

CHAPTER V

THE NEGATION OF THE NEGATION

1. The Marxist Application

There is a more basic consideration of the negation of a negation than the theological one introduced at the end of the last chapter. It has to do with changes in sensible things, and it may well serve to introduce us to the Marxist interpretation of the expression. St. Thomas explains this fundamental meaning of "the negation of a negation" as follows:

" (a) For there are some opposites of which each posits a certain nature, like white and black, and in such opposites the negation of either one is a real negation, that is, the negation of some thing.

And therefore, since affirmation is not negation, because to be white is not the same as not to be black, for these are really different; then the corruption of black, whose term is the non-being of black, and the generation of white, whose term is the being of white, are really different changes, although there be only one movement.

(b) But there are some opposites of which only one is a certain nature, the other being nothing but the removal or negation of the first, as is clearly the case in opposites according to affirmation and negation, or according to privation and possession. And in such things the negation of that opposite which posits some nature is real, because it is the negation of some thing; but the negation of the other opposite is not real. For it is the negation of a negation, the latter

negation being the negation of the other opposite. And therefore, this negation of a negation in no way differs in reality from the positing of the other opposite. So that, in reality, the generation of white is the same thing as the corruption of non-white"(197).

It would be well to keep in mind this unreal character of the negation of a negation in mind when the Marxist application of this type of negation as a dialectical principle.

In his Capital (198), Marx presents the expropriation of the expropriators which sounds the "knell of capitalist private property" as an example of "the negation of the negation:"

"The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production."

This appeal to negation of negation as a principle functioning in nature was taken up by subsequent dialectical materialists, both in justification of its use by Marx, and in an effort to find further applications of it.

The principle itself did not originate with Marx, but was borrowed, as were the other laws of dialectics, from the philosophy of Hegel (199). But, whereas in Hegel "these laws are foisted on nature and history as laws of thought and not deduced from them" (200), the Marxists concern themselves with showing that "the dialectical laws are really laws of development of nature" (201). Marx openly acknowledges his dependence on Hegel and admits that "the mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner"(202). The trouble with the Hegelian dialectic is that "it is standing on its head"(203), and, as a result, the dialectic method in Marx "is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite" (204).

It is quite true that there is a marked difference between Marx and Hegel as to the origin and functioning of the laws of dialectic. This difference, according to Marx, results from the fact that "to Hegel, ... the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought"(205). But the difference

between materialist and idealist dialectic does not detract from their similarity as dialectic, and, consequently, to understand the laws of dialectic, particularly as regards our present concern the law of the negation of the negation, we must go beyond the Marxist application of these laws to their original formulation by Hegel. In treating of this question we shall proceed by considering, first of all, the operation of the law of the negation of the negation in Marxist materialism; secondly, its origin and application in Hegelian Logic; and finally, we shall try to point out the error that underlies both applications of the law and, indeed, the law itself. We shall consider the Marxist application first because the concrete examples which the Marxists present as representative of the functioning of this law, "in nature and in history," are such as to make its materialist application the more easily understandable of the two.

To return to the original quotation from Capital, we see that a first stage of private property, "founded on the labour of the proprietor," gives way, necessarily, to capitalist private property, "which rests on exploitation of the nominally free labour of others"(206). The first stage "brings forth the material agencies for its own dissolution"(207). The first state is negated; it

is "annihilated." But the second stage, capitalist private property, contains likewise within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Like the first it moves inevitably towards its own dissolution. It is pregnant with "irreconcilable contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production"(208). A third stage is inevitable, a stage which results from the annihilation, or negation, of the second. Since the second stage of property was a negation of the first, the third stage, being a negation of the second, is said to be a negation of the negation. This third stage "does not re-establish private property for the producer," and so it is not a simple return to the first, but it is something new, more advanced, which "gives him (the producer) individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e. on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production."

The law of the negation of the negation is a law of progress. The successive transformations, each necessary and each inevitable, lead towards a more and more perfect situation. The economic relationships that determine the social structure are consequent on a specific mode of production, which, in turn, is dependent on the state of technological development. This change in the

material forces of production is uni-directional; and since it and its accompanying economic relationships are the chief determinant of the social order, there can be no question of a regression. Any particular order will be superior to the one that preceded it, and superior precisely because of the magic law of the negation of the negation, a law, which in any particular triad brings about the retention in a higher synthesis of whatever is desirable in the two extremes that are negated.

The way in which Marx proposes the law in this particular context would imply that a stage is reached where all struggle and contradiction is obliterated, relative to which stage the capitalist system is penultimate. While the bourgeoisie "produces its own grave diggers," the proletariat is privileged to enjoy forever the fruits of its conquest. "The other classes perish and disappear in the face of Modern Industry, the proletariat is its special and essential product"(209). The law of the negation of the negation is thus represented here by Marx in its grandest application, inclusive of all human history, past, present and future, and culminating in a synthesis beyond which the law has no further application. But within this all-inclusive triad the law is operative on many other levels, in many spheres other than the

economic. Some of these other applications are developed in succeeding Marxist authors.

Herr Eugen Duehring (210) protested against the use by Marx of the law of the negation of the negation, calling it "a dialectical crutch ... (which) in default of anything better and clearer, has in fact to serve here as the midwife to deliver the future from the womb of the past"(211). To shield Marx from this accusation of "Hegelian word-juggling" Frederick Engels undertook to explain and justify the introduction of this law as being merely the interpretation of an inevitable historical law that is quite independent of our understanding, and that is, furthermore, very obviously operative in any number of fields.

"Marx merely shows from history, and in this passage states in a summarised form, that just as the former petty industry necessarily, through its own development, created the conditions of its annihilation, i.e. of the expropriation of the small proprietors, so now the capitalist mode of production has likewise itself created the material conditions which will annihilate it. The process is an historical one, and if it is at the same time a dialectical process, this is not Marx's fault, however annoying it may be for Herr Duehring"(212).

In other words, Marx does not take a stand "a priori" in favor of the law of the negation of the negation, and then read and interpret history in the light of this dialectical law. He does not "foist" this law on "nature and history."

"In characterising this process as the negation of the negation ... Marx does not dream of attempting to prove by this that the process was historically necessary. On the contrary: after he has proved from history that in fact the process has partially already occurred, and partially must occur in the future, he then also characterises it as a process which develops in accordance with a definite dialectical law. That is all"(213).

Engels interprets the negation of the negation merely as a convenient label which Marx found at hand to characterise a process that presented itself objectively to him. How it is that what "partially must occur in the future" could present itself objectively to a disinterested spectator who had not given himself over with confidence to the operation of the law in question, this Engels declines to explain. Certainly, the confident prediction of future historical events has no justification outside the framework of some more or less infallible law, and Duehring would seem to have had some reason for accusing Marx of using the law of the negation of the negation "as an instrument through which things can be proved" (214). In his anxiety to alienate from Marx all idealist presuppositions Engels goes perhaps too far in diminishing the importance of this dialectical law in the Marxist interpretation of history. However, let us see how Engels attempts to clarify the law by examining its operations in other spheres.

"But what then is this fearful negation of the negation which makes life so bitter for Herr Dushring and fulfills the same role with him of the unpardonable crime as the sin against the Holy Ghost does in Christianity? - A very simple process which is taking place everywhere and every day, which any child can understand, as soon as it is stripped of the veil of mystery in which it was wrapped by the old idealist philosophy and in which it is to the advantage of helpless metaphysicians of Herr Duehring's calibre to keep it enveloped. Let us take a grain of barley. Millions of such grains of barley are milled boiled and brewed and then consumed. But if such a grain of barley meets with conditions which for it are normal, if it falls on suitable soil, then under the influence of heat and moisture a specific change takes place, it germinates; the grain as such ceases to exist, it is negated, and in its place appears the plant which has arisen from it, the negation of the grain. But what is the normal life-process of this plant? It grows, flowers, is fertilized and finally once more produces grains of barley, and as soon as these have ripened the stalk dies, is in its turn negated. As a result of this negation of the negation we have once again the original grain of barley, but not as a single unit, but ten, twenty, or thirty fold. Species of grain change extremely slowly, and so the barley of today is almost the same as it was a century ago"(215).

The grain of barley "is negated" when in dying it gives rise to a new plant. (It is to be noticed that the term "negation" is applied both to the process, that is, the actual change which takes place over a period of time, and also to the plant, the result of this process. The resulting plant is called the negation of the grain.) The plant in turn dies, or is negated, but this

time the result is far more advantageous than in the case of the first negation, at least for one who is interested in an increase of barley. The first negation saw only the disappearance of our one grain of barley, what is supposedly, in this context, a loss. But we must patiently await the second negation, the fruitful one, the negation of the negation, which returns to us the original grain and many more. The productivity of the law is expressed here only in terms of quantity, because "species of grain change extremely slowly." However, lest we be inclined to believe that quantitative change is all we can expect from our double negation, Engels hurries to give us another example of even greater consequence.

"But if we take an artificially cultivated ornamental plant, for example a dahlia or an orchid: if we treat the seed and the plant which grows from it as a gardener does, we get as the result of this negation of the negation not only more seed, but also qualitatively better seeds, which produce more beautiful flowers, and each fresh repetition of this process, each repeated negation of the negation increases this improvement"(216).

The fact that Engels introduces into this example an operation of human art is of little importance, for he could just as easily have bolstered his position by introducing the idea of evolution, or the other dialectical law of the transformation of quantity into quality. The main idea is obvious enough: a negation of the negation

produces always a result which is superior, in quantity and also (in the long run at least) in quality, to the original positive reality or affirmation.

Engels goes on to give an example from the insect world:

"Butterflies, for example, spring from the egg through a negation of the egg ... they pair and are in turn negated, dying as soon as the pairing process is completed and the female has laid its numerous eggs"(217).

What happens to the law when the parents are not negated, do not die, when they produce their offspring does not bother Engels very much:

"We are not concerned at the moment with the fact that with other plants and animals the process does not take such a simple form, that before they die they produce seeds, eggs or offspring not once but many times; our purpose here is only to show that the negation of the negation takes place in reality in both divisions of the organic world."(218)

It would seem reasonable that if one is going to give a great deal of importance to a "law," if one is going to base predictions of future events as well as his own present practical activity on credence in this law, he ought to attempt to examine the extent to which the law is operative, and the reasons why some cases seem to manifest its presence, while other analogous cases seem to be completely independent of it. In fact, the Marxists

seem to take great pains to show the objective character of this law by insisting that it cannot be used to predict things without a concrete study of the facts in question. Merely to show that we can find in nature examples of the functioning of the law of the negation of the negation does not seem to be a very strong verification of it as a law. If Engels were merely trying, as indeed he says, to show that "the negation of the negation takes place in reality," or if he were merely trying to explain what is to be understood by the law, we could hardly demand more than a few examples. But that he really intends a justification and verification of the law is apparent from his conclusion:

"What therefore is the negation of the negation? An extremely general - and for this reason extremely comprehensive and important - law of development of Nature, history and thought" (219).

We are not yet prepared to examine the law itself critically, but even assuming that if operative it could produce the wonderful results the Marxists attribute to it, we would demand a much more rigid verification of it than that which Engels proposes. His cavalier dismissal of the cases in which the law does not seem to apply, or in which a prodigious effort would be required to discern its functioning, could not help but shake our confidence in its "extremely comprehensive" character.

If Engels inquiry is not as intensive in each order as it might be, his coverage is surely extensive. He has examples from geology, where

"... in the course of millions of centuries, ever new strata are formed and in turn are for the most part destroyed, ever anew serving as the material for the formation of new strata"(220).

From mathematics:

"If 'a' is negated we get '-a.' If we negate that negation by multiplying '-a' we get 'a²,' that is, the original positive magnitude but at a higher degree, raised to its second power"(221).

From history:

"All civilised peoples begin with common ownership of the land. With all peoples who have passed a certain primitive stage, in the course of the development of agriculture this common ownership becomes a fetter on production. It is abolished, negated, and after a longer or shorter series of intermediate stages is transformed into private property. But at a higher stage of agricultural development, brought about by private property in land itself, private property in turn becomes a fetter on production as is the case today, both with small and large landownership. The demand that it also should be negated, that it should once again be transformed into common property necessarily arises. But this demand does not mean the restoration of the old original common ownership, but the institution of a far higher and more developed form of possession in common which, far from being a hindrance to production, on the contrary for the first time frees production from all fetters and gives it the possibility of making full use of modern chemical discoveries and mechanical inventions"(222).

One might be inclined to see a divergence in the presentation of the evolution of the mode of property possession in Engels from that described by Marx. For Engels common ownership is negated by the rise of private property, which in turn is negated by a return to a superior form of ownership in common. Marx had spoken of individual private property negated by capitalist private property, which is then negated by a return to individual property. Actually, the original state of ownership in common spoken of by Engels is identical with the state described by Marx in which individual private property is "founded on the labour of the proprietor." And the ownership in common that follows the negation of private property in Engels' interpretation is nothing but what Marx refers to as "individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era," a type of ownership which Marx explicitly refers to as based "on co-operation and the possession in common of the means of production" (223).

It is quite possible, however, that Engels' broad application of the principle of "the negation of the negation" goes far beyond the intention of Marx. Marx's dialectic may have been intended to be restricted to history, or to causes and effects in human activity, and

some might say that there is no need to show that there are sudden leaps and jumps in nature to justify revolution in society. Nevertheless, in the framework of the materialist concept of man, and the deterministic approach to this human activity, Engels may be forgiven for his anxiety to extend the law to the whole universe of human experience.

Consider further his examples:

From philosophy:

"The philosophy of antiquity was primitive, natural materialism. As such, it was incapable of clearing up the relation between thought and matter ... The old materialism was therefore negated by idealism. But in the course of the further development of philosophy, idealism too became untenable and was negated by modern materialism. This modern materialism, the negation of the negation, is not the mere re-establishment of the old, but adds to the permanent foundation of this old materialism the whole thought content of two thousand years of development of philosophy and natural science, as well as of the historical development of these two thousand years"(224).

From politics:

"Already in Rousseau ... we find not only a sequence of ideas (i.e. Rousseau's idea of an original equality among men in the state of nature, the rise of inequality, and the re-establishment of the equality by the social contract) which corresponds exactly with the sequence developed in Marx's Capital, but that the correspondence extends also to details, Rousseau using a whole series of the same dialectical developments as Marx used: processes which in their nature are antagonistic, contain a contradiction, are the transformation of one extreme into its opposite; and finally, as the kernel of the whole process, the negation of the negation"(225).

By these examples Engels hopes to clarify what is meant by the "general law of motion" known as the negation of the negation. To those who object that the grain of barley, or an insect, is negated even when it is crushed under foot and destroyed without any subsequent development, without any advance in quantity or quality, Engels replies that

"negation in dialectics does not mean simply saying no, or declaring that something does not in any way exist, or destroying it in any way one likes ... I must not only negate, but also in turn sublate the negation. I must therefore so construct the first negation that the second remains or becomes possible. If I grind a grain of barley, or crush an insect, it is true I have carried out the first part of the action, but I have made the second part impossible. Each class of things therefore has its appropriate form of being negated in such a way that it gives rise to a development ..."(226).

Like Marx, Engels gives credit to Hegel for the first clear formulation of the law of the negation of the negation (227), but he would resist violently any suggestion that Hegel had "invented" the law, or formulated it out of his own head. This law is "unconsciously operative in nature and in history"(228), and if Herr Duehring aims "to expel the process itself from thought, we must ask him to be so good as first to banish it from Nature and history"(229). So, even if the Marxists claim to have freed dialectics from "the idealist trammels which

in Hegel's hands had prevented its consistent execution," they have, nevertheless, retained "the great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less than their mind-images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away, in which, in spite of all seeming accidents and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end"(230). We must go to Hegel then for the first formulation of this "great basic thought."

Before examining the role of the law of the negation of the negation in the philosophy of Hegel, let us sum up the Marxist interpretation of this law. For the Marxists this law governs evolution, or progress. In the evolutionary process development takes place in such a way that one change negates a given state of affairs, and a succeeding change, which negates the state of affairs resulting from the first negation, re-establishes, in a more perfect or more developed form, some feature of the original state. The third state contains the first and the second even while it contains their negations. But it is the process of negating that is central to the law. We have not yet spoken of negation as a process (except in the sense that

the operation by which I negate a proposition, or construct a negative proposition in the second operation of the mind, is a process - but this is an operation that is entirely extrinsic to that which is negated), and yet, it is the concept of negation as process that is basic to dialectic, even though the word 'negation' is used as well to signify the product resulting from the process. The development of this meaning of negation will be seen in our study of Hegel, but it would be well to keep in mind that the various "states of affairs" of which the Marxists speak are not to be considered as states of rest or immobility. If we were so to conceive them we would be guilty of interpreting a dialectical law in terms of "the old method of investigation and thought which Hegel calls 'metaphysical'" (231).

Consequently, the following might be taken as a summary of the Marxist interpretation of the functioning of the law of the negation of the negation, abstracting from its various applications:

"Process A is opposed by its contradictory, not-A, and, let us suppose, A is succeeded by not-A. Not-A, in its turn, however, will be the pole of a further opposition and so will be succeeded by its opposite, A. This second A, however, will not be merely the first A re-instated, for the first A was the opposite of a not-A that had not yet replaced it, while the second A is the opposite of a not-A which has already replaced the original A" (232).

CHAPTER VI

THE NEGATION OF THE NEGATION

2. The Hegelian Application

Why is it that the Marxists consider that the most important characteristic of anything is that it is not something else? Such a question would seem to be a legitimate reaction to what has been said of their use of the law of the negation of the negation. For, apparently, it is not in what a thing is that its value, or importance, consists, but in what it is not. Or, to put it in another way, whatever it has of worth is to be attributed to the fact that it is a negation, and preferably a negation of a prior negation. Furthermore, if it does not itself contribute to its own eventual (preferably immediate) negation, or dissolution, it is but a stumbling block in the way of progress. Whence comes this idea that to be negation, or non-being, is of such moment? Is it true, as the Marxists say, that such is the nature of things, and we can only submit to the priority of the negative in the extra-mental order? Or is it possible, as Herr Duehring suggests, that all this talk of the negation of the negation is nothing but a crutch made use of by the Marxists to give a semblance of objectivity to what they wish to conceive of

as a law of progress; an attempt to find a speculative justification for a prior practical revolutionary preoccupation?

Since the Marxists were not the first to give such importance to negation, we may well put off the answer to these and similar questions until we have seen the role of negation in the philosophy of Hegel, from whom they admittedly borrowed the essentials of their dialectic. It will be our purpose in this chapter to examine Hegel from this point of view. It is not a thorough examination, or critique, of Hegel that is intended, then, but a study of his understanding of negation as a component of essences and as a process.

When reference is made to negation as an element entering into the very composition of things, one cannot but be put in mind of the statement of Spinoza: "Determination is negation"(233). This remark has been said to be the most important pronouncement ever made on the subject of negation, and the re-appearance of a similar idea in Hegel is pointed out by W. T. Stace:

"Spinoza formulated the profoundly important principle that 'all determination is negation.' To determine a thing is to cut it off from some sphere of being and so to limit it. To define is to set boundaries. To say that a thing is green limits it by cutting it off from the sphere of pink, blue, or other-colored things. To say that it is good cuts it off from the sphere of evil. This limitation is the same

as negation. To affirm that a thing is within certain limits is to deny that it is outside those limits. To say that it is green is to say that it is not pink. Affirmation involves negation. Whatever is said of a thing denies something else of it. All determination is negation.

This principle is fundamental for Hegel also, but with him it takes rather the converse form that all negation is determination. Formal logicians will remind us that we cannot simply convert Spinoza's proposition. But it is sufficient to point out in reply that not only does affirmation involve negation; negation likewise involves affirmation. To deny that a thing belongs to one class is to affirm that it belongs to some other class, - though we may not know what that class is. Positive and negative are correlatives which mutually involve each other. To posit is to negate: this is Spinoza's principle. To negate is to posit: this is Hegel's.

When, therefore, we meet Hegel talking about "the portentous power of the negative," we have to consider that for him negation is the very process of creation. For the positive nature of an object consists in its determinations. The nature of a stone is to be white, heavy, hard, etc. And since all determinations are negations; it follows that the positive nature of a thing consists in its negations. Negation, therefore, is of the very essence of positive being. And for the world to come into being what is above all necessary is the force of negation, "the portentous power of the negative." The genus only becomes the species by means of the differentia, and the differentia is precisely that which carves out a particular class from the general class by excluding, i.e. negating, the other species. And the species again only becomes the individual in the same way, by negating other individuals. These thoughts are no casual reflections of Hegel. They underlie his entire system. We must get to understand that these three ideas, determination, limitation, and negation, all involve each other" (234).

The importance of negation in the philosophy of Hegel is easily seen when one examines the manner in which it is introduced and the function that it is called upon to fulfill. If all the other categories are to be deduced from what Hegel calls the category of Being, or rather, if the other categories are to deduce themselves from it, then there must be some principle which will account for the passage from one category to another, a principle which must be intrinsic to the prior category and explain why the posterior one will follow from it. Hegel finds this principle in contradiction, a contradiction which is inherent in every thought and every thing.

"Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world ..."(235).

The first category, that of Being, would remain sterile in its indeterminateness if there were not present within it some factor capable of reducing its indeterminateness to determinateness. This factor, endowed with such a power, Hegel considers to be the opposite, the negation. Adopting as his own Spinoza's famous dictum Hegel concurs in the assertion that "the foundation of all determinateness is negation"(236).

The negation, or the opposite, or the contradictory, is inherent in every affirmation. It serves the role, in

the deduction of the categories, of a moving principle which accounts for the passage from what would otherwise be a sterile affirmation of abstract Being to all the variety of categories. It is a kind of specific difference which is contained within the genus, not potentially (in the Scholastic sense of the genus as determinable from without), but actually, in that the affirmation contains and posits its own negation. For if the determination were to come from without, the system of the categories would not be rational of itself, since we would then have to explain the reason why the specific difference comes to be added to the genus. Thus, the category, Being, contains its opposite, Nothing, and this Nothing, or not-being, serves as a difference, which, combined with Being as genus, gives rise to a new category, Becoming.

The affirmation not only includes the negation but is identical with it. The genus, far from excluding the differentia, is this very differentia. Since they are identical, affirmation and negation pass into one another. This passage, an objective process of reason, which takes place independently of us, is responsible for the deduction of the categories. The fundamental reason for the dialectical method, therefore, is the necessity of showing how the differentia is contained in the genus (237).

The fact that the differentia is negative is attributable to the principle that negation is determination.

"Becoming also is Being but Being with negation or determinateness"(238).

By adding the negative to the genus we limit it, and to limit, or determine, it is to turn it into a species.

While we are on this point of the essential role of negation in the Hegelian dialectic it may be worthwhile to consider the relation between this characteristic of negation as limiting, and the Scholastic assertion that "negation restricts the nature of the known thing"(239). In the first chapter we spoke of negation as a means of knowing; of the process, that is, by which a notion is limited by being set apart from other notions. Although the two opinions of the limiting power of negation might seem to be similar, there is a world of difference between them. The Scholastic will say that every negation implies an affirmation, and he will admit the possibility of interpreting this statement in two ways:

a) Before a negation is conceived there must be a prior conception of some affirmative notion, "since that which is negated or removed is always of the notion of the negation or privation"(240). Thus, I could have no conception of "non-sentient" without a prior conception of "sentient."

b) When I negate a certain predicate of a subject, I do not indicate that the negation pertains intrinsically to the essence of the subject, but, on the contrary, that the subject has a positive characteristic that excludes the predicate negated (241).

The negations determine, then, not as forms or attributes inherent in a subject by which it is distinct from other things; but rather as denials of forms, inherent in other things, by which these other things are distinct from the subject of which the negation is said. The negations are true because the subject has a nature that excludes such and such attributes. In other words, it is not because it is non-rational that the brute is a brute; it is rather to be said that the brute is non-rational because it is a brute. And furthermore, non-rational is not a specific difference except insofar as it is indicative of a positive difference that is hidden from us.

If we identify determinations and negations, then of course we must end by saying that what has the greatest determination will be identical with that of which the most negations can be predicated. The monstrous potentialities of such a doctrine need hardly be made explicit.

In the Hegelian system, the negation is said to be identical with the affirmation. In fact, negation could hardly be expected to play the role of paramount importance assigned to it in this system unless it were endowed with far more than we have allotted to it by characterizing it as the absence of something. The absence of something could never be considered as an all-powerful principle of fecundity such as negation is in Hegel. Dialectics describes both existence and thought in terms of opposites, opposites which are the outcome of a process that is more ultimate than the opposites themselves; and the process by which these opposites are generated (and united) is called negation. Negation is, therefore, the central and all-important concept in dialectic (242). The dialectical method was introduced so as to be able to deduce the world logically from its reason.

It has been said that "dialectic has no theory of contraries. For according to the philosophy of opposites, the contrary is also the contradictory" (243), and we are able to see this in the manner in which Hegel insinuates the negation into the affirmation. It is, at the root, a confusion between the absolute negation (or, more precisely, that which is expressed by the infinite name) and relative negation, that is, negation in a determined genus.

We see this very confusion at the beginning of the dialectic when Being, because it is completely indeterminate, is identified with Nothing. Because it does not signify this being, or that being, it is taken to signify absolute non-being.

"Nothing, therefore, is the same determination (or rather lack of determination), and thus altogether the same thing, as pure Being"(244).

Of course, in treating of the position of Hegel we are always faced with the danger of imputing to Him a one-sided stand which he, himself, would not admit. Thus, in the present case, where we would be inclined to propose his position in the form of the proposition: "Being and Nothing are the same," he would be equally willing to admit the proposition: "Being and Nothing are not the same," for, as he would say, these two propositions refer to the same thing (245). At any rate, in this case, we can say that it is because Being represents, and is, nothing determinate, it represents, and is, nothing at all. This identification has an analogy in the mistaken identification of prime matter with absolute non-being because it is not being in act, or this particular determined kind of being. Hegel, apparently, is aware of this analogy.

"Thus, we find Being identified with what persists amid all change, with matter, susceptible of innumerable determinations"(246).

To identify prime matter with absolute non-being is, of course, to place a contradiction within every material being, for if matter is nothing it is opposed to every conceivable form of determination. To identify Being and Nothing is, similarly, to place a contradiction at the root of every being, and it is precisely this which Hegel intends. We shall shortly see how such intrinsic contradictions are further fostered by the principle of the negation of the negation, but for the present we may consider other instances of this confusion of an absolute and a relative negation.

"In the doctrine of contradictory concepts the one notion is, say, blue ... and the other not-blue. This other then would not be an affirmation, say, yellow, but would merely be kept in the abstract negative. - That the Negative in its own nature is quite as much Positive is implied in saying that what is opposite to another is its other. The inanity of the opposition between what are called contradictory notions is fully exhibited in what we may call the grandiose formula of a general law that Everything has the one and not the other of all predicates which are in such opposition. In this way mind is either white or non-white, yellow or not-yellow, etc., ad infinitum"(247).

Hegel's objection to the position according to which of two contradictory predicates one or the other must be said of every thing is obviously based on a misconception of the opposition of contradiction. Why should

he object to predicating of mind either white or non-white, if it were not that he considered either predicate as placing the subject in the genus of color. But the non-white which is opposed to white by contradiction is, precisely, the infinite name, a negation "extra genus," and not the privation. It can be said of everything that is not white, whether or not that thing be susceptible of color.

To indicate the "inanity" of the Principle of Contradiction Hegel also makes use of the mathematical consideration of the circle as a polygon with an infinite number of sides:

"A notion which possesses neither or both of two mutually contradictory marks, e.g., a quadrangular circle, is held to be logically false. Now though a multi-angular circle and a rectilinear arc no less contradict this maxim, geometers never hesitate to treat the circle as a polygon with rectilinear sides"(248).

This argument does not particularly concern us at present (although we can quite easily reduce this objection to an admission of a simple identity of the notions of circle and polygon, or else to the acceptance of the everlasting impossibility of realising a limit at infinity - the point at which the polygon would become a circle); but what follows in Hegel does show us how every type of opposition is confused with the opposition of

contradiction, the only type of opposition to which the Principle of Contradiction is applicable.

"In the notion of a circle, centre and circumference are equally essential; both marks belong to it: and yet centre and circumference are opposite and contradictory to each other ...

Positive and negative are supposed to express an absolute difference. The two however are at bottom the same: the name of either might be transferred to the other ... What is negative to the debtor is positive to the creditor ... (248).

To consider the oppositions here described as violations of the Principle of Contradiction is no more justified than to say that if something white exists it would be contradictory for there to be any existing non-white; or that if there exist such a thing as a debtor there cannot be any such thing as a creditor. Those who support the Principle of Contradiction cannot certainly hold that contradictions do not exist. In fact, wherever there is opposition of any kind, including privation, contrariety and relation, there is present also contradiction. One of the strangest characteristics of the dialectical philosophers in the line of Hegel and Marx is their concern in showing that the Principle of Contradiction nowhere prevails, showing this by means of examples which do not at all violate this universal principle, while at the same time the tasks which they demand of the moving principle of their systems could not

be fulfilled except by a veritable contradiction according to which the same thing, at the same time, must be and not be in the same respect. Only such a contradiction would be as demanding of resolution as is required in these systems.

No one can possibly deny the existence of contradiction in the sense of contradictory opposition. If there is distinction at all there must be contradiction, for one thing is not the other, and further, in finite beings one attribute is not the other, so that we can say that each finite being contains contradictions. But it is the confusion of such an admission with the denial of the validity of the Principle of Contradiction that seems to give confirmation to dialectics. The contradiction of which Hegel says

"(It) is the root of all movement and life, and it is only insofar as it contains a contradiction that anything moves and has impulse and activity"(249),

cannot be anything but what we would call an inherent self-contradiction and relegate to the realm of impossibility. But it is a far cry from such a contradiction to the type of opposition illustrated in such texts as the following:

"In movement, impulse, and the like, the simplicity of these determinations hides the contradiction from imagination; but this contradiction immediately stands revealed in the

determinations of relations. The most trivial examples - above and below, right and left, father and son, and so on without end - all contain contradiction in one term. That is above which is not below; "above" is determined only as not being "below," and is only insofar as there is a "below," and conversely: one determination implies its opposite. Father is the Other of the son, and son of father, and each exists only as this Other of the other; and also the one determination exists only in relation to the other: their Being is one persistence.... Opposite terms contain Contradiction insofar as they are negatively related to each other in the same respect, or cancel out and remain indifferent to each other"(250).

We could hardly object to the presence of a contradiction between relatives as expressed in the above text, but there are insidious consequences of the admission of this sense of "containing a negation," for we are soon led to admit that wherever there is opposition, or negation, there is self-contradiction of the strict and inadmissible type. For example:

"According to the first or merely positive side, then, Possibility is the mere form - determination of self-identity, or the form of essentiality. It is thus the relation-less and indeterminate container for everything in general. - In this sense of Formal Possibility, everything is possible which is not self-contradictory; hence the realm of Possibility is limitless multiplicity. But every manifold is determined in itself and as against other and contains negation; and, generally, indifferent variety passes over into opposition; but opposition is contradiction. Everything therefore equally is contradictory and therefore impossible"(251).

There are two areas of confusion in the above text.

One is based on the meaning of possibility. For in his definition of Formal Possibility, Hegel very clearly opposes "possible" to "impossible," that is, to what is self-contradictory. So that an infinite variety, or "limitless multiplicity," of things are possible. But in fact, "every manifold is determined, ... and contains negation," so that it cannot be possible in the sense of Formal Possibility. All things are, therefore, impossible by reason of their determined character. But there is a sense in which "possible" can be said of existent things. Existents can be said to be possible in the sense of contingent, or not necessary. In the realm of such possibles there is not infinity, but determination. In other words, if one takes "possible" in the sense of non-existent, but not self-contradictory, such things are indeed limitless; but if one takes "possible" in the sense of contingent, but existing, there is no such thing as limitless multiplicity, but rather, determination, or limitation. Hegel appears to confuse the two meanings (252).

Secondly, when Hegel concludes that what is possible because not self-contradictory is impossible because contradictory, he falls into a sophism which results from the confusion between an absolute negation and a

"negatio in genere," and a further confusion between contradiction (or even thinking contradictory things) and an inherent self-contradiction. The Marxists, too, are very adept at discovering "contradictions" which we would readily admit, and then using these as arguments against the Principle of Contradiction (253).

It is small wonder that some authors have seen fit to attribute to Hegel a faithful adherence to the Principle of Contradiction.

"The dialectical process, far from supposing the rejection of the principle of contradiction, is entirely and visibly based upon it. In fact it is precisely because the contradictory appears impossible to him, and on the other hand an imperfect thing in an isolated state seems contradictory to him, that Hegel sees everything in relation to other things, namely, with its contrary, and with their common synthesis. And it is thus he builds his system.

The passage to the synthesis manifests again the effort to avoid contradiction. In order for two contraries to fuse in a single term they must both lose their prior form" (254).

Such attempts to show Hegel's respect for the principle of contradiction by insisting on his concern for the "resolving" of all contradictions cannot ignore, however, the fact that contradictions (of the strict type) are said to be really present in the thesis, in the antithesis, and in the synthesis of the familiar triad. The thesis "contains" and "is" its opposite. The contradiction is "resolved" in a synthesis which retains the "identity

of opposites." Furthermore, in order to push reason on to a synthesis, to be a moving, propelling, force, the contradiction must first "be," that is, it must actually exist. It is all very well to say that reason cannot rest in what is self contradictory and is therefore forced onwards towards a synthesis; but this is hardly the same as saying that contradictories cannot be identified.