltanschauung* for everything and everyone, the interpretation of any event by means of their *passe-partout*, individual *motivation*, which affords such immensely interesting peeps through the mental keyhole behind the scenes of the Führer’s headquarters or the neighbor’s living room.

And to this end, this science need only follow a few basic rules “borrowed” not only from the mental efforts of bourgeois characters; these rules show it to be the theoretical imitation of the practical opportunism that it will neither do without nor comprehend as its object.

For the first principle of psychological thinking and interpretation consists in *divesting* every explanation of its object. No psychologist would designate the bourgeois subject as his object, although he deals with and draws his examples from nothing other than moral individuals who have committed themselves to the ideal of coping in the crazy, common, and therefore also “normal” form of being allowed to be pleased with themselves. Psychologists talk about the purpose of self-assertion, -realization, -discovery, etc., as if it were the most natural concern in the world to every *human being*; and the complete lack of content of all such crushing motives, which do not even induce a psychology professor to give his lectures, does not bring the mind expert to ask why people claim to have such motives, but, at best, to take a look at the animal kingdom, where everything is so similar somehow. How self-assertion works best — *that* is what a psychologist asks. And with that, he is claiming to be putting his theory wholly at the service of that fictitious object, the human being. The world is to understand his science as a helping hand for a functioning inner life.

This helping hand without knowledge is firstly not one, of course, but secondly, it is not unselfish. After all, with its offer, psychology claims nothing less than that *it* not only has discovered the actual problems of all individuals, but is also absolutely essential for handling them properly. Its parasitic position toward the mistakes of bourgeois character masks, with which position it “constitutes” its object for itself, serves it as proof that its opinions, advice and therapeutic efforts are terribly important. Because bourgeois individuals let themselves in for a struggle with themselves when they dedicate themselves to the ideal of righteousness, psychology celebrates itself as the indispensable tool for a successful inner life. This is what makes for its instrumentalism, and is the principle of its partisanship — which truly stands above the classes.

Thus, as little as this science explains any of the practices of a modern, moral inner life, as little does any object of world affairs, be it ever so far removed from the techniques of fiddling around with one’s character, remain exempt from its interpretations. Despite all its qualification of its specific findings, it rather immodestly takes upon itself the theoretical responsibility for announcing what is decisive when it comes to the reasons for and purposes of capital and labor, state and revolution, marriage and family, fact and fiction, anything and everything. Just as Freud conveyed his very definite and, for seventy years, popular views about war and love — of course within the framework of his three-province theory of the mind; just as Skinner put forward very definite but wrong principles of state and religion — of course within the framework of his doctrine of conditioned reflexes, operant behavior, etc.; so today have all university- and radio station-resident psychologists the audacity to go on little excursions in the fields of sociology and epistemology, which for them are the same thing anyway — of course completely within the framework of a theory of perception and consciousness and, derived from that, their search for the actual object of psychology.

To conclude, here is a materialistic psychological judgment. Professional psychologists and amateurs of this discipline alike are cynical enough to accuse anybody who doesn’t share their point of view of, firstly, not having a clue; secondly, not caring about suffering humanity; and therefore being totally screwed up himself. This falls under the impertinence of the democratic scientist’s servile consciousness.

## 11. Madness and normality

Both the point of view of self-assertion and that of a pretty fundamental self-incrimination can be practiced without the actors being lost to the activities of bourgeois society. Plenty of individuals drift along for years with the fear that they “won’t make it” while *still* remaining *useful* as housewife, husband, secretary, skilled worker, or singer. And even those who have settled down into some neurotic conceit along with its therapeutic support don’t necessarily get out of line, but at the most just get on the nerves of those around them.

Things become serious, however, when free will gets serious about its “problem,” when the individual makes *self-assertion* his life work and *proves* to himself that he is reckless enough to enforce his threatened interests. Then mere bragging turns into a practical demonstration of superiority and strength wherever this can be done; emancipated from the *content* of an interest, from the satisfaction of a need, *psychopaths* of all dimensions set out to get their money’s worth; and they decide extremely *arbitrarily* in which areas to act out their *delusions*.

The ideas that occur to an individual when he wants to live out his *self-condemnation* are just as arbitrary. He looks inward for “reasons” for “being a failure,” thus using his mind to prove that he simply can’t help it. And a *neurotic* accepts this proof only as a specific defect that *really* prevents him from doing all kinds of things: he lives out his invention to the point of somatic effects. Neurotics can point to just as proud a collection of afflictions as can their brothers and sisters of the other department who are afflicted by the “compulsion” to affirm themselves. Why should an “inferiority complex” develop less productive variants than a “delusion of grandeur”?

Official psychology knows just what to do with these “behaviors.” It attends to the cases with the feigned medical ethos of its founders, calls the people “sick,” and contributes theories to the interpretations the patients offer of themselves, in order to then proceed to action: getting the client, who never fails to perceive the attempts at interpretation as the *acknowledgment of his defects*, to judge the matter by the book. The acceptance of this version is considered a “success” when the crazy people make use of it in such a way that they — however limitedly — at least start dealing with two or three other things alongside their affliction while nursing their affliction. Such successes are reported en masse by the propagandists of this science, but on the other hand the lunatic asylums report otherwise and resort to more banal methods — so that protest has been emanating for some time from the ranks of the so humanely-minded friends of the “intact” bourgeois psyche. No matter that psychology, even with its development into psychiatry, has failed to become the medical science of “mental diseases” — that it couldn’t do even if it were familiar with the truth about such mental “illness.” In psychiatric hospitals, this guild is granted the institutional authorization to rest assured that it is a health care branch indispensable to this society.

### 11.1. Self-assertion as a purpose: Distinguishing oneself

The methodological handling of one’s own personality, the continual attempt to shape oneself into a respectable character mask, that is to say, the programs of self-assertion and self-condemnation that are nowadays so usual and honorable, present many a master of such arts of living with problems. On the one hand, efforts of this kind are definitely aimed at *success* in the bourgeois world, while on the other hand, psychological practices do not provide anyone with any *objective* means for asserting himself. After all, the focus is exclusively on the alleged deficiencies of one’s own subjectivity, quite as if only this “condition” determined whether an individual wins or loses the (daily) “struggle for existence.” The success he is concerned about has thus gotten different content in his turning toward himself: for a subject who cultivates the defensive idealism of his specialness as means and obstacle, *decently* making one’s way coincides completely with the gain of *recognition* he provides for himself; and in place of the *performance* he as a moral citizen still regards as the lever of advancement, he posits the ideal of a *usefulness* he would like to produce in himself.

Both the effort to show oneself off as a figure with very special attributes and skills, and the art of demonstrating quite special deficiencies, provide the arsenal of bourgeois characters with some strange enrichments. The first division graces humanity with that set of publicly recognized psychopaths who staff parts of the culture industry as competitive athletes: one of them climbs mountains in remote corners of the earth because he has made it his purpose in life to challenge his physique to the limit and to challenge the eight-thousand-meter peaks and has thus made a *sensation* of himself; another becomes obsessed with playing chess because he thinks he has to become world champion — and the whole nation appreciates his exclusive sensitivity; yet others make first themselves and then sport-viewing mankind happy with their skiing arts, which they cultivate the whole year round so that they can then zoom down mountains with the proper build with speeds that are otherwise reserved to those who drive 70 laps around a circle. From the ordinary person who makes wagers of the craziest kind to prove some kind of *uniqueness*, to the ridiculous entry in the “Book of World Records,” there is a wide spectrum of pretty small-minded individuals whose desire to *distinguish* themselves is honored in a society where even entertainment is

based on *role models* because everyone finds himself much too ordinary. Frantic attempts to spur one's own mind to invent some kind of world view, which defies all thought but is at least new and *original*, become hits at the book fair, just as a sadistic slasher can enjoy the warmest attention if only he chops up his victims outlandishly enough. And for the sheer attention that can readily be had for any extravagance, young people come up with the idea of making their clothes and hairstyle the seal of their lifestyle standing out from the "masses"; they run around as "preppies" or "punks," get so caught up in their self-presentation that they beat each other up, and thereby prove what *meaning* they are *exclusively* claiming. No less intent on their specialness are people who, in perpetual anticipation of the agony of dealing with the other sex, don't want to show any feeling for its members any more, or never develop any in the first place because they "came out" with a taste for homosexuality in time and stuck with it. The fitting answer they have come up with to their criminal prosecution and moral condemnation is, firstly, a racy cult of their exquisite "nature," by which they have demonstrated to themselves their extraordinary gift for nonrepressive loving; and secondly, they have for some time been busy spreading ideologies about their variant of the right to happiness and founding a "movement" whose entire content is their own personal leanings, due to which they present themselves as the better part of mankind.

### 11.2. Demeaning oneself as service: The happiness of the Christian individual

As for the other branch: the method of taking one's own weaknesses as the badge of a sort of person to be unconditionally respected, of awarding oneself a unique advantage with all one's self-denunciation, can score a success in bourgeois society that makes the self-assertion artists pale in comparison as a quite harmless fringe group. The *Christian mania* of being deeply steeped in sin, with its hypocritical humility that undauntedly claims to be fighting materialism in oneself and especially in others, is not even considered something special, but as a realization of the human spirit *per se*. With it, the modern citizen's willingness to submit turns against every other particularity, whether national or not, chastising it always as a danger — for each and every person — that arises from someone having the impudence to deny *responsibility* for everything negative, and to think of something "positive" without the deepest expression of gratitude for undeserved benefit.

Christians do not insist simply on going along with things, i.e., being good citizens. They prove themselves as the squeaky-clean brigade of both divine and worldly rule, which always boils down to perfecting the rule. This is particularly important to them on the part of those ruled in the world: no interest and need eludes their critical investigation, which takes on quite a psychological form. Use is always made of a religious anthropology, from "not by bread alone" to condemnations of the "hubris" of thinking, so that neither the eating nor the knowing redounds to the individual's finding his real humanity, and *morality* always appears as supreme *happiness*. (And there is really no more to the idea of happiness!) The demonstration of religious simpleness is not one of righteousness, but always one of *happiness*, which befalls mankind with Pope, liturgy, joyful renunciation, and the declaration of *powerlessness*. The actual character mask chooses itself as the ideal, and anyone who does not himself cultivate the techniques of heart-rending declarations of his own *inadequacy* is immediately noticed by this majority (democracy!): he doesn't *want* to be bad, therefore he *is*! After all, such a person doesn't want to just *survive* while regarding *himself* as the sole danger for doing so, but rather actually presents himself as a purpose instead of a tool. Anyone unwilling to take himself to task has gambled away all human dignity, due to the modern necessity of an old faith for "man." In the spitefulness with which Christian clerics and education ministers would best like to ban orange-robed Buddha disciples as liable to corrupt the young, although their Pope, the object of the dumbest veneration, is driven throughout the world like an club flag, Christians concede that that the difference between their teachings and congenial ones is a *functional* one. What matters is the *service* that this psychology inflated into a religious edifice performs; and this is why even the followers and revisionist fans of "Real Socialism," with their songs, heroes, martyrs, and declarations, had to put up with the tough accusation of being an ersatz religion.

### 11.3. Totally mad

There is no acknowledgment, but rather ostracism and pity in store for a person with his freedom to be delusional when, and insofar as, he practices it in such a way as to lose his practical respect for the demands made by the bourgeois world on the fitness of its members. For it is not the content of the crazy idea he devotes his existence to that decides whether democratic society basically counts on him as one of its "achievers," nor is it the stubbornness with which someone construes and sets up his life as the realization of certain tasks emanating from his imagination. In order for a person's inner life to make him a *case* that no longer meets the criteria of usefulness, he must become so radical in his continually disappointed quest for acknowledgment of his imagined particularity that, in its name, he resolutely disregards any acknowledgement actually paid, denies his everyday bourgeois life as the sphere and criterion for proving himself, and instead invents a *new everyday life* in accordance with the desiderata of his fantastic individuality, whose demands and promises he henceforth exclusively complies with: he successfully drives himself *mad*.

The madman has freed himself from the desire, so hopelessly illusory for him and the majority of his fellow men, that the real circumstances should be willing material for his striving for "self-realization" — but only in favor of the freedom to establish the longed-for equation between the world, on the one hand, and his own made-up defects and claimed abilities, on

the other hand, incontrovertibly and irrevocably in his imagination, and to make it come true in the conduct of his life. The sad and hopeful daydreams that every righteous person entertains in his disappointment at the “hard facts” of the capitalist world; the identification with a role model that is warmly recommended as a means of “finding oneself” to every person asking for “orientation”; these comfortless comforts of solid bourgeois everyday life, in which ordinary people, *alongside* their real duties and deeds and in the interest of a productive consent to them, maintain the appearance of being the hub of what goes on in the world — all this is prevented by madmen, *for themselves*, from being discredited by actual requirements and one’s own achievements, as inevitably follows hard in normal life. A modern madman gets serious about the daily refuted bourgeois ideal of emancipation from “external control” by providing his image of himself and the world with all kinds of practical triumphs over objectivity before the forum of his own personal judgment — at the cost of definitive uselessness for the world, whose acknowledgement he was originally after.

And he’s still after it even *in* his delusions. For common neuroses and psychopathies in fact reveal their origin, not without good reason, in the activities of psychologically perfected *calculation*. There are people who demonstrate to their contemporaries in their “phobias,” “regressions,” and “pathological inferiority complexes” their uncontrollable, “compulsive” “*inability*” to satisfy the normal requirements with regard to “self-control,” i.e., who subsume themselves with every fiber of their being to the gamble on that element of acknowledgment that is even contained in disparaging pity in the form of a general absolution. And just as to the shameless self-assurance of the individual, subjected only to his own judgment because he’s “unique,” so does “depressive insanity” include not only “manic insanity” but also the insane mission of discrediting the real world with its rules and prohibitions in practice before the imagined *supremacy* of one’s own true self. The “harmless” UN bosses and born-again Jesuses, who insist so vigorously on the respect of those around them (and offer all kinds of practical proof that madmen with all their inventiveness can’t hold a candle to the pluralism of acknowledged idiots of bourgeois intellectual life when it comes to crazy ideas), realize their exclusive ideal of their true *usefulness* known only to themselves, just as their colleagues from the locked wards do, who offer proof of their imagined mastery over the world with usually very purposeful “aggression” against their fellows and are categorized by the law and psychology as “*compulsive* offenders.” Every psychiatry textbook informs about the curio collection of mad exaggerations that the bourgeois mind is capable of, exaggerations of the normal struggle of characters for their recognition; about the various degrees of their emancipation from the world; and about the combinations of their alternatives, with the stereotypical — and always only extremely “preliminary” — distinctions between neuroses and psychoses, “hyperthymic, depressive, insecure, fanatical, self-seeking, emotionally unstable, explosive, affectless, weak-willed, asthenic”<sup>25</sup> or also “schizoid, cycloid, explosive, excitable and other psychopaths,” without giving even a hint of the banal truth about insanity. In fact, its manifestations are nothing but an encyclopedia of the achievements of an abstract free will reduced to their principle. Just as a person can only make a habit of obedience — submission to the regulations of a rule that aims to be understood as a humanitarian and humane order — if he *judges himself* according to the criterion of *decency*, puts his pride into personally appropriating and developing all the techniques of demonstrative *submissiveness*, and thus rates his remaining “egoism” as so inferior that a manifest *inferiority complex* is only a short step away, in quite the same way does a thinking subject endure the daily practiced comparison of performance only if he makes the thereby prescribed *way to success* his purpose in life, judges himself accordingly by the *efficiency* he proves in doing so, and is so conceited about the obvious extent of it, or the extent that has unjustly not become obvious, that by demonstrating this conceit he quite logically ends up with *megalomania*. It’s a rough way back from the radical alternatives of a bourgeois self-consciousness to its functional ways of operating, so lunatic asylums conversely need not worry about being continuously supplied by the world of successful decency.

Crazy people are most certainly not becoming fewer since large numbers of flip-out candidates have meanwhile found ways and means to produce the *effects* of insanity in themselves without concentrating with irrevocable determination on denying the difference between normal and imagined reality. Even in its own numbing by drugs, the mind struggling to assert itself endeavors to provide its dreams of itself with a reality that withstands its practical refutation by everyday life at least for a while. The fact that the delusional feeling of happiness, because it is induced pharmacologically, exists *alongside* the reality-oriented calculations of the mind, is an “advantage” over madness, while having its price in addiction. The resolve, habitually put into practice, to equip the fantasy world spun out of one’s own cultivated individuality with the indisputability of an objective fact asserts itself quite logically for the subject in his moments of wakeful calculation as a compulsion to the extent that he has subjected his psychological and physical “balance” to this habit. Quite apart from the other irony that definitely asserts itself against the drug addict: just like the delusions of the modern madman, his blissful states are none other than those of the imagined self-assertion of his ever so complex character.

#### 11.4. Psychiatry

When the bourgeois intellect takes a scientific look at madness, it is interested less in the specific activities of the “sick” *mind* than in the unfailing *result*: the individual’s uselessness, which it thinks it has sufficiently characterized by the negative

<sup>25</sup> Kurt Schneider, “Die psychopathischen Persönlichkeiten” (1923).

reason “disturbed”; “the organism fails to process the arising affects,” there is “a more or less complete loss of orientation ability in the real environment,” a “loss of the inner unity of the personality,” and for some scholars it also “seems reasonable to assume that schizophrenia may basically involve toxic disturbances of cell metabolism.” So madness is attributed to anyone who — and to everyone to the extent that he — becomes unfit for everyday life, and this *standard of functionality* can always easily prove its own fitness, beyond all the methodological debates about what is actually “normal.” There is no need to pay any attention to the differences between a normal technician of bourgeois morality, a neurotic at large, and a clinical case, or to what is common to the mental achievements peculiar to them. The achievement of the psychopath, who relinquishes his free will by acting in practice according to his self-interpretation, betrays to a specialist merely the “contrast” of this achievement to bourgeois “reason”; and the idiocies of the normal mind suffering from itself and well-disposed toward all kinds of solipsistic weaknesses appear as the most natural thing in the world for an intact intellect. That someone can prove their worth by getting in on the action therefore appears to the representatives of clinical psychology as the extremely humane goal of their work, regardless of the fact that their clients put their entire ambition in separating their self-assertion practice from its useful subordination under the imperatives of society, from which they, together with virtually all other individuals, claim to have culled the need for a special round of insisting on their own person — which “socially” oriented members of the profession actually credit them with as *protest*.

When the science of madness sets delusion against normality as the functional opposite, it is refusing to accept this *connection* between the mindscapes of a normal bourgeois character mask and the delusional worlds of that minority who can only save their morality by emancipation from their functionality. Unconcerned with the tautological nature of such an “explanation,” it insists on “dysfunction” as the *essence* of madness — and actually prides itself on this mistake. Since it thereby in fact loses sight of the difference between the consistently “successful” delusions of the moral mind and injuries or diseases of the brain and their consequences, as *psychiatry* it puts its pride in the age-old *ethos of helping and healing* and defines madnesses of all kinds and every caliber as *diseases*. In the same breath, it designates these “diseases” as “endogenous” and goes on record as knowing nothing about whether they are supposed to be actual diseases — “Thus, when one speaks of ‘endogenous’ mental disorders nowadays, one initially only means ‘mental disorders of unknown genesis’” — but this does not in the slightest impair its certainty that its clientele is suffering from “pathological dysfunctions.” And this is how it attends to its “patients,” both theoretically and practically.

On the one hand, psychiatry is *in agreement* with its clients from the beginning in the most important point: when the madman subsumes himself under an imagined determination of his thinking, feeling, wanting, and doing so consistently that he denies to the utmost of his power that he is the subject of this subsumption, this science confirms for him the actual existence of an objective force of the kind and especially of the incontrovertibility of a brain tumor — without, however, citing an actually identified germ for this highly scientific diagnosis, indeed without ever being *able* to cite any proof at all for an “impersonal power” “within” the mad striving other than: *the testimony of the madman himself*. On the other hand, the scientific mind by no means takes the fantasies of the “disturbed” mind at face value: anyone suspected of madness will find that *his* reflections on himself and the world at large are rejected on principle, even if he might have happened to notice some truth (in that case he will definitely be believed least of all!). *Against* the madman’s self-interpretations, psychiatry starts looking, unchallenged by its continually renewed failure, for the “real” reason for that “inner” higher power that it has conceded to its patient as the objective determination of his psyche. And while sharing the cynicism of a quasi-medical promise of help, which no longer takes any note of the madman’s struggle against the freedom of his will, but instead *proceeds* from the non-existence of his free will, the schools of psychiatry part company:

— Some direct their psychiatric faith toward solid physiological causes of “endogenous” insanity, resorting with ironic logical consistency to therapies that are supposed to achieve, are able to achieve, and as a rule actually achieve, nothing other than this: they *immobilize* a dysfunctional will by physiological means — from cold showers and electric shocks to the “more elegant” chemicals of the pharmaceuticals industry.

— Others use the fabrications of depth psychology to understand the crazy people’s delusional worlds by way of translation — into the sexual, in case of doubt — and plague their patients, while posing as having the deepest understanding, with their “offer” of an alternative delusional world, in which father, mother, and penis play the leading roles, and which is to be celebrated as a successful “release” when the madman accommodates himself to it while reverting to a couple of useful habits.

— Behavioral therapists’ training attempts on the “black box” can sometimes also score a success of this kind — again, only because the opposite of their theoretical premise is true: the presented “stimuli” provoke the remains of *calculation* that the crazy person still practices after separating himself from the world of calculation.

— And because all these “offers of help,” taken as a whole, look extremely bad against their own medical ethos, there is now also a faction within psychiatry that understands itself as “antipsychiatry,” because it chooses to see its “patients” frame of mind as being determined as strange, in full agreement with the mainstream clique, but without the aspect of condemnation entailed by designating the “strangeness” as a disease. Unconcerned with the antagonism with the everyday world that the delusions of a crazy mind open up in practical terms as well, antipsychiatrists want to see its fantasies *appreciated* as quite respectable individual extravagance, if not the ability to defend oneself.

The antipsychiatrists' reverence for insanity is, like the depth-psychologists' interpretation of it, excellently suited of course for dealing with the "phenomenon" of madness in terms of *world view*, beyond the gates of the psychiatric fraternity. Because the bourgeois mind tends to puzzle psychologically over its products anyway, it is always easily and gladly tempted by the equation between lunacy and profundity to act as a philosophical parasite even when it comes to madness, and to credit it with providing proof for its own "questions about the meaning of life." When it rightfully starts to fear that it might likewise be suddenly seized by the "enigmatic forces" of insanity itself — then the profound mind has already covered the first stage on the philosopher's royal road to madness. For finally, and once again: a person goes mad only when he wishes to be pleasing to *himself*, measured against his self-made character ideal, strictly in *opposition* to reality.

## 12. The enforcement of psychological self-criticism: suicide

Quite a few who wish they were able to deal with the world, but aren't, manage the personality's *leave-taking* from the bourgeois world more simply than through the self-tormenting procedures of psychopathology: *they kill themselves*, without insisting beforehand on getting much sympathy for their self-destruction — whether from the psychological amateurs around them or from professionals. The enforcement of the judgment that an individual oriented toward proving his righteousness makes when he fails is a psycho-logical consequence drawn by bankrupt capitalists, bad pupils and students, disappointed spouses, husbands fathering kids outside the home, as well as lovesick teenagers. And the decision not to want to live any longer is by no means accounted for by *failure*: in order to do away with oneself, one really has to apply the standards of bourgeois morals to oneself without any reserve, i.e., without having their “use” in mind. The “transition” can be made with respect to *any* element that characterizes a moral subjectivity, although the predominant motives are those originating in private life, because this is where the individual with his high expectations of happiness is hit hardest by disappointments.

In suicide, also known as “voluntary death,” abstract free will resorts to its “final argument” and, to the horror of the bereaved, makes its irrationality tangible to the world at large; even when the individual's interpretation of his own failure, his conscience gone mad, “commands” him to execute himself, he acts *calculatingly* by advance warning and farewell letter, and launches a last offensive. The fact that he has no benefit from this calculation, which is intended to get to other people's consciences, may serve as a reminder of the epigraph at the beginning about making abstractions hold in reality...

### 12.1. Self-pleasing in despair

The suicide is undoubtedly a *victim* — but this observation is a very stupid ideology when it gives no information about *what* he is a victim of. In any case, it is not “social conditions” that guide the suicide's hand: for even with the greatest wretchedness and misery imaginable, what matters is the *conclusion* the person affected draws from it. And it requires a fairly crazy logical consistency in order to proceed from whatever starting point and arrive at the result that one no longer belongs in this world. After all, the suicide is not merely executing on himself the feeble judgment that life is not *worth it* anymore, since being dead surely ought to be a lot less worth it. With radical narrow-mindedness, the suicide candidate measures his life against a most personal idea of certain conditions, only under which his life would be *worth* living at all. Whatever reason he may cite for his death sentence — from the failed exam, the darling who ran off, the wayward children, career-related failure or the fear of being busted for crooked dealings in business or marriage, to the impending or actual end of his accustomed way of life, or a general lament about the unkindness of the world — it becomes a reason for ending his own life only by his taking it as an *argument against himself*: as evidence of the inadequacy of his own person in the face of a standard of *fitness* he wants to submit to completely. So it is not simply his own circumstances or the will of other people that have made his life a failure: the suicide candidate *deems* his most personal *moral life agenda*, in which *he alone wants to be pleasing to himself*, to be a failure and unworkable from now on — but without in the slightest losing faith in the criteria for the character mask that he solely wants to accept himself as, and even live as. It is thus an idealism — taken seriously without compromise and without the usual qualifications of fitness for bourgeois life — of a *perfect moral character*, an idealism whose crazy demands the candidate sees only one chance of standing up to; namely, by freely *sacrificing* himself to this idealism: *this is the only way he likes to be pleasing to himself*. This logically consistent moral stance is easily the equal in brutality to the National Socialist program of “euthanasia” in the interests of preserving the racial purity of the national character; turned against himself, the suicide's logically consistent cruelty serves as his last and utmost means for proving the validity of his *ideal* of successful self-assertion against its practical refutation in his own person, and thus for saving the madness itself, in which he has placed his entire *honor*.

Bourgeois individuals from all classes and social strata, political or ideological “camps,” “unemancipated” nuclear families or “progressive” shared households — all are equally capable of such logical consistency in submitting to their self-fabricated character program. For the basis and content of the plan to remove oneself from the world is the *general moral idealism* of class society. And the fact that everyone subscribes to this idealism in his own special way, which he is God only knows how proud of — and which he above all has no problem regarding as a very superior *criticism* of the prevailing “lack of principles” and “double moral standards” — is the best guarantee that everyone, proudly believing he is taking quite a unique journey through life, can also work toward the not-at-all unique logical conclusion of murderous self-criticism, which is included in *all* moral idealism, but also follows *only* from moral idealism.

### 12.2. Ridiculous respect for “voluntary death”

Of all the moralistic follies of the bourgeois individual, none is made so much fuss about as planned, attempted, and completed suicide. In theory, suicidal thoughts are familiar to everyone, because everyone, in the course of his life, is

occasionally *ashamed* in the face of the maxims of character-laden self-stylizing — and shame is simply *the* “argument” for suicide. So the “normal” person, who is “normal” in that he deals pragmatically with his self-incriminations, *admires* the practitioner of a destroyed sense of honor for a firmness of principle that he declares unsuitable for himself, but not without a somewhat guilty conscience. Even when a brilliant deed of this kind is denied recognition — on grounds that it was “unnecessary” a) for someone with an otherwise steady personality, b) for such a relatively trivial reason, c) at the present time, etc. — even then, the proof offered by the suicide of how much his absolute “self-respect” is worth to him still makes quite an impression. Surviving friends and relatives, and whoever else wants to consider himself affected, are moronic enough to compare their own strength of character with that of the one who departed in such an evidentiary manner, and to wonder whether they perhaps *failed to do justice* to the depth and fineness of his character and to the subtle moral demands on the world that it entailed, and what they might have “done wrong.” In their efforts to regularly work their way forward to contempt for the “victim” by discoursing about his entirely individual unfitness for life, in order to obtain a good conscience on this point — “He just wouldn’t *let* anyone *help* him!” — in these efforts, they pay their last respects to his crazy materialism.

This ridiculous respect is, of course, the fitting basis for the bourgeois public responding to reports of dramatic suicides with a pleasurable shudder, and liking to be culturally entertained by the lie that such a “voluntary death” really gives the audience rather a lot to “think about.” The sympathetic observer feels very close to the “question of the meaning of life” — and quite rightly, since someone has just paid his last tribute to this idiocy; only this is not at all what a morally indoctrinated intellect sees in the suicide’s “sacrifice.” Philosophers and clergymen, both pros and amateurs in fact, have not the slightest difficulty sponging ideologically off every act of bourgeois madness, so also and all the more off suicide, by blowing it up into an unsuccessful or — more rarely — even successful object lesson on the “existential emergency,” thus turning the ultimate gloominess of bourgeois self-assertion by self-destruction into an opportunity for enjoying their boring “ultimate questions.” And while the Christian churches condemn suicide because they see in it, of all things, an extreme lack of moral willingness to bear life patiently, and, in the name of their pious servitude to God, interpret self-destruction as a last radical rearing up of materialism and man’s hubristic lack of restraint; on the other side, the critical leftist takes the liberty — not only since “Mother Krause’s Journey to Happiness”<sup>26</sup> — of discovering in all bourgeois crap, so also in young proletarian or other “fringe-group” suicide, a misguided, but “basically” revolutionary protest against the callousness of capitalism.

### 12.3. Calculation in suicide: The idealism of spitefulness

The fact that the bereaved family and friends of a suicide have pangs of conscience about his act of desperation is no secret, least of all to a suicide candidate. And so the multitude of “suicide” attempts arranged so as to be discovered in time, and the practice of farewell letters, are not the only evidence of the sort of *calculation* that a bourgeois individual performs even when he is despairing of his moral life program. With his narrow-minded radicalness, the suicide candidate finally and incontrovertibly puts himself and his ideal of life in the right, in this way having the last word against all who failed to give him sufficient recognition, or at least reproach themselves for that afterwards. And so his deed is not only a final reckoning with himself, but at the same time a last offensive in the fight for the *recognition* of his own special character, namely, for a final, no longer refutable compensation for missed recognition, an offensive that has freed itself from any hope of a real advantage, that simply aims to recoup itself from the envisaged horror of others, and is thus hard to beat for *petty spitefulness*. With the final ratification of the idealism that the suicide candidate has subjected his existence to, the purpose of this idealism — to be *the* means and the embodiment of a will to *defensive* self-assertion against everything and everyone — this purpose also comes into force in a final way in all its wretchedness and shabbiness.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, Phil Jutze’s 1929 film depicting the horrors of poverty ending with suicide — with a plug for Communism!