

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

The allure that the principle of "the negation of the negation" might hold for a dialectical philosopher of the Hegelian or the Marxist type may be readily understood from the consideration of the possibilities it promises in the line of inherent contradictions. For it turns out that this principle not only breeds new objects, but breeds fecundity itself, by allowing for an apparent infinity of contradictions within the same object.

The dialectical processes that we have been considering in the two previous chapters customarily involve three stages, the second of which is the negation of the first, and the third the negation of the second. If we represent these stages symbolically as A, B, and C, the stage B is to be considered the negation of the stage A, and the stage C the negation of the stage B. Considering only the negations, our stages might be represented as A, not-A, and not-not-A. If we take now the stage C, we find that as C it is not-A, for it can as well be considered not-A as B can be so considered, and at the same time, it is also not-not-A, for it is the negation of that not-A which is B. C is then both not-A and not-not-A. If, to simplify things we were to represent the

expression "not-A" by another symbol, X, then C is simultaneously X and not-X, and we would appear to be involved in a contradiction.

This statement of the dialectical process may appear to be merely a sort of game in which terms are juggled about so as to deceive; but the deception, even if it be self-deception, is one that inevitably results from the consideration of things as nothing but negations. It should be clear to anyone that the representation of the two cases of "not-A" by the same symbol "X" in the above paragraph is not justified, since "not-A" does not have exactly the same meaning in each case. In other words, the expression "not-A" is used to refer to two very different particular and determined objects, whose determinations cannot be represented in the same appellation, "not-A". When I say that C is not-A, and allow this to be an adequate description of C, then the implication is that C is identical with B and D and everything else of which "not-A" can be said. In fact, when I say that C is not-A, I really mean only that C is distinct from A, or that it is that not-A which is C. And when I say above that C is not-not-A, I really mean that it is not that not-A which is B. If one loses sight of the affirmations that underlie the negations, then nothing but confusion can result.

Let us take another example, more concrete but still of a very simple character, to indicate the pitfalls in store for one who would consider positive realities to be nothing but negations. A leaf may be thought of as changing its color from green to red to brown. The red will be the negation of the green, and the brown the negation of the red, or the negation of the negation. We thus have:

green      red(not-green)      brown (not-not green)

It is apparent that brown is not-green, but it is just as apparent that it is not-not-green, for it is not-red, which red is not-green. The leaf is then at the same time (as brown) not-green and not-not-green, a situation which presents us with the same apparent contradiction as before. This apparent contradiction can be resolved in the same way as the previous one, for the brown leaf is that not-green which is brown, and not that not-green which is red.

The truth of the matter is that when I say the leaf is not green, I in no way indicate what its actual color is. The danger lies in considering the first negation as indicative of something positive, which could only be the case if we could retain the positive underlying reality along with the negation, and restrict the extension of the infinite name to this particular positive

reality, so that the ensuing negation of the negation would be a real negation. In fact, if we wished to use the term "not-green" in this way, then when we would go on to say that brown is "not-not-green", we would simply mean that brown is not red. The final enunciation, then, which in the above cases appeared to involve a contradiction, now appears in the very innocuous form: brown is at the same time not green and not red, a proposition which no one would hesitate to accept. It is not, therefore, the fact that it is not-green that accounts for, or describes, the leaf's being red; and it is not the fact that it is not-not-green (nor even the fact that it is not red) that accounts for its being brown. The negation contributes nothing to the positive reality of the subject. "A negation does not pertain intrinsically to the essence of a thing"(255). But in a dialectical philosophy which bases itself on the principle of the negation of the negation, the negation, and particularly the negation of the negation, is precisely the reason for the superiority of one thing over another.

We have already seen that a negation of a negation is not a "real negation," that is, it is not the negation of some thing (256). Whether such a phrase, "the negation of the negation," be intended to signify a thing or a

process, it can only signify a thing or a process of the reason. Even a "real negation" is not "something real," but the absence of something real; and as far as process is concerned, it is obviously impossible for a non-being to corrupt as such.

The importance, and even the necessity, of negation in our knowledge of real things, both finite and infinite, demands that we be on guard against a multitude of possible errors issuing from the confusion of the various meanings of negation as outlined in the earlier chapters. It might be worthwhile to list the more important of these areas of confusion, everyone of which has appeared, at one time or another, in the history of philosophy, accompanied in many cases by some disastrous practical consequence.

1) The confusion of matter (or potency) and privation. This appears even in serious contemporary students of Aristotle and Hegel, such as G. R. G. Mure, who refers to primary matter as "sheer privation"(257), and as "per se purely negative"(258). This confusion implies a contradiction in any change, since the subject, which remains at the term of the change, will be opposed to the form acquired. The only alternative, in the framework of such a confusion, would be to eliminate the subject altogether, and make of change an incomprehensible leap from form to

form, which is equivalent to a denial of change in the traditional sense of the word.

2) The confusion of various distinct types of opposition (v.g. contrariety, privation and habitus, and even relation) with contradiction. This confusion has been noted in connection with the dialectical philosophies of Hegel and Marx, and it has been observed that, universally, "dialectic has no theory of contraries. For according to the philosophy of opposites, the contrary is also the contradictory"(259). Reference has also been made to the confusion of the absolute negation with a relative negation (or a negation within a genus)(260). If we add a well known Marxist example of the relation between the social structure and the means of production, we see contradiction identified with every form of opposition. Whereas, while it is true that every opposition implies, basically, the opposition of contradiction, each of the other types adds something to this basic contradiction.

3) The confusion of a logical being, or process, with a real being, or process. This is obvious enough in the Marxist system, where it is a question of natural beings and natural processes, which exist and take place independently of mind. The negations of negations are

for the Marxists, certainly, anything but logical beings. They are not foisted upon nature by the human intelligence. In the case of Hegel, one might say, in his defense, that he is dealing, precisely, with logical beings, and that no confusion is possible. But it is to be remembered that Hegel considers the Absolute as both the experient subject (self-expressed and self-conscious) and the subject of predicates (which empirical thought considers external to itself as subject).

4) The consideration of every determination as a negation, and the implied possibility of knowing the negation without knowing the affirmation of which it is the negation. In fact, for a dialectician of the Hegelian bent, if a thing is not other than itself it remains featureless and indeterminate.

The attempt that was made in the early chapters to identify and delineate the various meanings of the word, "negation," would seem to be well worth the effort, if besides making clear the necessity in which the human intelligence finds itself of knowing through negations, it should also put us on guard against certain confusions which vitiate heroic efforts of systematic thought that might otherwise prove very fruitful.

106. See Chapter I, p. 18, (c).
107. I Contra Gentiles, c. 71.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. In V Meta., lect. 9, no. 896.
111. John of St. Thomas, Cursus Philosophicus, Reiser edit., Vol. I, 285 b. 14.
112. Ibid.
113. In IV Meta., lect. 1, no. 540.
114. De Ente et Essentia, c. 1.
115. John of St. Thomas, loc. cit., 286 a 12, sqq.
116. De Ente et Essentia, loc. cit.
117. Ia, q. 16, a. 3, ad 2.
118. Cf. Q. D. De Veritate, q. 21, a. 1.
119. John of St. Thomas, loc. cit., 288 a 40.
120. Ibid., 288 b 23.
121. Ibid., 302 b 38.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid., 304 a 6, sqq.; cf. also Curs. Theol., Desclée edit., Vol. II, d. 18, a. 4, nos. 11-14, pp. 396-9.
124. I Contra Gentiles, c. 14.
125. In De Trinitate, q. 1, a. 2, c.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.



128. Ibid.
129. Cf. St. Thomas, Expositio in Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus, c. 1, lect. 3.
130. Ia, q. 12, a. 12; cf. also q. 13, a. 1 and a. 8 ad 2.
131. I Contra Gentiles, c. 14.
132. Ibid.; cf. In De Trinitate, q. 6, a. 3, c.
133. III Contra Gentiles, c. 39.
134. Cf. Commentary of Sylvester of Ferrara on I Contra Gentiles, c. 14 in the Leonine Edition of the Opera Sti. Thomas.
135. Ia, q. 12, a. 12, c.
136. Q. D. De Potentia, q. 7, a. 5.
137. Ibid., q. 9, a. 7, ad 2.
138. Ibid., q. 7, a. 5.
139. Loc. cit.
140. Cf. I Contra Gentiles, c. 20.
141. Cf. Q. D. De Potentia, q. 7, a. 5.
142. Ia, q. 13, a. 11, ad 1.
143. Dionysius Areopagita, De Coelesti Hierarachia, c. 2, in Migne's Patrologia Graeca, Vol. III.
144. Ibid., De Mystica Theologia, c. 1.
145. Cf. Ia, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2.
146. Q. D. De Potentia, q. 7, a. 5, ad 2.
147. I Sent., d. 22, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.
148. Cf. Q. D. De Potentia, loc. cit.

149. Originally thought to be the work of the Athenian convert of St. Paul, Dionysius the Areopagite, but later discovered to have been written near the end of the fifth century. The name, Dionysius, was used as a pseudonym, and since the real identity of the author has not been discovered he is commonly called "Pseudo-Dionysius." (Cf. F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. II, Chapter IX.)
150. Cf. Introduction, by D. Petrus Caramello, to the Marietti edition of St. Thomas' commentary on the De Divinis Nominibus of Dionysius.
151. Cf. Joannes Scotus Eriugena, Expositiones seu Glossae in Mysticam Theologiam Sancti Dionysii, c. 3, in Migne's Patres Ecclesiae Latinae, Vol. 122.
152. In Migne's Patrologia Graeca, Vol. III and IV, we find also the De Coelesti Hierarchia, and the De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, as well as several letters.
153. De Mystica Theologia, c. 1.
154. De Coelesti Hierarchia, c. 2.
155. Cf. I Sent., d. 22, q. 1, a. 2.
156. Cf. pp. 83-84.
157. Cf. Q. D. De Potentia, q. 7, a. 5, ad 2.
158. Expositiones super Hierarchiam Coelestem, c. 2.
159. Ibid.
160. St. Maximus, Theologia, c. 2. (Quoted by Balthasar Corderius in his commentary on the De Mystica Theologia of Dionysius, in Migne's Patrologia Graeca, loc. cit.)
161. Cf. IIa IIae, q. 8, a. 7, c; also Ia IIae, q. 69, a. 2, ad 3.
162. In De Mystica Theologia Dionysii, Quaestio Prooemialis, B. Alberti Magni Opera Omnia, Paris, Vives, Vol. 14, p. 814.

163. Ibid., c. 2.
164. Ibid.
165. L. De Blois, A Book of Spiritual Instruction, c. 12.  
(Quoted by A. Tanqueray in The Spiritual Life,  
English translation by H. Branderis, Tournai,  
Desclée and Co., 1930, p. 653.)
166. De Mystica Theologia, c. 1.
167. Loc. cit.
168. In De Divinis Nominibus, c. 13, lect. 3, Marietti  
edit., no. 996.
169. La Nuit Obscure, II, c. 17, St. Jean de la Croix,  
Oeuvres Spirituelles, traduction du R. P. Gregoire  
de St. Joseph, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1947,  
pp. 626-627 (English translation by the author).
170. Balthasar Corderius, loc. cit.
171. St. Albert, op. cit., c. 3, loc. cit., p. 843.
172. De Mystica Theologia, c. 2.
173. Cf. Commentary of Pachymera on the De Mystica  
Theologia, c. 2, in Migne's Patrologia Graeca, loc.  
cit.; also St. Albert, op. cit., c. 2.
174. St. Albert, op. cit., c. 2.
175. Dionysius, De Mystica Theologia, c. 2, translation  
of John Scotus Eriugena, loc. cit.
176. Ia, q. 3, a. 8, c. It is another line of reason-  
ing than that described in our context that leads  
David to identify God and prime matter, but both  
lines of thought are inter-related, as is implied  
in the third objection of this article.
177. De Divinis Nominibus, c. 4, lect. 2, no. 297.
178. Op. cit., c. 2.
179. Ibid., c. 3.

180. John of St. Thomas, Curs. Theol., Desclée edit., T. II, d. 18, a. 4, no. 20, p. 401.
181. De Docta Ignorantia, c. 4.
182. Ibid.
183. Ibid., c. 22.
184. Ibid., c. 3.
185. Ibid., c. 1.
186. De Mystica Theologia, c. 1.
187. Loc. cit.
188. Commentary on the De Mystica Theologia, c. 1.
189. Op. cit., c. 1.
190. Ibid., c. 3.
191. De Divisione Naturae, Bk. I, c. 1, Migne, Patres Ecclesiae Latinae, Vol. 122.
192. I Contra Gentiles, c. 31.
193. Ibid.; also Ia, q. 13, a. 2, c.
194. I Contra Gentiles, c. 30.
195. Ia, q. 12, a. 12 (underscoring by the author).
196. See p. 83.
197. De Veritate, q. 28, a. 6.
198. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, New York, International Publishers, 1947, p. 789.
199. Cf. Frederick Engels, Dialectics of Nature, translated by C. P. Dutt, New York, International Publishers, 1940, p. 26.

200. Ibid.
201. Ibid., p. 27.
202. Marx, op. cit., Author's Preface to the first edition, p. xxx.
203. Ibid. Similar expressions as descriptive of Hegelian dialectic recur frequently in Marxist writings. Cf., for example, Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, New York, International Publishers, 1941, p. 24; Anti-Duhring, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947, p. 41.
204. Marx, ibid.
205. Ibid.
206. Ibid., p. 788.
207. Ibid., p. 787.
208. Joseph Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism, New York, International Publishers, 1940, p. 37.
209. Marx, op. cit., p. 789, footnote.
210. Particularly in his "Kursus der Philosophie;" cf. F. Engels, Anti-Duhring, p. 46.
211. Quoted in Frederick Engels, Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Duhring), Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947, p. 192.
212. Ibid., p. 199.
213. Ibid. (our underscoring).
214. Ibid., p. 200.
215. Ibid., pp. 201-202.
216. Ibid., p. 202.
217. Ibid.

218. Ibid. (our underscoring).
219. Ibid. (It is difficult to understand why the translator renders "Nature" with a capital "N." In German, of course, all nouns are capitalized. One would surmise that the translator wishes to give a special meaning to "Nature" here and in other places where he capitalizes this word.)
220. Ibid., p. 203.
221. Ibid. (On the question of further mathematical applications of this law by Engels and other Marxists, cf. the article by C. De Koninck in Laval Theologique et Philosophique, Vol. IV, No. 2).
222. Ibid., p. 205.
223. See the distinction which Marx makes between two very different kinds of private property, op. cit., p. 790.
224. Engels, Anti-Duhring, p. 206.
225. Ibid., p. 208.
226. Ibid., p. 210.
227. Ibid., p. 211; cf. also Dialectics of Nature, p. 26.
228. Ibid.
229. Ibid., p. 212.
230. Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, etc., p. 44.
231. Ibid., p. 45.
232. H. B. Acton, "The Marxist Outlook," in the review, Philosophy, Vol. XXII, No. 83, November, 1947, pp. 218-219.

233. Letter 50, The Correspondence of Spinoza, translated and edited by Abraham Wolf, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1928, p. 270. Wolf prefers to translate "determinatio" by "limitation;" and in an annotation to Letter 36 (*ibid.*, p. 211) he explains why: "The Latin is 'determinatum', usually translated 'determined,' which term, as also the term 'determination' in the familiar statement that 'all determination is negation,' must be understood to refer to the limiting or delimiting of finite objects within the unlimited or complete Attribute or Substance of which they are modes. For example, the marking of the boundaries of a finite portion of space within infinite Extension. In the expression, 'qualitative determination,' the term, determination, has a very different meaning. It means 'positive characterization,' not negative delimitation. It is impertinent to apply the principle that 'determination is negation' to such qualitative 'determination' or characterization, especially to the Attributes as Spinoza conceived them. This confusion has been responsible for serious misrepresentations of Spinozism."

However, even if the above interpretation be just, it is not so much the true interpretation of Spinoza that is in question at present, but the interpretation that others have put on his remark, and particularly the way in which Hegel was influenced by this idea. Of course, when the Hegelian dialectic introduces the notion of the transformation of quantity into quality, then any distinction between quantitative and qualitative determinations becomes irrelevant.

234. Stace, W. T., The Philosophy of Hegel, London, Mac Millan, 1924, p. 32.
235. Encyclopaedia (Logic), translated by William Wallace, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1873, p. 159.
236. Ibid., p. 171.
237. Stace, op. cit., p. 90.
238. Wallace, op. cit., p. 170.
239. Cf. note 14.

240. Cf. note 24.
241. Cf. note 14.
242. Cf. Otis, Lee, "Dialectics and Negation," in the Review of Metaphysics, Vol. I, No. 1, September, 1947, p. 3.
243. Ibid., p. 10.
244. Hegel, Science of Logic, translated by Johnston and Struthers, New York, the MacMillan Company, 1929, Vol. I, p. 94.
245. Cf. ibid., p. 103.
246. Encyclopaedia (Logic), p. 161.
247. Ibid., p. 221.
248. Ibid., pp. 221, 222.
249. Science of Logic, Vol. II, p. 67.
250. Ibid., p. 68.
251. Ibid., p. 175.
252. Cf. In Meta. IX, lect. 3, nos. 1811-1812; also Contra Gentiles, Lib. III, c. 86.
253. See, for example, Le Marxisme, by Henri Lefebvre, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1954, p. 29. The Marxists speak, for example, of contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between the social structure and the means of production, etc. No one denies such contradictions, but they can hardly be used either against the Principle of Contradiction, or as justification of the sort of contradiction that is at the basis of dialectics.
254. Translated from "Hegel et l'universelle contradiction," by Franz Gregoire in the Revue Philosophique de Louvain, Tome 44, February, 1946.



- 255. See note 14.
- 256. See page 59 and pp. 116-117.
- 257. Mure, G. R. G., An Introduction to Hezel, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 73.
- 258. Ibid., page 7 and page 27.
- 259. Cf. note 243.
- 260. Cf. page 132.