

Ute Bublitz (1998)

Beyond Philosophy

Reconciliation and Rejection
Three Essays on Aristotle and Hegel

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Preface

This book is about philosophy, without, however, being a philosophy book. I did not even wish to continue the line of traditional philosophy. Indeed, I am convinced that it is impossible for anyone to do so today.

The meaning of philosophy is deeply linked to reconciliation. And reconciliation to the world as it is today is no longer possible. Living unreconciled opens the way for rejection. Yet, rejection can never carry out what it implicitly requests: a thorough transformation of life. Without the element of the general, rejection is doomed to certain failure. Only philosophy has been able to develop that generality. On the other hand, mere philosophical knowledge of how to grasp the whole, dies the moment it is faced with a world to which reconciliation is impossible. Today, then, we can neither reject the way we live, nor reconcile ourselves to it. In this book, I confront the two so that they mutually illuminate each other with the hope that, in their combined light we can see our path into the future. ...

Introduction

...

Nature engenders nature, and nature only, in its reproduction and in its life. The rose brings forth more roses, never anything ‘unnatural’ or ‘unrose-like’. The human being creates humanity, but with this difference: what is human can at the same time be either ‘*human*’ or ‘*inhuman*’. The results of human action range from creations which fill our hearts and souls with lasting strength and delight, to crimes whose shame no atonement can wipe off the face of the earth.

The human being — and only the human being — can create something inhuman. Thus, insofar as the inhuman deed has been done by a human being, it is a *human* deed, an *inhuman human* deed. ‘An inhuman human action’ or ‘an inhuman human life’, may sound illogical, but these utterances describe a certain reality with perfect accuracy. If we want to call their meaning ‘contradictory’, then this contradiction expresses the truth of a contradictory reality, a contradictory life. And it is because they convey a truth of life, that we are compelled to look at them, even if logic can’t cope with them. Let us attempt to disentangle their complex underlying content.

1. By expressing what seems to be a contradiction, such utterances also make the uncontradictory statement that we simply possess two different kinds of knowledge.
2. One of these two kinds of knowledge is a presupposed, shared knowledge of what ‘the human being’ might mean, or what it is for a human being to be. This might be called ‘human essence’ or ‘essential humanity’.
3. The other kind of knowledge that the contradiction contains, arises from an experience in real life which is opposed to, or contradicts, that essence.

4. Those contradictory statements tell us that a judgement has been reached, a sentence passed. This judgement is the result of a comparison between the two kinds of knowledge. A given, concrete reality of our experience has been compared with our invisible knowledge of the essence of the human being. In this case, reality has been found guilty.
5. 'An inhuman human deed' also states something more. It is the *essence* that has to be the measure against which reality must be matched, and not the other way round. The phrase says that a certain reality we know does not live up to the essence which we know. For, if the essence is contradicted in reality, does not contain what we know from experience, then we say that the experience is deficient, not the essence. Essence is stronger than reality.
6. Such judgements imply that the essence and the reality of life *ought* to coincide; that there should be no such divergence between the essence of something as we know it and the reality that we find in the circumstances of its life; that there should be no abyss between the *essence* of humanity, residing in the spiritual realm, and its *reality* down here on earth, as lived by you and me. Without the implication of this *ought*, such judgements would not only be meaningless, they could not even be made at all.

No other being can contradict its own essence in its active life, neither in general, nor even in a single action. The reason why this possibility is given to humanity lies precisely in its essence. The human being is free. In contrast to the seed, there is absolutely nothing that the human being can do which is *only* a response to a natural urge. Nothing about the human being can be only natural. Every single act carries the ingredient of the will, which is free. The will is not a corset, to be taken off, letting nature hang loose.

Nor can we quickly slip it on again, so as to impose a deliberately civilised form upon our behaviour. However, the free will even eludes this picture, for the decision whether or not to wear that civilising garment, would itself be an act of free will. Whatever the human being does, it does as a conscious being. And the human being is a conscious being, precisely because it is endowed with a free will. The will, freedom, belong to our essence. And we can't rid ourselves of our essence — we can only contradict it. But even by contradicting it, we still realise our essence. We are able to think and act in a way that does not accord with our essential nature. That is how we can create a contradictory reality.

This freedom means that our lives are not just given to us, but that we *create* them. Every action is part of the continuous process of *self-formation* of the individual, taking place within the larger frame of the self-formation of society and human history. That is, no action is preformed, as it is in unconscious nature. A human action is freedom, through and through; it can only be carried out wilfully. It might, therefore — and only therefore — be called a *creation*. This holds true also for the most brutal atrocities. Indeed, *only because* it holds true, are they *crimes*.

We talk about 'the human being' out of habit rather than as a result of good reasoning. The problem is that with our general manner of thinking, we are quick to individualise such a conception, and then to understand by the expression 'human being', particular, separately existing individuals. But this will never allow us to grasp the meaning of freedom, the real essence of 'the human being'. For the individual never lives detached from others. This is true, even in an artificial and accidental state like the one in which Robinson Crusoe found himself. The only survivor of a shipwreck, he still remains a child of his times,

carrying them within him, as it were; he only acts according to the thinking, morals and values of his times, as he had learnt them back home.

Whatever an individual human being is or does, it can only be or do because humanity *in general* has acquired those powers and those possibilities. The freedom and the will we talked about just now are themselves acquisitions of the history of humanity. They belong to the species as well as to the individual, to humankind as well as to each single human being. In fact, they only belong to the individual *because* they belong to the species. And they only belong to the species, because it is possible for them to belong to any particular individual. From our earliest days, whatever people might think, when we learn about a 'thing', this is never just a relation between us and that 'thing'. It is only given to us through the meaning that it possesses in the world in which we grow up. Thinking in terms of individualism has itself been historically produced.

The individual exists only as a social being; what the individual does, is only the shared deed of the community. Consider a conversation. One partner exposes part of her so-called inner world to the so-called outer one. Being confronted with this proposed meaning, the other lets it enter and pass through his own inner being, where it calls forth a response from the experience and memory which belongs to him. This response lays bare another side of the content, adds to it and refines its contours. The now-transformed meaning is returned to the person it issued from in the first place, who receives her own as somebody else's, whether in the form of look, gesture, action or word. In this spiralling process, each depends on the view thus offered about themselves and the world, through the mirror of the other. And as

well as being a conversation, this is the formation of meaning. It is a common, or shared work on their relation to each other, and through that, to the world and to themselves.

This is the process in which all feeling and thought is shaped. Only through such a *shared* process are perception and comprehension of the content, of the world and of oneself, confirmed and established. This formation includes, presupposes and rests on the community, the giving and taking between people living together. It had been presupposed by the one who began the conversation, who assumed and needed the response. We can only understand ourselves and the world in which we live, as they are seen in the mirror of the other's face, heard in the voice of the other person's soul, and recognised in the other's action. There is no beginning and no end to this process, and there is nothing in us which we can say was only our own. A conscious, free, wilful being can exist only as an individual being, which is *at the same time* entirely social.

Language is a vital component of this freedom. Freedom permeates it, is intrinsic to it; and language permeates and is intrinsic to freedom. Humanity has created language as part of its own self-making. In the form of spontaneity, freedom is present even within every single utterance. Without it, language cannot function. And freedom, as that process of self-making through reflection in the other person, would never be possible without language.

Such self-formation is also the process by which we bring our human essence into our own biological nature and the whole of nature external to us. Language and music, for instance, are only possible because their practice has gradually shaped the organs for

their execution and perception. As natural, yet conscious, free and wilful beings, our nature loses much of its deterministic side, and, instead, turns into a 'human nature'. The freedom that humanity enjoys means that, instead of being entirely shaped by nature, we shape it, and thereby *ourselves*. Human nature is nature freed. Our history is the history of humanising nature. We can only make ourselves by humanising nature. And this bringing together of freedom and nature through human creativity gives birth to beauty and joy, engenders what is humanly true and good.

The world given to us, the one into which we are born, has been made by all the people who preceded us. It is their legacy to us. It confronts us from the outside, like the meaning that somebody puts forward to us in a conversation. Although it has been set in front of us, without our having directly contributed to it, this is where freedom begins. Freedom can't be given to us from the outside. Freedom is in the way we deal with what is given to us. For it all depends on how we, as free and conscious beings, respond to what has been said, how we live in the world which is around us and given to us, how we transform it, put ourselves into it. It is neither interesting nor challenging to talk about how 'nature' restricts the freedom of the human being. It is far more important to observe how, in society, freedom is transformed into necessity and necessity into freedom. This should be our only concern. The freedom our predecessors enjoyed in making their own lives, has become a necessity for us. It has formed what is now given to us. This given necessity is the condition of our freedom. And we, in turn, bring our freedom to bear, in the way we now deal with that 'necessity'.

It is perhaps only in relation to a work of art that a creation from the past is not, and can never be, a necessity for us. Every re-

encounter with a work of art makes us re-live its creation, makes us encounter the freedom of humanity in it. Art might therefore seem to be the fulfilment of human self-formation. However, what is meant by a 'work of art' remains to be seen.

But turn your head away from the realm of pure, clean thinking, and face reality! What a dirty mess have we made of it! We are always lying to each other and to ourselves. If somebody questions our lies, we take out a whip and flog them into accepting what we know is wrong. Our need to maintain the constant process of shaping our consciousness and knowledge about ourselves and the world, through and with others in free exchange, is humiliated, perverted. We look into a cracked mirror and see a cracked image. Society in general, this world of our creation, which should be the human world and our self-created home, turns out to be not too different for us from what the natural world is for animals: a power that determines them through and through, that does not leave any room for freedom, will and creativity. We might therefore call society our 'second nature' and it has been so called.

To have a 'second nature' is against our essence. It hinders and destroys our flourishing at every turn. For example, on the most banal, outward level, our first nature might have determined that the natural death of a certain person was to occur at the age of 83. 'Second nature', though, might bring about this event a great deal faster, in early childhood maybe, on account of a famine, caused by a sudden rise in the price for the local staple food, in turn determined by the world market. As simple and straightforward as that: no money, no life. Such a drastic result of the well-known 'vagaries of the market', what they call 'the economic climate', is one of the very few features of our second nature that might stir our conscience because we feel that there is something wrong.

Such examples are always valuable to visualise the absolute and remorseless power of second nature. However, the great danger of such pictures is that they make second nature appear as something that can be more or less easily rectified. With a bit of development and aid, with a more 'equitable' taxation or with an increase in productivity, such hardship can be made a thing of the past. But second nature is much bigger than this example suggests. It is deeply rooted in all our thinking and acting. It is even part of that thinking which endeavours to ameliorate some of the unfortunate effects of second nature itself. It determines our ordinary daily lives. We are so proud of our talent for stringent logical thinking, but its rules, which cannot grasp contradiction, are part of that second nature too. Second nature distorts the freedom of our essence by forcing it into sterile categories, and squeezing it into ready-made, fixed definitions. These ensure that the necessity of the past is continued in a necessity of the present, so that we can't bring our essence or freedom to bear on the given. Instead of creating our own lives, we are ruled by abstractions. Instead of giving to others what they need, we seek to satisfy our self-interest. Instead of friendship there is war. We all create this system out of our own free will, and it turns out to govern us from the outside, as an order against us, to which we have to submit, and to which we give our lives.

The contradiction, whose intricate content we have investigated above, is now all-encompassing. An 'inhuman human deed' is a judgement about only one event singled out from the rest. But now we know that whatever we do, we do as participants in our common and continuous shaping of our world. The whole of our life is a contradictory process. Freedom, essential humanity, our very selves, with all our powers and capacities, create the opposite:

un-freedom, inhumanity, a world which constantly tramples underfoot our dignity, crushing our capacity for true community and beauty. The general *reality* in which we all live, which we perceive and experience, and the continuance of which we assure by our own actions, contradicts the *essence* of the human being.

If we live in a reality which is not worthy of our essence, if our lived reality determines each of us from the outside, incarcerates us, we cannot say that we are free, leading a free conscious life. But that does not imply that reality is as it ought to be, or that it is the only one possible. It means that the human essence has no possibility of pouring itself into an adequate living shape, which would openly display this essence for everybody to see and enjoy. Freedom is an intrinsic part of the essence of the human being. But the life that we live, reality, is ruled by un-freedom. Our way of life is contradictory because it denies our essence and affirms what stands in its way. Our essence, which is free, is contradicted in un-free reality, the creation of which is *our* doing. *We* are, potentially, or according to our essence, free; but we use this potentiality blindly. Our use of it is a mis-use, ab-use.

Contradiction demands resolution. Its two sides indicate two directions in which this might occur. We might assert our essence and deny our ordinary ways; or we could confirm the given reality and deny our true essence. The first is what this book discusses as *rejection*. It is a moment when the confidence in our essence gathers enough strength to burst into the open, in spite of the power of the given, which is inimical to it. The other response to our contradiction is *reconciliation*. This gives in to the overweening weight of what is, which claims not just to be, but to be rule and necessity.

Rejection and reconciliation are not two proposals to solve a given problem, the problem of our contradictory life. For neither of them is fully self-conscious, neither fully realises where it comes from, or why. They ignore the origin in the contradiction of our real life. Thus, neither can know that it is but one side of an opposition. This leaves us, in the void of our everyday lives, confined to the passive state of playing the role imposed by second nature, keeping our essential powers and the longing for a beautiful life hidden away under the required mask. The mask has grown fast to our face, has become our second face, so that we can neither recognise it for what it is, nor peel it off.

However, reconciliation is not only about giving in to self-created emptiness and denial. In the form of art, religion and philosophy, reconciliation has also brought forth the highest achievements in the history of humankind. These three are responses to the contradiction of life within second nature, to a view of the world through the mask of our second face; but they are answers which leave the contradiction unresolved. Nevertheless, the greatness of their creations is that they give the feeling of fullness, overcoming the grey of the everyday. By making sense of life without touching any of those of its features which deny our essence, art, religion and philosophy reconcile us to it. On the other hand, looked at from a higher standpoint, they give us a glimpse — only a glimpse — of a free humanity, one whose essence is not denied, a humanity which really creates itself.

To reconcile means ‘to restore or bring back to friendship or union’, from the Latin *conciliate*, ‘to call together’. The word is used in nearly all modern translations of the Bible. Its meaning is the same as, or overlaps with, the etymologically beautiful English

word *atonement* (at-one-ness, or atonement), *to atone*, 'to make at one', used in older translations. Signifying the restoration of the community between God and the human being, reconciliation is one of the most important theological terms. A world that has its origin in God, can only be understood through Him. And life only makes sense if people keep to His institutions. But community with the Creator is always threatened with disruption through sinful behaviour. Then, God, in His mercy, may grant reconciliation by taking the people's sin away.

For Hegel, art, religion and philosophy are the three highest forms of consciousness. For, taken in that order, they attain an increasingly better grasp of the truth of what is. The full grasp, he said, is only possible in philosophy, which is therefore also the only form in which reconciliation is fully developed. However, if we look again at art and religion, we find that they also contain an element of rejection. For they only succeed in making sense of the world by moving *away* from it. Religion knows of powers beyond our world, and beyond our grasp; and the creation of art is secluded from the mundane, judging it to be unsuited for freedom. In philosophy, reconciliation overcomes this apparent movement *away* from the world, bending it back right into the heart of the world.

Religion and philosophy stand in a special historical relation to each other; as the one declines, the other rises. The emergence of philosophy in Ancient Greece, for example, occurred when the old Gods retreated. Then, in the Christian era, until a few centuries ago, religion was again the most powerful of ways of holding the West European community together. But with the new light in which the world appeared in modernity, religion was no longer able to do that. Natural science and philosophy put paid to the

supremacy of religion, despite the many attempts to make peace between them. (Modern fanaticism is a different story)

Art gives us the opportunity to look more closely at the intertwining of rejection and reconciliation, and to see how a given surface appearance may be contradicted by the meaning that it contains. This might help us face some questions. If we generally live in a way which denies our essence, how can this essence nonetheless exist in the face of its denial? How can something assert itself, when it is being denied? How can the unworthy life-experience contain its opposite, the notion of a worthy life? How can two opposites be true at the same time?

As an example, I am going to look at the work of the German artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945). In her work, she shows us that the given is not straightforward and that it appears different from what it really is. We might separate three levels of this. First, there is the material she uses: all her two-dimensional work — posters, woodcuts, charcoal drawings — is in black and white. The unartistic world that our eye perceives is ‘black and white’ only metaphorically, but in reality even shadows appear coloured to us. Yet the abounding blackness of her work *adds to the reality* depicted and to its accessibility. It guides the viewer to the meaning of the work, in a way which ‘realistic’ colouring may not be able to do. The black and white of the picture turns into all colours and shades of our individual experience and feeling which the figures evoke. The material blackness of the charcoal turns into vivid colours in your inner eye.

Then, there is another way in which we find the apparent uniformity turn into a manifest richness. Kollwitz is only interested in representing the human figure. But instead of being a

confinement, her work opens the doors to a whole world. In her pictures, nothing can tell us more about the world in which we live and its conditions than the human body. In its shape and posture, and in the face is reflected the history of more than one generation.

This leads over to the main, and third, respect in which Kollwitz shows that the 'given' is at the same time not simply to be taken as given. This is her theme of suffering, despair, the downtrodden. In her pictures, you can see that the forms and lines of a face are moulded by a suffering that has steadily and relentlessly accompanied the person all their life. You may see the eye fixed on something distant, outside the frame of the picture, while the head, the body, the muscles, contain the memory of all that passed. They show in flesh and blood that the past is present, and that some radical change is needed if the suffering of the past is to be overcome. But through this, much more than any picture of a sunny spring-day and awakening buds, the work confers timeless strength, courage, power and hope, a breath that will outlast any hardship. The portrayed wretchedness of the people is turned into the knowledge of the value and dignity of humanity. And thus the picture contains the demand of the people that the lived reality should be other than it is. The suffering contains a judgement: what is should not be.

In the course of this book, we shall come to see that the contradiction between the true human essence and the reality in which we live is most difficult to grasp. However, this contradiction is not a matter for specialised thinkers to discover and spell out to us. On the contrary, the highest forms of thinking that humankind has developed, are also the most sophisticated way of covering and hiding the real problem. This is quite a feat. For the problem, the contradiction, exists for everyone. In the form of

suffering, it is directly present in everybody's life. The suffering we have in mind here is a form of our essential contradiction. As such, it is characterised by those six points that we have disentangled above; and as such, it demands a resolution. Suffering in itself proves three things: the human essence, its denial in our reality, and the demand that this contradiction should not be. And this 'should' of suffering expresses something more: against all appearance, and against any experience to the contrary, the essence is stronger than reality.

This kind of contradiction totally differs from opposites like 'day and night', 'land and sea', 'female and male'. These are part of nature, just like the fact that the human being has got two legs rather than three or five. According to our use of the word, such pairs can never be called 'contradictions' at all, and it would be silly to worry about them. It is impossible for nature itself to know about any 'should' or 'good' and 'bad'. Nature cannot deny or oppose itself. Those pairs are features of nature which don't contain the indication that they should not be. They can't change in the sense of working towards the realisation of their freedom. What concerns us is a human-made contradiction, one which carries a demand, and points in the direction of its own overcoming.

When we say that something 'should not be', we deal with two kinds of knowledge. The knowledge about the given situation is gained in the light of a world that is not the one in which we live. The whole point of the meaning of 'should' is the difference between two worlds, that of our experience, and that of our innermost conviction. The 'should not' is more than a mere mechanical or formal negation. It is not at all empty. But so far, its fullness and concreteness are shown only through the form of

denial. The denial shows the strength of the essence which no inhumanity can eliminate. And, ready to answer any particular given form of inhumanity, the denial shows the richness of essence. But some, always in a hurry, always fearing to miss the train, rush forward crying: “ Tell us, then, what your ‘essence’ really is! Tell us what the world *should be* like! Tell us what your promised land is like or else we won't move!” Those have already lost. They are deceived by the given world and its presumption of the material fact, against which denial must be the beginning of a freedom that can be lived and the life of which is beauty.

What is, may not be seen. Appearance, and its close relative, self-interest, get in the way. The gloss of the surface blinds us. The contradiction is part of the world we inhabit. And yet, how this contradiction is going to appear in our heads is neither obvious nor given. For example, it was inevitable that the Kaiser himself, quite in accordance with his stance in society, would disapprove of Kollwitz’ work. Quoting Roman wisdom, the monarch pronounced that ‘art should elevate and instruct ... it should not make the misery that exists appear even more miserable than it is’. His idea about the ‘should’, is rather different from ours.

In her work, Kollwitz consciously expresses that opposition between our essence and its denial in the reality of life. We might get hold of some of her intentions by contemplating the pictures, by letting them make an impression on us. But does that bring any nearer that other world that they indicate? on the contrary, the better the work of art, the more effectively it upholds reconciliation and actually confirms that given world against which it perhaps intends to speak. Art soothes us rather than spurring us to change the world into a better place. By helping to

keep us going, reconciling our ordinary consciousness to our daily round, it merely adorns the bare walls of our invisible prison.

Philosophy considers itself the highest form of thinking. This position is confirmed if we look at the relation between philosophy and its offspring, the sciences. (For the English-speaking reader, it is important to note that 'science' here is used to include all branches of systematic knowledge, not just natural science.) Philosophy is one and only *one*; it is one subject, one tradition, but with many different interpretations. The sciences are *many*. Each of them has its own neatly restricted circle of objects, those things it investigates. Each of the sciences takes its objects as given, and does not have to worry about where they come from. And each takes for granted its own way of thinking about these objects, and dealing with them. Because a science never gets beyond its own restricted circle, the fact that it shares everything that makes it a science with all the other sciences, is hidden from it. Each science must have the 'knowledge' of what an 'object' is, how to get hold of one, and how to look at it so that a science can be built up on it. The forms of knowledge used are taken for granted: 'theories', 'abstractions', 'generalisations', 'definitions', 'models', 'concepts', as well as 'judgement' and 'syllogism'. That is, each of the sciences takes for granted the foundations and determinations of thinking in general, and that implies the way of life which is bound up with that thinking.

From this derives one of philosophy's proper tasks. It accepts the sciences in general; but it is itself not simply another science. It doesn't just repeat what the others are doing on yet another object. Philosophy's task here is to try and spell out what the sciences assume: the constitution of a scientific object and the way in which thinking thinks about it. When we talk about 'Philosophy', we are

at the same time saying something about what it means to be a science. It is in this sense that we shall use 'philosophy' and 'science' interchangeably.

The task of philosophy or science is simply to investigate the given, to show what *is*. Their endeavour aims at knowledge of how that given is constituted or made up. Necessity is the core notion of scientific thinking. And this in two respects. On the one hand, the principles *of the world* given to us, or whatever particular clipping of it one may have chosen, are considered necessary; on the other hand, whatever we *know scientifically*, we know because we can show that it necessarily derives from something else. This necessity is always twofold: real and logical, simultaneously in the head and outside it. Neither science nor philosophy can work without that notion of necessity — whatever their subject-matter might be. What if the given were an insane monstrosity, destroying soul and spirit, and killing the possibility of a human future in front of our own eyes? Still, science would show its necessity, that what is, has to be. From our point of view, the problem with this necessity is that it is a useless notion when it comes to grasping the essential contradiction of an 'inhuman human life'.

Yet, it might still appear to some that scientific thinking is very well-suited to grasping the two kinds of knowledge that we have been talking about in relation to that contradiction. For, are philosophy and science not about the relation between two worlds, the world of the here and now, of contingent appearance, and of the principles and laws behind that appearance? Yes, but this must be differentiated from our two kinds of knowledge. For science, the principles and laws are always present within the world of appearance. There is no essential contradiction between the two worlds, between appearance, and the metaphysical world of the

laws giving appearance its soul or notion. This is how it is and has to be, says science. The core notion of scientific thinking necessity has its place precisely between the two worlds. It shows us which bits of the world of appearance are necessary by deriving them from something behind or beyond the perceptible. To say that there should be no such split between the two worlds would be utter nonsense in science. However, the essential contradiction that interests us, between a human world and its denial in our inhuman human world, is something that should not be, that ought to be overcome.

The notion — the nature of things as uncovered by science shows us the general content of reality, by grasping what is necessary within appearance. In our way of life, we cannot know this unaided by science. It renders to us the necessary inner being of a thing that we might find in our world. When uncertainty, narrowness, worry and delusion of prosaic consciousness have been removed, the notion is a clear eye, looking at blind reality, revealing its generality. Through this generality, it provides ordinary life with knowledge about itself. However, it is as if, by looking at a bright picture of our home, we had sought to cure the disease in it, which casts its shadow on everything we do.

The knowledge of scientific necessity is the most developed answer we may get to the question of why we have to live the way we do. But whereas the question seems to indicate an opening up of possibilities, the answer, being provided by science, only binds us back more firmly to the starting-point, our given reality. The reduction of our world to unshakeable logical principles is good for demonstrating that, in principle, we have to live the way we do, but no good for comprehending that this way buries our humanity.

Thus, science and philosophy cannot but be reconciliatory. What is more, as the specialised skills of thinking in general, they might have given us the idea that all thinking has to reconcile us to what is going on anyway. Hegel, however, is the only philosopher who has explicitly made reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) the heart of his thinking.

To recognise reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to delight in the present — this reasonable insight is the *reconciliation* with actuality which philosophy grants to those who have received the inner demand *to comprehend*, and as well as to preserve their subjective freedom in what is substantial, to stand with their subjective freedom not in what is particular and contingent, but in what is in and for itself.

[\(PhR, p xxviii\)](#)

Let us make a beginning in understanding the quotation. In German, just as in English, *cross*, in its worldly sense, means adversity or affliction in general, or a burden or cause of suffering, as in ‘*bear one’s cross*’ (Chambers English Dictionary). If we look at our present life, it might appear to us as such a cross. However, if we look at it with the eyes of *philosophy*, we learn ‘*to comprehend*’. With philosophy we learn to keep the other world in view, we learn what is to be disregarded, the ‘particular’ and ‘contingent’, and what is to be held fast, the notion, or ‘what is in and for itself’. This will also teach us to be free, even though we have to participate in our given everyday world. For, our participation is now one that comprehends. And we are no longer led astray by appearance. Thus, philosophy shows us how to see something else in that cross. Thinking pierces through that appearance and discovers necessity. This, according to Hegel, will offer an almost mystical experience of the ‘rose’, of joy instead of suffering.

The picture obviously refers to Christ, through whose suffering and death on the *cross*, God offered the world the opportunity to be *reconciled* to him. To understand this reconciliation by the cross, means to be comforted in this world, for it is now seen to lie in God's hands. However, rather than relying on religious feeling, Hegel's reconciliation is built on *logical* stringency. This means that the other world is not God, but the world of reason, to be comprehended by reason. Our world is not governed by God, but by reason, or by necessity. In Hegel's reconciliation, reason is reconciling itself to itself. And it happens when we recognise that the two sides which appear to be opposites, the world and our grasp of it, are actually one. When we know that the concept that we have of the world is truly the concept *of the world*, then we see that the concept is 'in the world, is the world itself, that the world *lives* it. Only conceit could make us believe that we could influence the reason of the world with our futile ideas. Philosophy is the way to break through the appearance of the world to its innermost concept, so that we may make the concept of the world our own. The world's reason is then the same as the reason that we have in our head. Then, while being only with ourselves in thinking, we are also, in thinking, united with the whole world. We are free, because as single subjects we 'stand in', are part of, 'what is substantial'.

This is the meaning of *speculation* for Hegel. It is a mostly tacit assumption of science in general that the notions it gains through its work, catch reality as it is. But only speculative philosophy is able to spell out how this occurs and how it is possible for it to occur. If what we have in our heads is the essence of things, then that means that that essence and our thought are *the same*. Now, if they are the same, we can look at it the other way round as well:

whatever we know about the principles of our thinking, that is about logic, must also be part of the essence of things. If this were not the case, our thinking, according to the laws of thinking, would distort the essence of the things that we would like to get hold of through thinking. There is only one reason, or spirit. Reason is the same, whether as residing in the outside world, as yet undiscovered by us, or as residing in our heads, where it is the essence of 'things' in their discovered form.

If reason is undivided, it is this unity that must be disclosed in all the different realms of the world. We then have to see whatever there is in the world as a particular form of one principle, reason, Aristotle's *nous*, or Hegel's Spirit. This is what Hegel expressed in his famous double equation, occurring two pages before the quotation that we just cited:

What is reasonable is actual; and what is actual is reasonable.

(PhR, p xxvii)

To be 'reasonable' means to be of reason, to have the property of *reason*. To be 'actual' means to be part of the general make-up of the world, to be the opposite of a contingency. What is actual has the laws of reason *acting* within it. Actuality carries out the purpose of reason, which is *active*. The principle of reconciliation states that, whatever the subject-matter, we can only think on the assumption that both the reasonable and the actual are *the same*. What governs our reality *must be* reasonable, *must have* the character of reason.

Aristotle is the other great speculative thinker in the history of philosophy, in fact the first. Together with Plato, he is the founder of Western philosophy as a science. One of the broadest minds ever, he delved into every realm and is the founder of many a

branch of modern science. But among his greatest achievement was the Logic, which occurs in history for the first time in his work. And for the next two millennia, thinking could not take a step beyond the foundations he had laid. Logic is the coming into light of the movement of thinking itself. Thinking which always seems to be immersed in something, occupied with a certain content, here looks at itself, free from any admixture from outside itself. With the principle of speculative thinking, that the reason in things is the same as the reason in our heads, this logic, being about thinking, spells out the deepest knowledge we may gain about anything that is. From the point of view of later centuries, Aristotle's shortcoming was that he did not make explicit the system that his work implies. This is what Hegel accomplished. And thus we have the history of philosophy embraced by the two great systematic minds and speculative thinkers, Aristotle at its inception, Hegel at its close.

These, then, are the two ways to respond to the general contradiction of our given way of life: reconciliation and rejection. They are directly opposed to each other. One says about the dark shadow of life that , '*it ought not to be*', the other that '*it has to be*'. The 'ought-not' contains the human-made irreconcilable contradiction between essence and reality that we keep on reproducing with our given way of life. Rejection can only occur by expressing its judgement with full conviction. But, although it might — just for a moment — smash up those laws of reason, that actuality, it has so far been unable to rise to the level of real knowledge and to effect a real change. Reconciliation, on the other hand, makes it its main task to express its wisdom in the form of generality, to reveal necessity which holds for everything and everybody. It is convinced that the generality and reason that

philosophy reveals are the real powers governing our world. In order to grasp this, we are required to look behind appearance and discover its imperceptible principles. Then we gain the higher knowledge that what is, 'has to be'. We can see 'the rose in the cross of the present', but the inhumanity of the world still stands.

Philosophy doesn't invent anything, but spells out a necessity *that is already there*. We *live*, create and recreate this necessity, but ordinary consciousness can't *see* it. Showing reality what binds it together, philosophy reveals this necessity, but only as something which cannot be otherwise. Philosophy's form of reconciliation, therefore, rests on a lower form: the common resignation to the everyday treadmill. Both ordinary ignorance and specialised thinking take their relation to each other as a natural given. You need a reflecting device, because you can't see yourself directly. Thus, according to philosophy, it is in the nature of things that society needs philosophy to tell it about itself. In one respect philosophy is absolutely right: everyday consciousness does not really know anything. It doesn't get very far past the immediate impression and, therefore, dwells in the realm of mere opinion. It doesn't know what it is that it abhors, it has no means to spell out its generality. Of necessity, it has to leave, ticking away like clockwork, what is hated and suffered.

But not always. From within this state of our lost dignity, opposition gathers itself, and from time to time breaks out of the ordinary, that which confines our freedom and hides our essence. We are led to *reject* it, to relate in a new way to the world, whose destiny, for a moment, we try to take into our own hands. The judgement, an 'inhuman human world', or the opposition between a reality that fails our essence and the essence imprisoned by that reality, bears fruit. All of a sudden, the blindness of our essence is

healed. Freedom, all at once, sees its prison, its 'second nature', and rejects it. The new relation to the world comprises three new recognitions: what the world is, who I am, what I can do. There is no science, no canon of thinking, which can think this rejection.

We all carry the essence in us, as a seed carries the plant it will become. But in this desert where we live, which has dried out our souls, freedom will never flourish. It lies there, waiting, like a dry seed. Occasionally, however, heavy rainfall transforms the seemingly barren land into the most exuberant oasis. The desert becomes lush green and soothes the eye. The seeds were there all the time, but only after the rain does their potential become real. They sprout and display their being, which had been until then hidden in the grain.

In its own kind of abstraction, art can, at best, only express the opposition between an essence that ought to be and a reality that denies it. For philosophy, this contradiction is unthinkable, is contrary to its very meaning. But, in everybody's life, from time to time, that contradiction and the demand to overcome it have to make their way into deed. Certain circumstances awaken the potential of our essence to grow, to display its content, to become real and resolve the opposition to the world by *changing* it.

Reconciliation, whether in the form of ordinary consciousness, or of science and philosophy, is tightly shackled to the given world, so overwhelmingly powerful. The shackle is made of the material of necessity which says 'it has to be'. It effaces the statement and the demand made by suffering. Everyday consciousness has to leave it at that pale assertion of necessity; for science the necessity of the given is a conclusion, derived logically. Rejection on the other hand is the conclusion *in the deed*

that this state of the world 'should not be'. It casts away the disfiguring shackles.

Reconciliation of ordinary consciousness means submission to the deadening requirements of the everyday given. However, in *one* respect, it is like rejection: neither can grasp its adversary, the given world. Rejection doesn't know what it actually is that is being rejected, and this implies that it doesn't know itself either. The only thing it knows is that no possible constraint can make the given bearable. This lack of knowledge will immediately be brought home to rejection, for it cannot carry out its task. It has no chance against the whole, the general movement, which swallows it up unnoticed. The generality remains undisturbed. But the heroic side of the event of rejection is kept in peoples' memories, kept alive as a germ of hope and a source of strength, passed on in stories, in works of art, in friendship. It is thus endowed by individual people with another kind of reality.

The opposition between reconciliation and rejection is not only to be seen in their result, as if this was a chance product, but it is a consequence of their respective methods and criteria for truth. Since science has to show the necessary constitution of what is, this given is, in a way, the measure which science has to live up to. If, however, the given is being rejected, what could then be the measure or criterion for this break-out? *According to what* has this rejection of the given life and world been made? A rejection is a deliberate way of saying 'no'. So, there must be some yardstick, some ground or criterion according to which the decision to reject has been made. Since it is precisely the given that is being refused, it cannot itself be the reason for its own dismissal. That reason must be something else.

The reason for rejection cannot be anything existing in the same way as the rejected given exists, as if they stood like two neighbouring houses, so that you might just take all your stuff and move from one to the other. This criterion is in a different mode from the given, something that is not *yet*, but is to be, shall be in the future. It is just as in Käthe Kollwitz' art: the given misery and suffering contain their opposite, the firm knowledge of a beautiful life. The mode of being of that opposite is the 'should', while the mode of being of the given is the 'is'.

The time in which we live is marked by the dark shadow of a recent historical event: we live after Auschwitz. (Yes, it still is recent!) It does not cease screaming at us, across the few decades that have elapsed. But who can hear? And what if we heard? Would we know what to do? Not only can we not get out of that shadow, but, what is more, we live in exactly the *same kind of society* which brought forth the slave-work and extermination camps as the outward symptom of its disease. In fact, in the meantime this system has tightened its grip over the globe. The symptoms might change, but the disease has not been cured. We don't know what to do, because we don't know what we are dealing with, what we are living in. One conclusion that definitely has to be drawn from our recent history is that we cannot go on just *living without thinking*. But how to think?

Auschwitz is a deep wound hacked by humanity into its own body. It is the '*reductio ad absurdum*' of our way of life, the 'falsest untruth' possible. For it stands in the furthest opposition possible to the essence of humanity. No philosophical reconciliation can deal with this opposition. Scientific thinking is based on the conviction that the given world to be investigated is *reasonable*, and that its intrinsic reason is brought to light by

scientific endeavour. Auschwitz smashes that relation between thinking and the reality of the world in which we live. Without that relation, philosophy cannot make sense of the world any more. And, therefore, through science or philosophy, we can no longer make sense of our reality.

We have to go beyond science. We have to go beyond philosophy.