RAHEL JAEGGI

Critique of Forms of Life

TRANSLATED BY CIARAN CRONIN

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Rahel Jaeggi

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Ciaran Cronin

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Preface

The critical theory of society, on the other hand, has for its
object men as producers of their own historical form of life
in its totality. . . . Each datum depends not on nature
alone but also on the power man has over it.

—Max Horkheimer

Federal elections, Olympic ceremonies, the actions of a
commando unit, a theater premiere—all are considered
public events. Other events of overwhelming public significance,
such as childrearing, factory work, and watching
television within one's own four walls are considered private.
The real social experiences of human beings, produced in
everyday life and work, cut across such divisions.

—Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge

Can forms of life be criticized? Can forms of life be said to be good, successful, or even rational *as* forms of life? Since Kant, it has been considered a foregone conclusion that happiness or the good life, in contrast to the morally right life, cannot be specified in philosophical terms. And with John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, what are probably the two most influential positions in contemporary political philosophy propose, referring to the irreducible ethical pluralism of modern societies, to abstain from discussing the ethical content of forms of life. With this, philosophy withdraws from the Socratic question of how to live one's life and confines itself to the problem of how, when faced with the multitude of incommensurable notions of the good life, a just cohabitation can be ensured in which different forms of life exist alongside each other. The political order of the liberal constitutional state is represented accordingly as an attempt to organize this cohabitation so that it remains neutral between forms of life. But when the central concern is no longer to realize the right shared form of life and becomes instead to ensure that the coexistence of the different forms of life is as free from conflict as possible, then questions of how we conduct our lives become displaced into the realm of private preferences. Then there can be no arguing about forms of life, just as there can be no arguing about matters of taste. Forms of life become an inaccessible black box; at most their effects can be criticized with reasons.

As it happens, there are obvious reasons for such a position. Not only is it doubtful whether an agreement would be so easy to reach among individuals who differ fundamentally in their conceptions of the world and their ethical beliefs. In addition, the aversion to being "dictated" to by (philosophical) moralizers concerning how to shape one's life is one of the ineluctable components of our modern self-understanding. This is why the liberal black box may seem to be one of the conditions of possibility of modern self-determination and what first creates the free space in which different ways of life can develop (or maintain themselves) undisturbed.

The guiding assumption of the present study is that there is something wrong with this thesis—indeed that, in certain respects, things are precisely the reverse. If we abandon the internal constitution of our social practices and forms of life to "extra-philosophical darkness," as Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has put it, we are in danger of accepting them in an inappropriate way as *given*. To do so would be to declare something that has public significance over hastily to be an ineluctable question of personal identity and thereby to insulate thematic domains that should remain within the catchment area of democratic collective self-determination against rational argumentation. Perhaps the burden of proof should be reversed: it is no easy matter to exclude the ethical question of how to live one's life from processes of individual or collective decision-making. It has always already been answered, implicitly or explicitly, in every social formation. This also holds for the form of social organization that embraces the pluralism of forms of life. But then to ask whether forms of life can be criticized is, in a certain sense, to ask the wrong question. It is not *in spite of* but precisely *because of* the situation of modern society—where this is understood following Hegel as the "immense power which draws everything to itself"—that the evaluation of forms of life cannot be relegated to the preserve of particular preferences and ineluctable ties.

This becomes particularly apparent in situations of social conflict and upheaval. Thus, there are situations in which technological innovations—think, for example, of genetic engineering—suddenly open hitherto unquestioned ethical principles up to debate. But also confrontations with other forms of life can give rise to conflicts, crises, and acute disruptions of our self-understanding in which the contents and basic orientations of our own and the other form of life themselves are exposed to scrutiny and established social practices become questionable. Here one need not immediately think of the conflicts that are often mistakenly hypostatized into "clashes of cultures" or of crises in the foundations of our moral systems of reference. Quite commonplace controversies over the design of urban space[1] or public support for childcare;[2] over the marketization of goods such as health, education, or housing; or over our society's understanding of itself as a work-oriented society can also be understood as conflicts over the integrity and constitution of forms of life.

Criticism of forms of life, therefore, is not concerned with "icing on the cake" questions of the good life (in the sense of a luxurious philosophy of the art of living)—that is, with questions that would only be worth posing after basic problems of social organization had been solved. What is at stake is the internal constitution of those institutions and supraindividual connections that lend our lives a certain form and within which our possibilities for acting and shaping practices first arise. But if the project of modernity, the claim of individuals to "live their own lives," is not simply a matter of being free from the interference of others, then—according to the thesis defended here—public as well as philosophical reflection concerning forms of life is less a problematic intervention in residues of individual or collective identity that must not be questioned than the condition of the possibility of transforming one's conditions of life and making them one's own. Criticism of forms of life—or better: a *critical theory of criticism of forms of life*—as I understand it here, therefore, is not intended as advocacy of a relapse into premodern paternalism, but instead as an exploration of the conditions of what can be conceived in the tradition of critical theory as a ferment of individual and collective *emancipation processes*.

This perspective also differs from the dreaded "moral dictatorship" in that it is part of a quest whose starting point is not the insistence on the single right form of life, but instead the insight into the many shortcomings of our own forms of life and of those of others. As Hilary Putnam puts it: "Our problem is not that we must choose from among an already fixed and defined number of optimal ways of life; our problem is that *we don't know of even one optimal way of life.*"[3] But if we do not know a single good form of life, then we would first have to develop it in processes in which the notion of ineluctable identities and the associated conceptions of the good are already disintegrating. The boundary between the "inside" and the "outside" of a form of life on which notions of their ineluctability in some respects rest thereby becomes porous, as does the collective "we" appealed to here. Then the difference between conflicts within and conflicts between cultures, too, loses much of its importance. Whether we argue (interculturally) about arranged marriages or (intraculturally) about gay marriage is not a categorical difference—if one tries to obstruct the separation between inside and outside in the perspective adopted here—but at most a question of sensitivity to the specificity of contexts. Forms of life, in this understanding, are not only the *object* but also the *result* of disputes.

My study starts from the assumption not only that we *can* criticize forms of life but also that we *should* criticize them (and thus ourselves in the conduct of our lives) and that we also *always already do this,* implicitly or explicitly. To evaluate and to criticize—and this holds especially for the so-called post traditional societies—is part of what it means to share a form of life and (in doing so) to be confronted with other forms of life. The claim I will explore in the following investigation is therefore that one can argue about forms of life, and one can do so *with reasons.* Forms of life imply validity claims that cannot be bracketed without consequences, even if here it is not a matter of ultimately justifiable (and in this sense compelling) reasons. Mediated by the question of their criticizability, therefore, what is at stake is also the specific *rationality of forms of life.*

The subject of my book is thus the question of the *possibility* of criticism of forms of life. Its goal is to elaborate a certain conception of criticism and to defend it with arguments, not to provide a social-critical diagnosis of a specific form of life.

It is no accident that I pose the question of the success *[Gelingen]*[4] of forms of life from the perspective of *criticism.* My intention is not to develop the general conception of a right form of life in the abstract, because in my view such inclusive ethical designs are neither desirable nor promising. I will focus instead in a negativistic sense on the specific ways in which forms of life can *fail,* on the crises to which they succumb, and on the problems they may encounter—hence, on the respects in which something can be "wrong" with forms of life and in which as a result they expose themselves to criticism.

Moreover, the fact that I am concerned here with the structure and dynamics of *forms of life* (and accordingly take the concept of a form of life employed in the debate seriously) instead of approaching the problem from the angle of the justifiability of ethical values is not merely rooted in how language is used in a special philosophical discussion.[5] The perspective of the success of forms of life—conceived, as I propose, as ensembles of social practices—enables us to develop criteria of evaluation that take their orientation from the normative conditions of the success of these practices.

The moment of dysfunction or *crisis* will turn out to be an important moving force of what will be called "criticism" in my outline. If criticism of forms of life, as I want to understand it here, begins where problems, crises, or conflicts arise, then it is not conducted from an external, authoritarian standpoint but is, one could say, the ferment of a process in which criticism and self-criticism are intertwined. To outline the respective opposed moments, therefore, the form of criticism at which I am aiming will not be "ethically abstinent," nor will it be paternalistic; it does not adopt a relativistic stance on the validity claims of forms of life, but in spite of this it should not have any antipluralist implications. And in the end it will turn out that it is precisely the fact that forms of life can be understood as historically developing learning processes endowed with normative claims to validity that is the key to their evaluation.

The structure of my study is straightforward. In the Introduction, the question and my approach are set forth in terms of the controversy with the opposing position—that is, with the different variants of "ethical abstinence." Then Part 1 raises the question of what constitutes a form of life—understood as an ensemble of social practices. Part 2 develops the specific normativity of forms of life and presents a concept of forms of life as ensembles of practices oriented to solving problems. Part 3 deals with forms of criticism and develops the concept of a "strong" version of immanent criticism inspired by the critique of ideology. Finally, Part 4 develops the idea of a normative social learning process. In this way, the question of when a form of life is deficient or successful is transformed into the question of the criteria for the success or failure *[Gelingen oder Nichtgelingen]* of such a process as a rational learning process.

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This book is an extensively revised version of my postdoctoral thesis, with which I acquired the professorial qualification in early 2009 in the department of philosophy of Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

Also, this book would have been inconceivable without the support of Axel Honneth. I am indebted to our almost fifteen-year collaboration for philosophical inspiration and encouragement, but also for the model of an approach to philosophizing that does not shirk big questions but, notwithstanding its seriousness, does not succumb to the pathologies of self-conceit. It is also difficult to overestimate the importance of my philosophical exchange and friendship with Fred Neuhouser. This book owes more to the impulses I have received from him than may be apparent at first sight.

I would not have been able to withstand the pressure in the crowded months prior to completing the habilitation without the support of a whole team of friends and colleagues who discussed the project continually with me and provided detailed comments on the text as it took shape. For this cooperation, in the very best sense of the term, I would like to thank Robin Celikates, Gustav Falke, Martin Saar, and Titus Stahl. They know how important and momentous their support was for me during this crucial phase and how much the longstanding cooperation and friendship—and the diverse interests, experiences, and projects we share—have taught me to understand philosophy also as a shared form of life. I would like to thank Rainer Forst and Stefan Gosepath for their long-standing collegiality, friendship, and philosophical inspiration—"notwithstanding all reasonable disagreement." To Martin Seel and Karl-Heinz Kohl I am indebted for their willingness to participate in the habilitation process as reviewers. I would like to thank Regina Kreide for her constant encouragement and for our weekly late-night discussions in Frankfurt. Daniel Loick, whose understanding of the political and lifeworld subtext of the topics discussed here is unsurpassed, provided helpful commentary on the work and encouraged me in every conceivable way to advance the project.

In this case, as so often, a long path remained to be traveled between submitting the academic thesis and the finished book manuscript. Lukas Kübler certainly had the most important influence on the final product. His deep hermeneutical intuition meant that at times he understood my project better than I did myself, edited the text with an amazing grasp of the problems and unimpeachable integrity, and enriched it with innumerable suggestions. At crucial moments Eva von Recker provided not only a final "sanity check" but also the necessary confirmation. In addition, at various times Georg Brunner, Margarete Stokowski, and Dana Sindermann were involved in the final proofreading of the manuscript, and at the very end Frank Lachmann, Lea Prix, and Selana Tzschiesche made decisive contributions. I owe them all a major debt of gratitude. With her dedicated and considerate remarks on the German text, Eva Gilmer showed me for the first time what professional editing can actually achieve. I am sincerely grateful to her for this and for her unflagging indulgence with a tardy author. Finally, I would like to thank Carina Nagel for her assistance in editing the text of the translation.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the employees of the Staatsbibliothek at Potsdamer Platz. As in the case of previous publications (in fact, of all of my previous publications), the library provided me with a stimulating public space where I was able to work undisturbed.

The entire period of work on this project coincided with the first years in the life of my son Jakob, my smallest, greatest happiness. That the first sentence of this study was written on the first day of the parental leave of my husband, Andreas Fischer, is no accident. Without his infinite patience, trust, and support it would not have been possible to realize this seemingly endless project. To both of you I dedicate this book—even if it is not a "proper book"!

Note on the Translation

This book is a reflection on forms of life and, in particular, how critique or criticism of forms of life is possible and what it involves. Since the notion of *Kritik* is of central importance for the present study and the German term can be translated either as "critique" or "criticism," it seemed advisable for the sake of clarity to adopt a consistent policy on the use of the English terms throughout the book. Thus, as a general rule *Kritik* has been translated here as "criticism" when it refers to the philosophical activity of criticizing forms of life in general, and "critique" has been reserved for the more specific sense of a strategy or line of criticism of a particular form of life, as in "Hegel's critique of the romantic conception of marriage" or "Marx's critique of capitalism."

The other term in the book's German title, "*Lebensform*," can be translated in a variety of ways, ranging from "way of life," "habit of life," and "lifestyle" to "lifeform." Since the term is central to the project pursued in this book—indeed, one of its central concerns is to develop and defend a philosophical conception of what constitutes a *Lebensform*—it seemed advisable to translate it uniformly as "form of life," and to reserve such terms as "way of life" and "lifestyle" for phenomena with which it is explicitly contrasted in Chapter 1. The one exception to the policy of translating "*Lebensform*" as "form of life" is where the author speaks of the *Lebensform* of giraffes or lions. In this case the biologically connoted term "lifeform" is a more appropriate translation, since animals do not have forms of life in the sense developed in this study.

A particular challenge for translation was posed by the author's extensive use of Hegelian terms (reflecting her understanding of critical theory as a Hegelian project). One of the examples of criticism discussed in detail in the book is Hegel's critique of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as a work-oriented society. "*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*" is standardly rendered as "civil society" in translations of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*; however, aside from having quite different connotations in contemporary political philosophy, the term "civil society" fails to capture the proto-Marxist elements of Hegel's critique of work-oriented society highlighted in the present study. Hence it was decided to translate "*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*" as "bourgeois civil society" with reference to Hegel but as "bourgeois society" in discussions of Marx, for whom the term "bourgeois" has, of course, strong connotations of social class and class conflict that it lacks for Hegel. It also seemed advisable to translate "*bürgerliche Ehe*" in discussions of Hegel's critique thereof with "bourgeois civil marriage," rather than with the more neutral "civil marriage," to signal that Hegel is referring to a historically specific formation that did not exist in this form earlier in history (rather than to the institution of civil marriage as such).

Other Hegelian terms that feature centrally and call for special treatment are "*Sittlichkeit*," "*Wirklichkeit*," "*Aufhebung*," and "*Entzweiung*." Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* is universally translated as "ethical life," a practice that is retained here since it presents no problems of comprehension for informed readers. However, to follow the practice of translating the related adjective "*sittlich*" simply as "ethical" would have been potentially quite misleading, since the English word lacks the social-institutional connotations of "*sittlich*" that the author wishes to highlight; moreover, for many readers it might have Aristotelian associations (of an individual ethics of virtue and the good life) that she wishes to avoid, or it might invoke the philosophical contrast between "ethical" and "moral" forms of judgment and criticism that she explicitly criticizes. Thus, it seemed imperative to translate "*sittlich*" with adjectival phrases that make the connection to Hegel's notion of ethical life explicit, so that, for example, "*sittliche Norm*" is rendered as "norm of ethical life" and "*sittliche Institution*" as "institution of ethical life."

The term "*Wirklichkeit*" is used in the present study in its general meaning of "reality" but also, with reference to Hegel, in the specifically Hegelian sense of "actuality." For Hegel, an entity can be real or possess reality without being actual or exhibiting actuality. Thus, a human child is a real human being but, insofar as it has yet to develop the full potential implicit in the concept of a human being, and hence does not yet correspond to its concept, it lacks actuality. Accordingly, where "*Verwirklichung*" refers to the process of development though which an entity actualizes the potential implicit in its concept in this Hegelian sense it is translated as "actualization" (and, accordingly, the verb "*verwirklichen*" as "actualize" and the adjective "*wirklich*" as "actual").

Generations of Hegel translators have despaired of finding an English word that adequately captures the meaning of the central Hegelian concept of "*Aufhebung*," which refers to a process of development in which a higher or more advanced stage both supersedes or annuls the previous stage while nevertheless also preserving its essential features in a new constellation. For this reason, the term specifically invented for this purpose, "sublation," and the associated verb "sublate," continue to be used in contemporary translations and discussions of Hegel and hence are also retained here. However, other invented words from earlier generations of translations of Hegel that serve more to obscure than to clarify the meaning of his thought have been avoided. A case in point is the term "*Entzweiung*," which is translated here with "division" (and the corresponding verb "*entzweien*" with "divide") rather than in the traditional way as "diremption" (even though the latter is still occasionally encountered in discussions of Hegel in English).

Finally, a point of translation that should be kept in mind when reading this book concerns what is meant by speaking of the "success" of problem-solving practices and, by extension, of the "success" of forms of life as such. In relation to forms of life and to the practices that, according to the analysis developed here, are constitutive of them, "success" means something more than the instrumental realization of a purpose or a goal that could be specified independently of the practice or form of life in question. "Success" in this more demanding sense of "*Gelingen*" (as opposed to mere "*Erfolg*") means that a practice or form of life satisfies criteria that are contained in its concept and hence are (implicitly) posited with it, so that the successful development can be reconstructed in rational terms. Moreover, according to the analysis developed in this book, the criteria in question always also have a normative meaning, so that the "success" of forms of life and their constitutive practices also has the normative connotation of “going well” or “turning out well,” as opposed to the merely functional sense of “working out.” Where it seemed imperative to highlight these noninstrumental and nonfunctional connotations of “*Gelingen*” and the corresponding adjective “*gelungen*,” “succeed” and cognate words have been supplemented with the verbs “turn out well” and “flourish” and cognates.

Introduction

Against "Ethical Abstinence"

We make and cannot escape making value judgments. . . .
Nor do we treat these judgments as matters of mere taste.

—Hilary Putnam

What is criticism of forms of life, and why do we engage in it? In the following introduction, I would like to spell out the issue to be addressed in this book under three headings: What does it mean to criticize forms of life *as* forms of life? What is at stake with the possibility of criticizing forms of life? Why should philosophy undertake such a project?

In approaching these questions, I will (1) elaborate in detail the specific character of a critical thematization of forms of life, (2) defend my line of inquiry against positions that for various reasons recommend "abstinence" regarding the evaluation of forms of life, (3) outline my approach, and (4) provide an overview of the further course of the argument.

1. What Does It Mean to Criticize Forms of Life *as* Forms of Life?

Someone who becomes seriously indignant when she sees another person eating bananas or wearing red cowboy boots is likely to inspire mirth. Even if you feel revulsion at the thought of bananas or are overcome by a fit of derisive laughter at the sight of red cowboy boots, it is hard to imagine a meaningful debate over the rights and wrongs of eating bananas or wearing red cowboy boots. These things, as they say, are everyone's own business and, quite literally, matters of taste. Things are different when we observe someone spanking her child. Here we become indignant, and we believe we do so with good reason. We are fully convinced that this is neither a question of taste nor a "personal matter" and that it is our moral duty to intervene.

But how do things stand when it is a question of whether someone is living in a polyamorous relationship or in a nuclear family, or whether intimacy takes place in a chat room or in Tantric workshops? How do we judge the custom of young families living with the parents of one of the partners—or, conversely, the fact (already emphasized in Hegel's depiction of the bourgeois family) that the nuclear family which is decisive for modern bourgeois society is typically constituted at a spatial and economic remove from the family of origin? And what do we do when it is not a question of spanking children but of the widespread practice of using the television as a babysitter? On what do we base our opinions about the spread of shopping malls in public space, traffic planning, or the subvention of single-family homes? Why do we choose to spend our free time in the theater, the cinema, or the pub instead of in front of the television? And why do we prefer living in the city to living in the country (or vice versa)? Finally, how do we distinguish between good or meaningful work and mindless, alienated work? And what criteria do we use to evaluate the work ethos that is widespread in our societies?

We also frequently take positions on such questions, sometimes even quite emphatically. We criticize the passivity and reclusiveness of television consumers. We are repelled by the conventionalism of marital cohabitation or regard polyamorous relationships as illusory. We find life in a nuclear family too isolated or, on the contrary, consider life in a larger family unit to be unacceptably restrictive. We enthuse about the vibrancy of urban life or about how comfortable life is in the provinces. We defend the "right to idleness" or see work as the main purpose of life. And where capitalism becomes too obtrusive—for example, when cultural values are subordinated to commerce—we may fear that our lives will become shallow or impoverished, or even be deprived of reality.

The positions hinted at here concern what I will address in my study under the heading of "forms of life." Differences in forms of life can become virulent in conflicts between different cultures or societies as well as within a particular society. Thus, the debate over the legal recognition of same-sex marriages in the United States and in Western Europe is underpinned by a conflict of values internal to the respective cultures; in dealing with arranged marriages, on the other hand, differences between cultures come into play, even though the boundary between intra- and intercultural conflicts is not always as easy to draw as it seems at first glance.

However, no matter how decided our opinions may be in some cases or how acrimonious the public conflict, the actual argumentative status of these positions remains unclear.[1] Are we inviting ridicule, as in the case of the red cowboy boots, when we look for reasons for wanting to convince someone of our opinion, or even get worked up in the process? Doesn't everyone have to decide for herself how to behave here? In such cases, are there any better or worse options and positions that can be intersubjectively communicated and justified, and hence claim context-transcending validity? Can our forms of life be (rationally) justified, therefore, beyond the sheer fact that they *are* our forms of life? And can anything more be said about the success or the failure of forms of life than that sometimes they simply succeed or fail? These are the questions that will be addressed in this book.

Forms of Life as Cultural Formations

The talk of forms of life, as I understand it, refers to forms of human coexistence shaped by culture, to "orders of human coexistence"[2] that include an "ensemble of practices and orientations"[3] but also their institutional manifestations and materializations. Therefore, differences in forms of life find expression not only in different beliefs, value orientations, and attitudes but are also manifested and materialized in fashion, architecture, legal systems, and forms of family organization, in what Robert Musil called the "the durable stuff of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions" that constitutes our lives.[4]

As *forms* in which life is lived, they belong (on a Hegelian conception) to the sphere of "objective spirit," or also, in Hannah Arendt's terms, to the specifically human world in which human life, in contrast to other biological life, unfolds.[5] Therefore, forms of life as they will be discussed here concern the *cultural and social reproduction of human life*. This is a definitional decision grounded in the fact that it seems obvious to speak of a form of life only where something is *shaped* (or formed), and hence could also be *reshaped,* but not yet where something continually repeats itself according to a typical pattern or follows an unalterable course guided by instincts. In other words, my question concerns *forms of life in the plural,* that is, the different cultural forms that human life can assume, not (from the perspective of ethical naturalism) *the* human form of life—in contrast to that of lions, say.[6]

Here one should not be misled by the apparently private character of the examples of discussions of forms of life cited above. The positions mentioned become established or are rejected based on cultural models and shared values. They concern questions of the conduct of life that transcend the individual and find expression in established social practices and institutions. Thus, forms of life are not individual options but transpersonal forms of expression that possess public relevance. Observing or refusing to observe a gender-specific code of conduct, for example, is a disposition that is not even available on an individual level insofar as it rests on socially constituted patterns of behavior and meanings. Moreover, one's own behavior in such cases inevitably affects not only those who observe such a pattern (or do not, as the case may be); it also shapes everyone's possible range of behavior.[7] In addition, forms of life have political and economic framework conditions. The very existence of single-family houses depends on institutional (and politically defined) conditions, such as zoning plans or government subsidies for owner-occupied homes;[8] family life with children is shaped by the existence or nonexistence of public childcare facilities, and the availability of high-quality theatrical performances ultimately depends on the public funding of culture .

Where the options in question may seem too trivial to be the subject of debates at all, it should be pointed out that, from the perspective of an analysis of forms of life, even the most mundane everyday activities can in case of doubt be read as (particular) manifestations of a general form of life.[9] These commonplace attitudes and lifestyles are therefore bearers of meaning—and that would even hold for the red cowboy boots, which are a hackneyed expression of a certain notion of masculinity and independence.

Criticizing Forms of Life as Forms of Life

What does it mean, then, to thematize forms of life *as* forms of life in the above-mentioned cases? What exactly is the object domain of a critique of forms of life that evaluates forms of life as such and what procedure or method does it adopt?

Such a critique focuses on the specific constitution—that is, a *qualitative* dimension of the attitudes and practices—of a form of life, in contrast, for example, to its consequences. For instance, it focuses on the moral quality of the form of life in question in the sense of harm to or unjustified treatment of others. Thus, to borrow a distinction of Charles Larmore's, it is a matter of the *intrinsic content* of the forms of life in question, not of their external effects.[10] Reformulated in terms of the opposition between the "good life" and "justice," to criticize something as a form of life in this sense is to ask whether a life form *as such* is flourishing or has turned out well—or is even rational—and not only whether it reflects a just social order in the narrower sense.[11] As it happens, the distinction between the "good" and the "right" life is itself contested, and its utility is a matter of dispute. However, this first demarcation should make it clear that the evaluation of forms of life opens up a broad and inclusive field of practical questions that cannot be subsumed under the narrower domain of questions of relevance for morality or justice.

Commodification as a Form-of-Life Problem

The specificity of a form of criticism aimed in this sense at the intrinsic content of a form of life is perhaps best illustrated by one of the current discussions mentioned in the preface. The marketization of more and more areas of life, as this is sometimes diagnosed for capitalist societies, involves an intermingling of several dimensions. The problem that areas of life not previously organized along market lines—for example, the sphere of human reproduction, but also education and health care—are coming under the sway of the market is, on the one hand, a problem of justice. It is typically poorer women who hire themselves out as surrogate mothers, marketized health care is in most cases two-class or multiclass health care, and an education system organized in accordance with the economic imperatives of the market is open to the suspicion that it primarily promotes the self-reproduction of the elites.

On the other hand, the problem of commodification also raises the question of the "success" of a social order or its "going well" in a broader sense. Even if, purely hypothetically, the deficiency of marketized institutions as regards justice could be made good through fair distribution at a basic level, this would not even touch upon, let alone answer, the question of whether there are goods that should not be marketized—irrespective of the distribution conditions. The issue here is what repercussions understanding certain goods as commodities and treating them in accordance with economic efficiency has for our understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a society and for the shape and functioning of our social practices. Those who share this understanding of the problem point in one way or another to the *inappropriateness* of applying economic criteria to certain areas of social life and claim that the specific nature of certain goods is misunderstood once they are treated as "an object of huckstering" (Karl Marx). What is addressed, therefore, is the intrinsic meaning of those practices in which our (common) life takes shape; what is up for debate are the qualitatively different ways of dealing with ourselves and with the things we value. Hence, the problem concerns the very constitution of our form of life as such—the goods themselves and not their distribution within the limits laid down by such an "order of appreciation" *[Wertschätzungsordnung]*.[12]

It should now be clear that, where forms of life are addressed, debated, and criticized as forms of life, what is at stake is not only what the best way of acting is within a given framework of purposes in order to achieve these purposes or how, within a given framework of value orientations, the most appropriate realization of these orientations should be conceived.[13] Rather, it is a matter of thematizing such purposes themselves, hence not only of the distribution of goods or opportunities to exercise influence, but also of what shape the very goods and the associated social practices should assume. Therefore, if what was thematized is not only the unjust effects of marketization but also what it means to treat goods as being for sale or not for sale, not only the distribution or the appropriate remuneration of work but also its *meaning,* then here—to use a helpful formulation of George Lohmann—the "proto-values" of a form of life themselves become contested.[14] But such a debate reveals just how far from self-evident certain ways of establishing such "proto-values" actually are and to what extent they are a product of certain historical and social constellations (and interests). Then the internal constitution of forms of life becomes the subject of discussion, and the black box is opened up.

Criticism of Forms of Life as Reflection on Framework Conditions of Action

Hence, criticism of forms of life is not only aimed at a different object domain from, say, the theory of justice, but at the same time it adopts a specific perspective: it not only examines *different things,* it also examines *things differently.* The most productive way of explaining what it means to criticize forms of life as forms of life is perhaps as follows: criticism of forms of life deals not only with our actions—hence, with what we (ought to) do—but also with the *frame of reference* within which we act and orient ourselves. As a result, our normative orientations, the concepts in terms of which we understand ourselves and the entire arsenal of social practices that determine our options for action, are examined with regard to their internal shape and quality.

Hilary Putnam's concept of "unchastity" (as an example of one of the "thick" ethical concepts that may be discussed in relation to normative questions) provides a good illustration of what is intended here.[15] If a statement like "We should avoid unchaste behavior" but also such statements as "Honor is a woman's most prized possession" or "That's a well-behaved child" (with the attendant emphasis on discipline in education) strike us as strange and inappropriate, then this is not so much because we advocate an unchaste over a chaste life or a dishonorable over an honorable life, or because we favor undisciplined over disciplined behavior. Rather, it is the frame defined by these concepts that we are rejecting. Then we have different positions about whether "chastity," "honor," or "discipline" should have a place in our ethical vocabulary at all. It is the reference system of social practices and interpretations itself, the understanding of the world in which these concepts are important, that we find wrong or strange. Criticizing forms of life *as forms of life* is therefore in large part a matter of thematizing the meaning and constitution, as well as the interpretation, of the concepts in terms of which we discuss what we do and ought to do. Up for debate here are not only practical-evaluative questions—that is, questions of *right action*—but already differences over the appropriateness of collective patterns of interpretation, and hence over the *correct conception of the world.*[16]

Of course, the framework conditions thus described are not always fully available, and it is not always easy to discover them. Therefore, even thematizing these framework conditions as such, and thus rendering them conspicuous or visible, is far from a minor practical problem for a critique of forms of life. Examples of how productive such a disclosure can be are classical social emancipation movements such as the women's movement.[17] These movements can actually be defined by the fact that they demonstrate that such framework conditions are not a matter of course by denaturalizing them and objecting to them in a variety of ways. For, in order to be able to criticize a form of life, we first have to *see* that concepts such as chastity, honor, and discipline (and the associated repertoire of practices and ideas) are far from obvious or even spontaneous developments but are part of established forms of life. The controversy over forms of life therefore has a denaturalizing effect: it strips something that appears to be self-evident of its legitimacy.

An Intermediate Level

Although I began by distinguishing between questions of taste (the red cowboy boots) and problems that aim at morally justified imperatives and prohibitions (spanking children), the issues involved in the criticism of forms of life seem to be located in an ill-defined intermediate domain. The problems posed here appear to be intermediate-level problems situated between moral imperatives and prohibitions, on the one hand, and questions of taste (or ones properly assigned to purely individual and arbitrary decision-making), on the other. A form of life centered on television or shopping malls may be bleak, civil marriage conventional, life in the provinces boring, an interest in esotericism regressive, townhouse windows decorated with porcelain cats tawdry, and the ideal of beauty pursued by means of cosmetic surgery sterile. But these things neither cause direct harm nor violate the principle of universal respect for the autonomy of others.[18] However, the fact that a form of criticism which addresses such questions employs a vocabulary that is richer than that of "right or wrong" and "good or bad" points to something important. The vocabulary we use to qualify and criticize forms of life is composed of, in Bernard Williams's expression, "thick ethical concepts."[19] Forms of life may succeed or fail, flourish or become impoverished; they may be sterile, lifeless, tawdry, bleak, or regressive—or, conversely, they may be cool, original, enthralling, fascinating, or progressive. But this does not necessarily mean that the operative criteria are "soft" or that a critique that makes use of such criteria involves only reduced validity claims. But how exactly are such validity claims constituted?

One could describe the goal of the conceptualization of criticism of forms of life as follows: it is to spell out systematically the intermediate level between prohibition and individual whim, a level that seems to have argumentatively dried up to a certain extent in the face of the dominant currents in political liberalism and Kantian moral philosophy. In other words, my goal is to bring light into the "extra-philosophical darkness"[20] into which ethical questions have been relegated in the philosophical constellation described. In the process, it may transpire that the darkness prevailing in this area, or even the "code of silence"[21] to which it is subject, is possibly due to the merely purported brightness of a light source that always illuminates the space of practical reasons from the vantage point of the primacy of the right over the good.

2. *Should* One Criticize Forms of Life? For and against "Ethical Abstinence"

But *should* one criticize forms of life? Doesn't such a form of criticism, when it seeks to be binding, inevitably lead to paternalism and moral dictatorship? In his essay "Ancient and Modern Ethics," Ernst Tugendhat sees the "emancipatory political thrust" of the modern conception of morality as residing specifically in "the conviction, fundamental for the liberal conception of law, that it should be left up to each individual how he or she conducts his or her life." And although he concedes that this "prohibition on interfering with the autonomy of the individual" does not directly presuppose that there "cannot be objectively justifiable principles governing how to conduct one's life," he notes that "where people believe in such principles . . . it is but a short step to a moral dictatorship."[22]

But at stake are not only opportunities for individual self-realization beyond collective pressures to justify and restrictions imposed by ethical life and tradition. Successful cohabitation within a multicultural society seems to depend on the recognition of difference and plurality, and hence on an attitude of liberal self-restraint and bracketing one's own tradition and way of life vis-à-vis the diversity of competing forms of life. Here sensitivity to context is an important virtue, and recognition of the difficulties of interpretation in the face of confrontation with "foreign" societies is an important insight. The processes of individualization, pluralization, and reflexivity that shape the actual development of modernity—as well as the ideas of autonomy, self-determination, and self-realization that constitute its normative content—seem to be inseparable from the notion that a universally binding form of ethical life is no longer possible, and correspondingly neither can there be a standpoint from which forms of life can be criticized.

Therefore, a variety of currents in contemporary political philosophy formulate conceptions that proclaim a position of ethical-epistemic abstinence directed against interference in questions of the shaping of forms of life, and thus (also) circumvent, "contain," or obviate the thematization of forms of life. (This is the attitude that I called a "black box mentality" in the preface.) The two most influential expressions of this position are probably political liberalism, with its pragmatic justification of the need for neutrality toward forms of life, and the assertion, defended by Jürgen Habermas among others, that there is a categorical difference between morality and ethics. In the following, I would like to examine these two positions briefly in order to motivate the need to reopen the question of the rational evaluation and criticism of forms of life in the light of their deficiencies.

Rawls: Liberal Neutrality and Reasonable Disagreement

The idea of liberal neutrality toward forms of life is rooted in a practical problem-solving strategy. If the European Wars of Religion marked the historical birth of liberalism, then there is a direct line leading from the relevant reaction to those wars—namely, the notion of containing the internecine conflict potential of ideological and religious differences by privatizing and individualizing their content—right up to present-day political liberalism.[23] Thus, political liberalism (in its various facets[24]) argues that, given the "fact of reasonable pluralism" (John Rawls), the key institutions of social life regulated by the state must be ethically neutral in order to be able to do justice to the ineluctable diversity of forms of life. According to Ronald Dworkin: "political decisions must be, so far as is possible, independent of any particular conception of the good life, or of what gives value to life."[25] Charles Larmore adds in the same vein: "Political liberalism has been the doctrine that . . . the state should be neutral. The state should not seek to promote any particular conception of the good life because of its presumed *intrinsic* superiority—that is, because it is supposedly a truer conception."[26] Therefore, conceptions of justice based on the ideal of neutrality abstain from evaluating the content of the respective conceptions of the good (supported by persons or groups). As a result, the highest degree of openness toward conceptions of the good whose content makes them mutually incompatible is achieved by an explicitly political conception of justice as fairness as this is conceived by John Rawls,[27] so that the individual members of such a well-ordered just society are enabled to pursue their individual life plans as long as these do not undermine the conditions of cohabitation within a just society. The necessary "overlapping consensus" is thus made possible by the fact that the evaluation of the contents of life plans, of ideas of the good, and ultimately of forms of life remains "outside."

Granted, the different liberal conceptions understand neutrality in very different ways (and in stronger and weaker terms). In particular, Rawls in his later work does not deny the ethical basis of the relatively thin core morality achieved in this way and that it bears the imprint of the values of liberal modern democratic societies. Nevertheless, the idea underlying a nonethical and nonperfectionist version of liberalism remains that the validity claim informing the strong demands of comprehensive ethical orientations must be neutralized in order to make that consensus possible.

Different motives may inform such a primarily pragmatically inspired position.[28] Rawls's thesis of "reasonable disagreement" concerning conceptions of the good represents a serious theoretical approach and is worked out in an especially consistent way. According to this thesis, two positions regarding the same ethical question may be equally rational but nevertheless lead to contrary results. But then the differences that exist cannot be overcome through a process of rational clarification, even assuming a willingness to reach agreement. Politically speaking, therefore, a "method of avoidance" is recommended that brackets such differences and contains the disagreements on the basis of an underlying agreement on the political principles governing social life. Such a conception, as Rawls himself stresses, is philosophically speaking decidedly flat inasmuch as any deeper thematization would become entangled in the controversies of specific conceptions of the good.

Habermas: Ethical Abstinence

The starting point for Habermas's conception (and its restraint when it comes to forms of life) is not only the diagnosis of pluralism, which he shares, and the insight into the fact of conflict in modern societies over questions of the right way to live. Although it has many of the same practical consequences as the liberal idea of neutrality, the Habermasian position (like the approaches that agree with him in this respect) has a special thrust that I discuss in what follows under the heading of "ethical abstinence." Here the assumption that a just social order should be neutral toward its members' conceptions of the good life translates into the categorical distinction between *morality* and *ethics*.[29] According to this construction, morality concerns the unconditionally and universally valid norms of social life, and hence the basic recognition and basic forms of respect that human beings unconditionally owe each other according to a Kantian morality of respect and duties. The moral points of view are therefore the yardstick against which every particular form of life would have to be justified. From this is distinguished the domain (or better, the point of view) of ethics, in which it is a matter of the success or failure of forms of life. Thus ethics deals with questions of our existential self-understanding that affect our individual and collective identity and as such are not generalizable precisely because they are based on values that can only claim particular validity.[30]

This subdivision of the space of practical reasons into a sphere of universal moral reason confined to the "narrow core meaning of morality" and the wider space of ethical questions has more than merely pragmatic significance in the context of Habermas's theory of modernity. For modernity, according to Habermas, can be conceived as a movement of differentiation of validity claims in which questions of the "right way to live" have become separated from those of the "good life," with the effect that the responsibility for their own "good life" now resides with the individuals themselves.[31] This splitting and differentiation of the space of practical reasons into universalistic moral and particularistic ethical points of view establishes a difference that was completely unknown to traditional ethics and virtue-ethical approaches in which ethical and moral rules are not clearly separated. Whereas in the modern era it is no longer possible to make a uniform and substantive notion of the good life binding, this differentiation establishes a sphere of reciprocal demands that can nevertheless claim validity independently of what "connects or separates" those affected "in concrete terms and what notions of the good, the desirable, and happiness they may have."[32] Ethically thicker positions that do not withstand such a claim to validity are exempted from this claim for this very reason. Jürgen Habermas coined the characteristic formulation "ethical abstinence" for this position. As philosophers, we should accordingly abstain from evaluating such questions and concentrate on interventions in the domain of moral disputes—what he elsewhere refers to as the "core area of morality." Regardless of this, as citizens we must confront all sorts of ethical conflicts, in particular also the conflicts over this very demarcation.[33]

The morality-ethics distinction is also motivated by the diagnosis of the ethical pluralism of the modern world.[34] For its most determined proponents, however, it is not only a distinction that can help bring about a pragmatic modus vivendi. Rather, they take a more enthusiastic view of it as a sign of the progress of modern moral philosophy, or even (as in Charles Larmore's case) as an indication of the "maturity" of a moral philosophy. And whereas positions can be found within the broad field of political liberalism that remain guarded also concerning the universalizability of *moral* validity claims, the ethical abstinence of modern "Kantian" positions such as that of Habermas is in a sense the reverse side of (and perhaps even the price to be paid for) their moral universalism, even if the latter may not (any longer) want to affirm an ineluctable claim to ultimate grounding.[35] Justice is, in Habermas's succinct formulation, "not one value among others"; rather, it is beyond the scope of the competition among values that prevails in the ethical domain.[36] So this is no longer just a matter of searching for overlapping positions but of a categorical distinction that is supposed to separate out the domain of what can be determined in a universalistic manner from the other contentious domains and keep it at a distance from them. Thus, Kantianism in its different facets rescues the possibility of a context-transcending universalistic morality by isolating it as a morality of universalizable duties from questions about the good, happiness, or of the success of a form of life.[37] In Habermas's words: "[The] 'moral point of view' casts a bright but narrow cone of light that sets apart from the mass of evaluative questions those practical conflicts that can be *solved* with reference to a generalizable interest. These are questions of justice."[38] On the other hand, to this there often corresponds agnosticism with regard to ethical questions, which are correspondingly presented in a much more diffuse light. At least Habermas clearly states the consequences of this "well-founded abstinence" in ethical questions for the possible scope of attempts to exercise influence:

> We call the torture of human beings "cruel" not only among ourselves but everywhere. Yet we do not feel at all justified in objecting to disconcerting child-raising practices or marriage ceremonies, that is, against core components of the ethos of a foreign culture, as long as they do not contradict our *moral* standards. The latter are those central values which differ from other values in virtue of their universal claim to validity.[39]

Thus, what Joseph Raz asserts regarding John Rawls and Thomas Nagel also holds for Habermas (and for the authors who follow him in this regard): "They advocate an epistemic withdrawal from the fray."[40] And even if the one thing does not necessarily follow from the other, separating morality from ethics is often in fact the first step leading not only to a pragmatic-agnostic stance but also to de facto noncognitivism regarding ethical questions, which stands in stark contrast to the declared cognitivism regarding moral questions.[41]

But is the stance of ethical abstinence outlined here—and described elsewhere by Habermas as possibly "unsatisfactory but inevitable"—really so inevitable? Is it plausible—and above all, is it as viable a practical strategy as it is presumed to be? If I am critical of the liberal "avoidance strategies" in what follows, then I am not so much concerned to refute the positions outlined here as to thematize their *costs* and thereby to provide the motivation to reopen the proceedings as it were.

After all, the liberal avoidance strategy is guided above all by two practical considerations: first, the idea that conflicts in modern, pluralistic societies can be resolved justly, or can at least be "contained," in this way; and, second, (on the positive side) the antipaternalistic idea that this strategy best corresponds to the idea of the personal responsibility and autonomy of modern subjects. The doubts that I now want to express about the viability of ethical abstinence and liberal neutrality are, on the one hand, grounded in the factual inevitability of ethical decisions and in the predecided character of many ethical questions also in states that understand themselves as neutral. On the other hand, my doubts at the conceptual level concern the ethical character of the morality-ethics distinction itself and the potential for conflict to which it gives rise.

The Unavoidability of Ethical Questions

My thesis is that both the principle of abstinence and the idea of neutrality encounter a limit—not *in spite of* but precisely *because of* the situation of modern societies. For although abstinence in ethical matters seems to have become emblematic of modern societies and neutrality toward forms of life is presented as an important requirement specifically in relation to the modern state, one can with equal justification claim that specifically life under the conditions of modernity and of scientific-technological civilization increasingly confronts actors with problems that make the evaluation of forms of life inescapable. The question of the susceptibility of forms of life to evaluation would then be faced with the same finding that can be read out of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* as a kind of dialectic of individualization: while, on the one hand, modernity enables individuals to become independent from collective and traditional bonds (which Hegel expresses as the "right of the subject's *particularity* to find satisfaction"[42]), on the other hand, individuals in modern civil society are becoming increasingly dependent on social exchange and interaction and hence are becoming increasingly interdependent. "Thick ethical positions" would then be more difficult to justify to the extent that the question of their justification arises at all. In this sense, one must agree with Ludwig Siep when he remarks that

> modern forms of life have . . . such massive technical and infrastructural preconditions that they are impossible without substantial public services. But these services in turn create irreversible conditions governing the possibilities for choosing and realizing forms of life. . . . When such decisions are in effect made by the freedom of technological development, of the market and of public infrastructure provisions, then the notion that preferences and conceptions of happiness are formed privately subject only to the constraint of general rules of mutual respect becomes illusory. When public, legal decisions are taken on private happiness—through tax laws, public technology policy, etc.—then there should also be a general discussion on ways of life that do justice to human beings.[43]

Thus, while the proponents of liberal and Kantian positions regard restraint on ethical questions as the only appropriate solution given the plurality of modern societies, one could argue on the contrary that these societies in particular are especially dependent on the regulation of matters of common concern. Specifically, they (increasingly) rely on the regulation also of those matters that prove to be resistant to such attempts at bracketing.

A situation in which "public . . . decisions are taken on private happiness" calls for the debate over forms of life to be brought out of the darkness of the private sphere and into the public domain—specifically *in the interest of* the "emancipatory thrust of modern morality" (Ernst Tugendhat). Seen in this light, the critique of the "privatization of the good" (as Alasdair MacIntyre describes the corresponding situation[44]) is not actually based on unrealizable and backward-looking or even immature desires for a new, binding form of ethical life. It rests on the recognition of the fact that ethical concerns are also produced behind the backs of individuals and that a shared situation and ethically connoted shared conditions of individual life also exist where these are not obvious and are not freely chosen.

This finding has relevance for the possibility of political neutrality in dealing with divergent forms of life. Forms of life are always *politically instituted* from the outset and depend on public institutions. And even where several competing forms of life exist alongside each other within a given society, that occurs in turn under the umbrella of a higher-level form of life.[45] Thus, the abstinence doctrine turns out to be an ideological self-misunderstanding of the liberal neutrality thesis that obscures the fact that the selection of possible evaluative decisions is always already predecided in certain respects by the institutional framework of liberal societies as well.[46] The institution of the market in today's politically liberal and economically capitalist cultures is perhaps the best example of such an institution that operates as a neutral medium but in fact has significant impacts on forms of life. Or, in Hartmut Rosa's description of the dynamic, here a form of life presents itself as a kind of "meta-paradigm" and cleverly disguises the fact that it itself is bound to a particular horizon of understanding and value.[47] But if the social orders constituted in this way are *themselves forms of life,* then the public debate about forms of life contributes to our ability to take "our" form of life into consideration again first and foremost *as* a form of life.

The Ethical Character of the Morality-Ethics Distinction

In this way, the morality-ethics distinction itself also proves to be contingent on forms of life and falls short as a strategy for avoiding conflicts.

Let us return to Jürgen Habermas's remark and the distinction it makes between cruelty and the merely disconcerting character of a form of life different from our own. On closer examination, it becomes apparent that such a demarcation is not as self-evident as it may appear at first glance. When is an educational practice merely disconcerting, for example, and when is it morally reprehensible? Fifty years ago, corporal punishment of children was still regarded by many people (also within "our culture") not only as morally unobjectionable—indeed, even as morally required—but also as a private matter.[48] Today, most of us think that it is cruel and that we are justified in intervening. What counts as morally relevant cruelty is also interpreted very differently across different cultures. For instance, in Vietnam (to take a not especially martial example) it is considered cruel to let infants cry, whereas in Germany the thesis that screaming strengthens the lungs and character has proved to be remarkably resilient. So where does the domain of universally binding moral issues end and that of ineluctable (and in case of doubt even idiosyncratic) ethical value judgments begin?[49] And, correspondingly, what justifies a public objection?

If we apply the Habermasian dictum of abstinence to these examples, then something like this follows: we condemn the corporal punishment of children (as cruelty), but we do not feel justified per se in objecting to the underlying and possibly disconcerting conception of discipline, decency, and parental authority. So should we tolerate the white ribbon that the pastor in Michael Haneke's eponymous film has woven into the hair of his children in order, as he puts it, to remind them of "purity and innocence"—values the children have supposedly wantonly flouted simply by appearing too late for dinner—as just a disconcerting educational practice, while we openly criticize the scenes of chastisement and may even have them legally punished?

Translated into the cross-cultural setting, this reads as follows: we condemn honor killings and if necessary also the practice of forced marriages, but we do not feel justified in speaking out against the underlying patriarchal understanding of the family or the corresponding notion of honor. In practice, however, this stance leads to tricky situations. Up to what point is the established ethos of arranged marriage just that, and when does it become morally questionable forced marriage? Here the boundaries are fluid, especially since the means of coercion within the corresponding social structures are manifold. Moreover, the meaning of some social practices—such as the "arranging" of marriages—becomes apparent only in the context of the tightly woven fabric of meanings of other practices. Here not only the actual creation of the connection but also the meaning of the marital relationship as such within the framework of family ties differs from the "modern" alternative models—and hence is likewise up for debate. It is precisely where the established ethos is not supposed to be just a matter of folklore, therefore, that it will not always be easy to draw the boundary between the good and the right, or between what is morally wrong and what is ethically bad, especially when the one (the ethos) turns out to provide the foundation or frame of reference for the other (the morally problematic practice).[50] Thus, it can not only be argued that someone who wants to prevent spanking must challenge the conception of discipline presented here (and the entire complex of pedagogical ideas in which children are represented as a wild and uncontrolled threat to the adult order) and that someone who wants to prevent honor killing must challenge the concept of honor. What these examples also illustrate is that it is always also a question of modes of perception and perceptual faculties that for their part are not independent of established forms of life.[51] After all, to return to the example of *The White Ribbon*, it is evident that the father depicted in the film is not just a particularly cruel man but someone who considers the measures described—from the weaving of the ribbon into the children's hair, to the injunction to remain silent at the dinner table, to the imposition of the prohibition on masturbation by binding the children's hands—to be indispensable practices of paternal care.[52] It is the attitudes and practices of his form of life that have shaped his emotions and faculty of perception and that numb him to the cruelty of his actions and to the oppressive coldness of the family situation he has created. But isn't the white ribbon woven into the children's hair almost worse than the beatings? And beyond the brutality, isn't it the self-righteousness with which the chastisements are inflicted that is really scandalous and especially repulsive? But if one must evaluate a situation appropriately (for example, by showing sensitivity to the fact that certain things are cruel) in order to be able to respond to it appropriately, then, conversely, morally questionable actions are based on modes of perception and established practices that cannot be grasped with moral criteria in the narrow sense and that cannot be castigated in terms of such criteria. In this respect, morality is shown to be embedded in more comprehensive forms of life. Moreover, applied to the example of parents who spank their children, the fact that nowadays children are less likely to be (systematically) beaten than in earlier times probably has less to do with the enforcement of moral principles than with a widespread change in forms of life—specifically, in how children are treated and in conceptions of the family and education—involving more than the willingness to apply moral points of view.

Furthermore, one of the most obvious findings of the debate on the morality-ethics distinction is that the scope of the domains identified as moral or ethical in the terminology outlined is controversial and, at any rate, exhibits extreme historical and cultural variations. This historical and cultural range of variation suggests that the criteria for the demarcation between ethics and morality are themselves a matter of established ethical life so that abstinence corresponds to a specific ethos—the ethos of modernity—in which it is in turn embedded. Thus, the question of where these boundaries lie and whether a definitive boundary is seen between the ethical and moral domains at all becomes the characteristic feature of every specific formation of ethical life—and in certain respects the key difference between traditional and nontraditional forms of life. Therefore, both points are controversial—namely, *that* a boundary can be drawn between the ethical and the moral domains at all and *where* this boundary lies. But if the demarcation itself has ethical connotations, then that places the distinction in a different light. Even if it is viewed from a universalistic perspective as a necessary distinction on which moral development converges to a certain extent (as is suggested by Charles Larmore's talk of "maturity"), it remains the case that—from a purely practical-political point of view—this specific ethos of modernity is not uncontroversial.[53] This has consequences for the cogency of this distinction in disagreements between "modern" and other cultures. If the demarcation between ethics and morality is absurd in the context of a traditional ethical order, then this distinction, as far as its practical consequences are concerned, itself becomes a weapon within the conflict—and it will also be understood as such. (This can be seen from the heated debates triggered by the above-mentioned law banning violence in education in Germany but also from the current debate in Germany over the religious practice of circumcision.) This is not exactly conducive to defusing the conflict. Therefore, we should be skeptical about, in Seyla Benhabib's apt description, the "'definitional ease' with which the divide between matters of justice and those of the good life is brandished around as if it were a magic wand which would solve some of the most difficult ethical, cultural, moral and political dilemmas of our time."[54]

As it happens, some proponents of liberal positions readily concede that not only our moral conceptions themselves but also the distinctions mentioned above, and hence how the "space of reasons" is tailored, are founded in our way of living and, in addition, do not admit of further justification. But does our spade turn too soon here?[55] Especially if we do not want to fall back on traditional patterns of justification and if we take seriously the right of all human beings to shape their lives as they see fit, it is hard to avoid already thematizing and justifying how the space of reasons is "tailored" (with reference to forms of life). The question arises, therefore, whether the "ethos of modernity" must not be explicitly defended itself and whether this defense can be formulated in any other way than as a defense of this particular form of life.

Interesting in this context is the position of so-called ethical or perfectionist liberalism (exemplified by Joseph Raz), since this represents a version of liberalism that understands and defends the liberal values of autonomy, liberty, and pluralism aggressively as ethical values and thus does not make any claim to neutrality in this respect. But here, too, our spade often turns at a very early stage. As Raz puts it: "The value of personal autonomy is a fact of life. Since we live in a society whose social forms are to a considerable extent based on individual choice, and since our options are limited by what is available in our society, we can prosper in it only if we can be successfully autonomous."[56] However, then Raz does not justify the specific content of the liberal ethos itself, which apparently is founded on facticity—namely, the autonomous life—in relation to other forms of life.

But it could be that, in view of the conflicts outlined, and specifically if we do not want to make use of the dominance of the majority culture (or a particular tradition), the defense of the ethos of autonomy in the mode of an open conflict over forms of life may sometimes prove to be less paternalistic than the effects of neutralism. For, in case of doubt, the thematization of forms of life, provided that the position of the critic is also open to contradiction and challenge, is the more egalitarian and symmetrical option compared to the attempt to downplay the ethical character of one's own form of life and hence in effect to insulate it from discussion.[57]

The problems I have outlined here regarding the liberal abstinence strategies point to a similar finding: what is intended as a strategy for neutralizing conflicts appears from this perspective as an obfuscation or deferral of conflicts and, instead of promoting the rationality of the corresponding debates, involves new potential for conflict also in practical respects. But as a result, there is at least a question mark over the first goal of these strategies mentioned above, namely, containing the conflict.

But questions also arise concerning the second goal, namely, meeting the claims to self-determination of modern individuals. In the light of what was said above, the most important argument in favor of resuming the debate over criticism of forms of life is the following: where forms of life cannot be thematized, they impose themselves without thematization. Ethical abstinence concerning forms of life leads to them being made *invisible as forms of life*—and thus also as something to which there are alternatives. And that means in many respects that they are renaturalized into a power of fate.[58] But such a renaturalization undermines the project associated with liberal antipaternalism with regard to how individuals lead their lives. Instead of enabling people to shape their lives, the strategy of neutral abstinence obscures the powers that determine their lives. As a result, the "emancipatory thrust of modern morality" (Tugendhat) could become inverted into its opposite.

Critique of the Model of Existential Self-Understanding

If ethical abstinence is of no help and an illiberal moral dictatorship is not desirable, how can a new perspective be adopted on this patently unsatisfactory alternative?

As a first step, we must free ourselves from the entanglements of this discussion and inquire into the character of the ethical domain that has been left in the dark. My thesis is that the view that questions about forms of life are particularistic by comparison with questions of morality or justice and that they do not admit of public philosophical justification in the same way as the latter already has its origin in a conceptually abridged description of the object. Therefore, already the very model of ethical identity that informs—in fact, if not necessarily—the discussion in question must be subjected to critical examination.

If we question the indefatigably asserted view that in the era of pluralism of worldviews and forms of life such positions cannot be clarified in uniform and universally binding ways, then what actually distinguishes ethical questions from all the other things over which there is likewise disagreement but concerning which no one would think of imposing a regime of abstinence?

Rawls and Habermas have very similar intuitions in this regard. Ethical questions, questions concerning the intrinsic content of forms of life, they argue, are closely bound up with questions of individual or collective identity, and hence with individual or collective (life) histories. Therefore, ethical questions are particularistic; they are motivated by the particular and historically contingent evolved situation of each individual (or of each collective). For this very reason they are in a specific way ineluctable and meaningful but not generalizable. In connection with the "burdens of judgment," which explain the existence and extent of "reasonable disagreements," Rawls writes that "our total experience, our whole way of life up to now, shapes the way we assess evidence and weigh moral and political values, and our total experiences surely differ."[59] The insurmountable ethical differences that pervade modern societies are thus in essence an effect of these different backgrounds.

As it happens, such considerations certainly help to explain why ethical-political debates are so fraught with difficulty, and they undoubtedly motivate a differentiated approach to the corresponding problems. But why shouldn't these "total experiences" and the way in which experiences coalesce into formative biographical constellations in turn be open to scrutiny with regard to both their formation conditions and their results? Is it correct to conceive of identities (whether individual or collective) as being so ineluctable? Habermas stresses that the distinction between the good and the right does not have to result in excluding "the questions of the good life accorded prominence by classical ethics from the sphere of discursive problematization, abandoning them to irrational emotional dispositions or decisions."[60] Nevertheless, the "ethical-existential process of clarification" to which he refers in the case of the "ethical use of reason" remains a purely internal clarification, a process of self-understanding that does not allow context-transcending criticism.[61] For whereas moral discourses according to Habermas call for a "break with all unquestioned truths" and require us to distance ourselves from established ethical life, in processes of reaching an ethical-existential self-understanding, subjects must not "distance themselves from the life histories and forms of life in which they actually find themselves."[62]

This seems to be based on the idea of an internal relation of fit. What I have to *do*—ethically speaking—takes its cue from what I *am*. What is good and appropriate in the world is, in the case of an ethical orientation, what is good *for me* and against the background of my particular identity; hence, it is what enables me to be in agreement with myself. The same holds for collective identities. But what could the answer to the question "Who am I?" possibly contribute to answering the question "What should I do?"? Why should my (or our) internal self-understanding yield an answer to the question of what attitudes and practices constitute a right form of life? And when would one even be—individually or collectively—in agreement with oneself? In his critique of Habermas's distinction between norms and values, Hilary Putnam has described the assumptions at work here as a "naturalization of values"[63] which treats them as something given and ineluctable that resists rational questioning.

But then the reference to the constitutive particularity of forms of life entails an *irrationalization* of what can be said in the domain of the ethical—moreover, one with far-reaching consequences. The liberal discourse on forms of life tends to *essentialize* and petrify the latter. The emphasis on the fact that forms of life "crystallize around particular identities" (Habermas), but also the liberal-pluralist celebration of ethical diversity, culminate in a "zoological view" that reacts to the differences and the essence rather than to the hybrid and dynamic character of every form of life. The basic intuition of the factual "thrownness" (into a form of life or a particularistic identity) and the nonavailability of individual and collective identities often goes hand-in-hand with a questionable tendency to romanticize identities and value judgments, and in the final analysis even with a form of traditionalism regarding forms of life that may not even be justified for premodern times. Habermas's position that the "success of forms of life" is neither a moral nor a rational matter and that the "substance of a way of life . . . can never be justified under universalistic aspects"[64] promotes, to cite Rüdiger Bubner's criticism, the "retreat of reason from the lifeworld."[65] And where Habermas revives his "doctrine of abstinence" in his recent reflections on the "semantic potentials" and moral resources of religion, this retreat is even intensified:

> The moral point of view obliges us to abstract from those exemplary pictures of a successful or undamaged life that have been handed down in

> the grand narratives of metaphysics and religion. Our existential self-understanding can still continue to draw its nourishment from the substance of these traditions just as it always did, but philosophy no longer has the right to intervene in this struggle of gods and demons.[66]

This is how a process that can be described as a *split between meaning and rationality* perpetuates itself. Not its least problematic feature is that it calls forth compensatory mechanisms.

But does the image of forms of life sketched here correspond to the actual character of the controversies conducted about forms of life? The distinguishing feature of these controversies is in many cases that the forms of life in which the individuals are embedded become unstable, change, and break open from within. Already the conception of what forms of life are and of the character of the validity claims they imply is, in my view, underdetermined by the positions outlined above. Not only does this conception fail to measure up to the normative claim that those involved in forms of life raise for them, but also from the perspective of social theory, it fails to come to grips with what forms of life, as nexuses of practices, actually do and what they do for the individuals concerned. Therefore, the philosophical justification of the possibility of criticism of forms of life is not (only) an ethical project but also a project in social philosophy and in social theory.

3. What to Do?

Where should the debate about forms of life be situated, and what place should philosophy assume within such a controversy over and criticism of forms of life? How and from which social location should such criticism be conducted? Even if we concede with Ludwig Siep that forms of life are publicly relevant and that questions of the successful life *[das geglückte Leben],* because they are answered publicly, should also be raised and discussed in public, it is still far from clear what is the correct forum for this discussion, and hence who should participate in the discussion and with what decision-making authority. What, then, is in need of *philosophical* clarification here? Before outlining at the end of this introduction how I intend to proceed in the remainder of the book, I want to anticipate some potential misunderstandings concerning what is to be expected of criticism of forms of life and its institutional classification.

Not Police Issues: Transformations Instead of Prohibitions

The first potential misunderstanding concerns how criticism is to be conducted and the authority *[Instanz]* by which it should be exercised or imposed. If I argue here that it is possible to criticize forms of life based on reasons, this does not mean that such criticism should lead directly to legal and political intervention in the shape of prohibitions and sanctions. The critical public thematization of forms of life must be separated from the question of political and legal sanctions. Criticism of forms of life is not a matter for the police.

Thus, nobody will want to simply ban bourgeois marriage, watching television, priests blessing fire engines at village fire brigade festivals, or the spread of cosmetic surgery. Not only will nobody want to combat the traditional notion of honor or the antiquated notion of chastity with police force; it will not be possible to come to grips with these phenomena through police force either. Moreover, the ways in which work processes become deprived of meaning are embedded in such a broad array of social and economic conditions that prohibitions or injunctions would only have a limited effect. One can consider the practices and convictions associated with certain forms of life to be demonstrably wrong and subject them to correspondingly harsh criticism without thinking that interventions by public authorities make sense or are even conceivable.

This (and not a categorical distinction between the subject areas) is what sets the critical thematization of authoritarian educational practices, traditionalist notions of honor, or the Catholic Church's concept of chastity apart from those measures that may have to be taken in liberal democratic states once coercion is exercised against individuals or suffering is inflicted upon them. In this sense, Jürgen Habermas is right to insist that different kinds of problems call for different responses.

But not only are prohibitions here in case of doubt pointless. The focus on the "police aspect" of the aforementioned problems also downplays the fact that here it is less a matter of restrictions than of the *transformation,* or even of emancipatory transformations, of forms of life. These transformations are seldom processes that can be imposed from above. In this context, public thematization means first and foremost the beginning of a discussion that first makes it possible to live out differing practices and to override customary perspectives.

But no matter how important it is to distinguish between the public thematization and the political and legal sanctioning of forms of life, it is equally true that, given that forms of life have political and legal framework conditions, this public thematization can and must sometimes lead to political and legal consequences, hence to binding provisions, and be included in the democratic decision-making process. Depending on the subject matter, however, in democratic societies this will be less a matter of prohibitions than of positive incentives—for example, in the domain of family policy or the promotion of culture.

Democracy and Philosophy

But why not entrust discussion of forms of life directly to democracy? Or, to rephrase the question: What role can and should philosophy and philosophical communication actually assume in the process I envisage? Doesn't the philosophical undecidability of such questions simply entail that they should be entrusted to democratic will-formation and decision-making? After all, nobody has claimed that one cannot talk about different forms of life. The bone of contention is rather how, and with what claim to be binding, judgments can be made here, who should be the subject of these judgments, and who can claim the prerogative of interpretation. Then the proponents of neutrality or abstinence toward forms of life would be less concerned to shroud the associated questions in darkness than to make a kind of division of labor between democracy and philosophy.

At stake in the relation between democracy and philosophy, however, is clearly how both philosophy and democracy are understood. The role of (political) philosophy, according to a widespread conception, is that of a kind of judge who generates binding and objectifiable standards for evaluating social relations and institutions. But it is precisely this claim that is disputed by the postulate of a "priority of democracy to philosophy."[67] According to the latter view, philosophy should not be accorded priority over the viewpoints of the subjects concerned, and philosophical analysis should not have a privileged role in the conflict of opinions among positions, which cannot be further substantiated. In my view, however, the opposition "philosophy *or* democracy" is already misleading. Philosophy, properly understood, is part of the democratic process, not its opponent.

If the process of democratic decision-making is understood as a matter not only of balancing interests but—in accordance with a deliberative understanding of democracy—also of the justified transformation of initial positions, then philosophy has more to contribute here than merely its competence in clarifying and demonstrating arguments and counterarguments. Rather, its primary contribution—and this very aspect sometimes takes a back seat in the normativistic orientation of contemporary political philosophy[68]—is to the interpretation and analysis of a situation. For example, one must first recognize and understand the regressive or alienated character of a form of life in order to be able to evaluate it, and this requires more than intuitions.

Therefore, even understanding what is problematic about a form of life (also) requires philosophical concepts, and this understanding and analysis is in addition itself already a normative matter. But if according to such a conception analysis and critique are inseparable, then philosophy intervenes in democratic debates differently from a norm-setting ultimate authority. It is one of the resources by means of which actors communicate about and evaluate their situation. Philosophy should not replace democracy, therefore, and philosophical clarification should not take the place of democratic debate. Rather, it is an integral part of the process of the democratic exchange of reasons, as it were, without having the final say in this process. Philosophy is therefore itself part of a social process of developing a self-understanding and hence has a task to perform even where it does not aspire to the position of a judge. (I will return to the specific understanding of criticism affirmed in making a close connection between analysis and critique in the third part of this book.)

Dynamic Conflicts

However, the question "Democracy or philosophy?" brings a further problem to light. The thesis that liberalism is itself a hegemonic theoretical position that defines a form of life is shared by some deconstructivist, radical democratic, neo-Marxist, and hegemony-theoretical positions that can be subsumed under the rubric of "political agonality." These positions (prominent advocates being Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau[69]) share with my conception the rejection of the neutrality thesis inspired by the critique of ideology. For the most part following Gramsci's theory of hegemony, they regard the irreducible conflict over the cultural prerogative of interpretation as being at the core of socialization. From this vantage point, "liberal" notions of neutrality are at best naïve and at worst ideological but are always a strategic move in the struggle for social hegemony. From the perspective of these theories, the conflict over forms of life cannot be pacified or bracketed. However, they are in turn skeptical about the possibility of placing the conflict conducted here on an argumentative footing.

With this, the suspicion of ideology formulated by the agonistic theory of democracy extends in a certain sense to attempts to provide a normative foundation as such; as a result, however, it ultimately extends also to the possibility of a critique of forms of life, at any rate where this critique, in contrast to agonal conflict, operates with justifications that claim (comprehensive) validity. Here a distinguishing trait of the enterprise of criticism comes to light: as I understand it, criticism is always simultaneously dissociative and associative; it forges a relationship—even if also a negative one—to what is criticized. But it is precisely this forging of a relationship, and hence the attempt to generate a common basis mediated by justification, that the agonal theories suspect of "eliminating" the irreducibility of the conflict.[70] Underlying this (left-Schmittian) emphasis on struggle or conflict, therefore, is not just an assessment of the social relations of force but also a problematization of the role of normativity as such. I consider these positions to be implausible for a variety of reasons. How is the politicization that the proponents of the agonality thesis also call for supposed to take place if not in debates about forms of cultural hegemony, which are in turn debates about forms of life? But if the latter were structured in such a fundamentally agonistic way that they were not even informed by the assumption of justifiability and the associated raising of claims to validity, how could a disagreement arise in the first place? According to my thesis, therefore, the theory of agonality fundamentally fails to come to grips with what I want to call the relational character of conflicts, and it misjudges their internal dynamics when it attempts to bracket the validity claims associated with them.[71]

It is interesting to note that the positions outlined above share with the liberal positions they in part harshly criticize a starting point that concerns the internal shape, structure, and dynamics of forms of life. They regard the latter firstly (arbitrarily or inadvertently) as self-contained and ineluctable units, and they "lock" them, as asserted above for the liberal opposing position, into their collective identities. Secondly, they do not take the normative validity claims raised with these identities seriously, because they reduce them to claims to power and domination.

One of the starting points of my study is the assumption that if one wants to criticize forms of life, then one must, contrary to both the agonistic and the liberal positions, arrive at a different understanding of the validity claims raised in and through forms of life and of the self-understanding at work in them.

4. The Rationality of Life Forms—Resituating the Problem

In the following I will outline briefly my approach in the light of the problems outlined. The difference from the positions that advocate abstinence, I had claimed, resides not so much in a completely different conception of the possibility of determining the good and the prospects of reaching agreement on this. Rather, the difference already arises at the level of social theory and social ontology. Therefore, opening the black box means gaining a different understanding of the practices and institutions that constitute the internal structure of forms of life.

Reduced to a succinct formula, my proposed solution can be stated as follows: forms of life are complex bundles (or ensembles) of social practices geared to solving problems that for their part are historically contextualized and normatively constituted. The question of the rationality of forms of life can then be formulated from a context-transcending perspective as one about the rationality of the dynamics of development of the respective form of life. Such a perspective adopts as its criterion of success *[Gelingen]* not so much substantive aspects of content but rather formal criteria relating to the rationality and success of the process thus described as an ethical and social learning process.

The aim of my investigation is thus to exhibit the conflicts associated with the debate over forms of life as something that cannot be reduced to the pattern of conflicts between ineluctable convictions concerning values—or "systems of belief"—and to exhibit the social practices associated with forms of life as something that is not unquestionably ultimate but involves conditions of life that human beings shape and can transform. The mode of criticism of forms of life whose preconditions I propose to conceptualize here is thus not a guide to a new debate on values but rests instead on a reappraisal of our understanding of forms of life informed by social philosophy.

The procedure to be followed in the rest of the study follows from the outline of the problem developed thus far. In the first step, I will have to develop a concept of forms of life that shows that they are susceptible to criticism in the first place. Although the concept of a form of life corresponds to a certain everyday intuition, its content, as it is used in sociology and in philosophy, has not really been clarified. Therefore, we must first determine more precisely the scope and depth of what constitutes a form of life. Forms of life must make a difference with regard to important substantive alternatives if it is even to be worthwhile criticizing them. The fact that with respect to forms of life (in contrast to "weaker" or more "volatile" phenomena, such as lifestyles or fashions) there can even be such a thing as problems and hence substantive or factual adequacy *[Sachangemessenheit]* explains why it is possible to raise questions about the conditions of their success and rationality—and hence why they can raise validity claims in the first place. It would not be completely off the mark to distill the results of the reflections made in this way into the claim that forms of life are manifestations of "ethical life" in the Hegelian sense—though in the context of this study, ethical life will be reconstructed in terms of a theory of practice.

In a second step, I can go on to analyze the specific type of validity claims that, as I contend, are connected with forms of life and constitute the specific character of the normativity implied in them. The central thesis of my study is that forms of life can be evaluated (and can be compared with each other in certain respects) precisely because they embody *problem-solving strategies*. In this way, criteria for their success or failure can be established based on their capacity actually to solve the problems they are supposed to solve. Criticism of forms of life thus understood explores, in addition to the rationality, also the success or flourishing of the forms of life in question. However, since the definition of the problems is not given independently of the understandings of problems proposed with a form of life, and thus always implies prior normative decisions, the success of forms of life can be understood only from the perspective of the interpenetration of their normative and functional aspects.

To the latter thought also corresponds, finally, the model of criticism to be established in the third step. My concern here is to specify a procedure such that criticism of forms of life neither depends on *external standards* marked by distance from every well-established form of life, nor remains *internal* in the sense that it is located within the framework of the above-mentioned ethical-existential clarification processes, which cannot thematize the framework of the form of life itself. The underlying model of criticism can thus be described as a strong version of immanent critique (inspired by Hegel and Marx) to be developed through demarcation from models of criticism that remain within the internal frame of reference.[72] This variant of criticism is inspired by the critique of ideology in the sense that, although it starts from an internal perspective—namely, with problems and moments of crisis internal to a form of life—it transcends this starting point. As a result, it relies less on "normative reconstruction," in the sense of salvaging normative moments already existing in social life, than on the transformation of forms of life.[73] The transformation process referred to here can be described as an ethical learning process or, in more old-fashioned terminology, as an emancipation process that, according to this assumption, is triggered by the critical thematization of one's own form of life and those of others.[74]

Such an understanding enables us in a fourth step to explore the form assumed by such learning processes. Then criticism of forms of life points to the irrationality, obsolescence, contradictoriness, or dysfunctionality of forms of life and aims to transform them for the better in ways directed and motivated by norms. Forms of life are porous and open to influence, and if they are not to be compulsive, they must involve a moment of openness to experience. The evaluation of forms of life should find its criterion in the subject matter of the problem or in the success of problem-solving processes. Because, conversely, their problems depend on interpretation and are changeable and open-ended—contrary to a trite functionalist perspective—not only can forms of life overlap, they are also inherently dynamic. Thus, the project of criticism of forms of life is rooted in a pragmatist reconstruction (and reduction) of motifs from the philosophy of history and in the assumption that the development of forms of life can be understood in this sense as a learning process that, although open, is nevertheless directed.

I

AN ENSEMBLE OF PRACTICES

Forms of Life as Social Formations

> It is not only in clothing and appearance, in outward form and emotional make-up that human beings are the product of history. Even the way they see and hear is inseparable from the social life-process.
>
> —MAX HORKHEIMER

What actually is a form of life? Whereas in my introductory plea in support of criticism of forms of life I assumed a more or less everyday preunderstanding of the concept of a form of life,[1] at this point we need to examine the concept more closely. For whether forms of life are criticizable or not depends crucially on how we understand their shape and internal structure. As it happens, neither the everyday meaning nor the theoretical use of the concept is clear or consistent. For this reason, I will begin my reflections in this part of the study by trying to achieve a reflective equilibrium between the prephilosophical usage and a systematizing attempt at a definition. The result will be a conceptual proposal for how to understand forms of life on which the project can base its criticism. Generally speaking, here I will adopt a reconstructive approach to understanding forms of life based on a theory of practice. This conception renders forms of life intelligible as normatively constituted formations of "ethical life" (in the Hegelian sense, though this reference to the history of philosophy will not be pursued directly here). The resulting description of forms of life as ensembles of social practices is intended to take into account the fact that these practices are interrelated in diverse ways but do not exhibit the strictly closed character of an organic whole.

Taking the everyday usage as its point of departure, the first chapter uses a demarcation from contrasting phenomena to elaborate a conception of forms of life that renders them intelligible as phenomena with a certain importance and weight by comparison with more ephemeral phenomena. The second chapter analyzes the inner physiognomy of forms of life referring to the understanding of social practices developed here and describes them accordingly as nexuses of social practices distinguished by specific moments of inertia and persistence.

CHAPTER ONE

What Is a Form of Life?

THIS CHAPTER SERVES to narrow down and define in an incipient way what we mean when we speak of "forms of life." The first section begins with an analysis of our everyday usage of the concept and approaches its content by demarcating it from related concepts. The second section uses the categories of permanence, self-sufficiency, and adaptation to reality to distinguish the phenomena we have in mind when we speak of forms of life from more ephemeral social phenomena.

1.1 Form of Life: Concept and Phenomenon

What are we talking about when we speak of forms of life? In everyday usage, the notion of a form of life refers to a whole series of extremely diverse and more or less comprehensive phenomena. The nuclear family is a form of life from which one may try to escape with the help of alternative forms of life; the urban form of life is opposed to the provincial form of life; the forms of life in South Texas can be compared to those in Northern California. Studies are devoted to the fate of nomadic or the decline of bourgeois forms of life. Scholars analyze the forms of life of the Middle Ages, changes in forms of life in the early modern period, or the pluralization of forms of life in the modern era, but sometimes we also speak in the singular of *the* modern or medieval form of life. The form of life of community garden colonies and even the phenomenon of "Tupperware as a form of life" have been the subjects of studies.[1] Scientific research can also be regarded as a form of life, the idea of Europe as an intellectual form of life inspires hopes, and critics take aim at capitalism as a form of life.

The term "form of life" became fashionable (at least in German intellectual history[2]) in the 1920s as a result of Eduard Spranger's book *Lebensformen.*[3] When Spranger distinguishes between "economic," "aesthetic," "theoretical" and "religious" forms of life, he is using the concept in a characterological sense to refer to "ideal types of individuality" corresponding to ways of relating to oneself and the world.

Thus, ensembles of very different scopes and kinds, whose commonalities are scarcely apparent at first sight, are called forms of life. Whereas the relevant point of reference in the one case is an entire epoch—for example, the Middle Ages or modernity—in the case of the family, it is, sociologically speaking, a small-scale organizational form of living together. But the phenomena brought together under this heading differ not only in terms of scope. In addition, the nature and the conditions of belonging to what functions in each case as a form of life could hardly be more different. Joining the form of life of a community garden colony may involve making an independent and conscious decision in the light of alternatives; by contrast, one seems to belong to a form of life like that of the Middle Ages simply by virtue of living at a certain time. And if we call a comprehensive socioeconomic formation such as capitalism a form of life, then we mean that it leaves its imprint not only on economic structures but also on how we conceive the world, on our relation to space and time, and on our relationship to nature in ways that affect our lives as a whole, without individuals even being aware of this as a specific imprint.[4]

Thematization of Everyday Life

Whatever the potential scope of the formations referred to as forms of life, however, the thematization of forms of life in everyday language reflects an interest in the mundane, life-determining orientations and the informal ways of shaping one's life that shape a society. In other words, it expresses an interest in how people live, what they do, and how they do it.[5] When, for example, the author Peter Schneider describes the 1968 movement in hindsight as a struggle against traditional and in support of "new forms of life," his point is that this movement was not only a matter of institutional changes in the political system but that it also concerned the political dimension of the everyday conduct of life.[6] According to this perspective, the real impact of the antiauthoritarian movement of the late 1960s, over and above relatively meager institutional changes, consisted in transforming everyday life. Examples of such transformation are the founding of antiauthoritarian daycare centers, experimentation with new forms of relationships and new forms of cooperation, the rejection of conventions governing social interaction, including dress codes, and the "new sensibility" both diagnosed and propagated by Herbert Marcuse.[7]

This is a matter of attitudes and practices, of "cultures of acting together" *[Kulturen gemeinsamen Handelns]* (Martin Seel) and the principles that govern them. And insofar as forms of life are more open and variable than more entrenched social formations but nevertheless designate stable and antecedent structures that constrain individual action, the perspective of forms of life thematizes something which "enables us to act," that is, something which shapes and limits our very options for action in decisive ways.

Related Concepts and Semantic Overlaps

The fuzziness of the concept of a form of life to which an initial examination of its preunderstandings and usages attests suggests that it would be worthwhile to try to clarify the term by demarcating it from related concepts and phenomena.[8]

There are clear overlaps between the concept of a form of life and that of the *conduct of life [Lebensführung]* in the sense of orienting one's life systematically toward something or of systematically living one's life under the guidance of certain negative or positive principles. We speak of the (admirable) conduct of life of a Mother Teresa or the (deplorable) conduct of life of an alcoholic. The principles informing this life conduct would be in the one case selfless devotion, asceticism, and unconditional empathy, and in the other hedonism and lack of self-control.

However, the concept of life conduct refers more to individual than to collective phenomena, whereas the reference to socially shared practices is of systematic importance for talk about forms of life. Another difference concerns the fact that how one conducts one's life is something one does more or less actively, whereas forms of life have a passive, antecedent element in addition to an active one. Perhaps this is only a matter of nuances. But to choose our words with care: one is socialized into a form of life; it is to a certain extent there and already prefigured as a form *prior to* the individuals concerned, even if, as we shall see, one of the preconditions of the survival of forms of life is that they are actively appropriated. In other words, leading one's life is something that one does, while forms of life refer to a context *in which* one lives and on the basis of which one acts.

Discourse about *habits of life [Lebensgewohnheit]* also comes very close to the concept of forms of life. It has connotations of regularity, stability, and self-evidence that are also characteristic of forms of life. Nevertheless, with "habits" we tend to associate isolated practices, whereas the concept of a form of life refers to clusters, or even a coherent ensemble, of practices. If one of my habits of life is to work at desk number 48 in the reading room of the Berlin State Library, this alone does not constitute a form of life. In addition, habits of life in contrast to forms of life can be individual. More important for the contrast between habits of life and forms of life, however, is a further circumstance: one cannot go wrong with regard to habits. If I do not sit in my usual place in the library tomorrow, I will have broken with a cherished habit, but I will not have done anything for which someone could justifiably blame me. This is different in the case of forms of life: behavior with regard to forms of life—conforming with or deviating from relevant collective practices—invites positive or negative sanctions. Forms of life, in contrast to habits of life, thus have a normative trait that we will have to address.

Although the close connection between the expressions "way of life" *[Lebensweise]* and "form of life" is shown by the fact that they are often used as synonyms, here, too, there are differences. On one hand, the character of being shaped in detail that seems to belong to a form of life is less pronounced in the case of a way of life. Moreover, a way of life (similar to a habit of life) is less comprehensive: you can justifiably say that you have changed your way of life if you now always get up at six in the morning instead of only going to sleep at three in the morning as before. But it would be an exaggeration to describe this already as entering a new form of life.[9]

A lifestyle *[Lebensstil],* on the other hand, typically involves a conglomerate of different matching practices and habits. However, lifestyles differ from what are called forms of life in their transience and a certain contingency, and hence fall within the catchment area of phenomena such as fashion and the fashionable. Where the term "lifestyle" is accorded a precise terminological meaning in the sociology of lifestyles as "the regularly recurring general context of a person's modes of behavior, interactions, opinions, stores of knowledge and evaluative attitudes,"[10] there is, of course, a certain proximity to the concept of a form of life. The differences are shown, however, by the fact that describing the bourgeois nuclear family or the Middle Ages as a lifestyle does not sit well with our feeling for language. To be a father is not a lifestyle, but it is to participate in a form of life. In contrast, lifestyle phenomena, performing the father or mother role that belongs to the form of life of the family, in turn involves reciprocal (normative) expectations.

The expressions "custom" *[Sitte]*[11] and "usage" *[Brauch]* capture pretty well the phenomenon described here as "forms of life." Not only are customs close to forms of life in their mode of organization and in the way in which they are binding, assuming we follow Max Weber's definition of a custom as an established rule that participants obey voluntarily based on a process of "long habituation."[12] Especially revealing is the normative trait of custom: "custom" encompasses a variety of habits of life insofar as they are "fitting"; indispensable here is the reference to customary modes of conduct, to "this is how things are done." The talk of usages, even though it may refer too narrowly to individual actions by comparison with the more inclusive talk of forms of life, also captures a key element of what constitutes forms of life with its emphasis on ritual and with the aspect of what is handed down.

This already points to another close relative of the concept of a form of life, the concept of tradition *[Tradition]*. This concept includes customs and habits of life of a more or less institutionalized kind. However, the emphasis of the concept of tradition is more on origin, habit, the (pre-)given, and history than in the case of forms of life, even though the context of a form of life may very well include a historical dimension.[13] Viewed in this way, a tradition is a long-standing form of life that derives its validity and dignity from this time-honored quality.[14]

There is an interesting affinity, but also an instructive contrast, with the concept of an institution *[Institution]*. Forms of life, like institutions, are instances of social practices that have become habitual and are normatively imbued. But they differ in their aggregate state, as it were. Whereas the corresponding practices in the case of institutions are firmly established and tend to be codified, they appear to be "softer" and more informal in connection with forms of life, even if a form of life as a form and as something that has been formed stands opposed to the unstable "flow of life" (Georg Simmel). This difference can be seen, among other things, in their respective conditions of emergence and criteria of belonging. One does not enter into a form of life—as one joins a union or gets married—by filling out an application form or saying "I do"; rather, one belongs to it, sometimes without wanting to.[15] In addition, forms of life are not founded or established—as institutions are, at least in some cases—and, unlike some institutions, they are not codified or legally constituted.

Rather, forms of life represent the background and the condition of possibility of certain institutions, or must accommodate them. This becomes evident wherever institutions cannot be implemented in a community from the outside and without a point of reference in the local forms of life, or where institutions, like classical wedlock, may have become "outmoded." Conversely, institutions become constituent parts of forms of life and even facilitate or stabilize them. Institutions such as daycare centers or nursing homes, for example, make the form of life of the modern nuclear family possible. In certain respects, this is a matter of gradations, especially if one also recognizes with regard to institutions that there are not only institutions that have been established and set up but also quite unregulated institutions that develop spontaneously.[16] And a form of life can also be understood differently as an overarching moment of an ensemble of practices of different aggregate states, one of them being that of institutions.

Finally, the extensive overlaps of the concept of a form of life with that of culture *[Kultur]* are striking,[17] if culture is not understood in the sense of civilization or artistic activity but, following T. S. Eliot, in a broad sense as "the *whole way of life* of a people, from birth to the grave, from morning to night and even in sleep."[18] This meaning is clarified by the anthropological concept of culture in Edward Tylor's classical definition of culture as "the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[19] "Culture" in this sense is a contrasting concept to "nature."[20] It is a product of cultivation, hence of refined ways of dealing with inner and outer nature and the corresponding way of organizing social relations. To culture thus conceived also belong the material conditions of reproduction and technologies or the "sum of the material and intellectual achievements of specific groups of human beings, their technologies, their tools and their other artifacts, and their knowledge of natural phenomena, their internalized values and their interpretations of meaning."[21] But even though the concept of culture is in substance perhaps the closest and most important relative of the concept of a form of life, the reference to the concept of culture is not especially helpful because it is itself "notoriously obscure"[22] and is in danger of becoming more and more blurred. Therefore, trying to explain the unclear concept of a form of life in terms of the concept of culture that is equally in need of explanation does not seem especially promising.

Pointing out a conspicuous difference between the two concepts may nevertheless be of help in further narrowing down the meaning of the concept of a form of life. The reference to the concept of culture (typically modeled on the idea of the culture of a people) often evokes the idea of a comprehensive and self-contained totality, thereby suggesting that a society has only a single, uniform culture.[23] The concept of a form of life, on the other hand, is suited to dissolving this assumption of uniformity and to comprehending formations that cut across such classifications and are situated below the level of such large formations. Therefore, the concept of a form of life, insofar as (to borrow Wolfgang Welsch's words) "it *passes through* classical cultural boundaries,"[24] is preferable as a de-essentialized and a de-substantialized alternative to the concept of culture, so that it can do justice to the hybrid character of the formation under discussion here.

Core Elements of the Concept of a Form of Life

A number of properties have crystallized out of this initial, still somewhat loose, preunderstanding with which forms of life can be described.

Forms of life present themselves as clusters of social practices or, in Lutz Wingert's formulation, as "ensembles of practices and orientations"[25] and systems of social behavior. They include attitudes and habitualized modes of conduct with a *normative character* that concern the *collective conduct of life,* although they are neither strictly codified nor institutionally binding. This means the following:

(1) We (should) speak of forms of life only when it is not a matter of individual or isolated practices but of *clusters of practices* that are *interconnected* and interrelated in the one way or another.

(2) Forms of life are *collective formations,* that is, "orders of human coexistence."[26] One does not have a form of life as an individual. A form of life rests on socially shared practices, even where one participates in it and relates to it as an individual.[27] The form of life of an individual refers to the respect in which he participates in a collective practice as an individual and through his individual actions.

(3) As established formations with a *habitual character*, forms of life have a passive as well as an active element. One lives in a form of life as in a structure that is pregiven and laid out in advance, even if one simultaneously creates it through one's own practice.

(4) As orders of social cooperation that rest on regular practices, forms of life are therefore always also demarcated from the possibility of disorder and are distinguished, at least from the internal perspective of their participants, by a certain expectation of cooperation. Thus, not unlike the phenomena of custom and tradition, a certain *normative pressure of expectation* is associated with forms of life.[28]

In order to develop a more precise definition of what constitutes forms of life, in the following section we must address a whole complex of questions, such as: What is the scope of the social formations that I call forms of life, and what weight, but also what depth, do they possess?

1.2 Duration, Depth, Scope

How stable, significant, self-sufficient, and comprehensive must an ensemble of practices and beliefs be in order to qualify as a form of life? Should we actually speak of Tupperware as a form of life? And does "form of life" then really mean the same thing as when capitalism or modernity is designated as such? Even the preliminary explanation of terms suggests that a social formation can be meaningfully described as a form of life only if one can identify it as a *stable* and *self-sufficient* entity in various respects and only if it has *a certain relevance* for how human life is shaped. Temporary and superficial phenomena and sporadic practices are not forms of life, even though it may prove to be difficult in many cases to make a clear separation between the phenomena. With this, the permanence, depth, and self-sufficiency of a social formation become criteria of whether it can be understood as a form of life. But how can these at first only intuitively plausible criteria be understood and demonstrated?

(1) The criterion of *permanence* or *stability* is relatively easy to explain. A formation must exhibit a certain stability in order to qualify as a form of life, so that something which never changes and cannot be changed does not constitute a form of life. Duration, therefore, is an important factor in determining whether something is a form of life or (as associated above with the concept of a lifestyle) a transient phenomenon. But the question is how permanent such a formation must be in order to qualify as a form of life.

(2) When we associate a certain *depth* with the phenomenon of a form of life, we metaphorically ascribe it more profound meaning than that associated with more fleeting or superficial phenomena of individual and communal life. Should we speak of forms of life, therefore, only where certain central or important areas of social life are affected? But even if there seem to be obvious examples of such practices and areas, it is nevertheless not easy (and perhaps not even desirable) to distinguish these in material terms.

(3) The criterion of *scope* and *self-sufficiency* refers to the fact that we speak of forms of life only when it is not a matter of isolated practices but of clusters of interconnected and interrelated practices. But how extensive must such an ensemble of practices be in order to count as self-sufficient? And what claims regarding internal consistency are associated with it?

If all three points still await satisfactory clarification in crucial respects, this is not only because we are dealing with soft criteria that are gradual, fluid, and not especially precise. What is unsatisfactory from a systematic perspective is above all that, instead of being open to *qualitative* analysis, each of them seems to depend on *quantitative* determinations.

In what follows, I will draw on the remarks of the sociologist Georg Simmel on a "philosophy of fashion" in order to clarify the relevant criteria for a qualitative characterization of forms of life in contrast to phenomena of fashion. The relevance of the social phenomenon of fashion in the present context is that it brings together criteria that are in crucial respects the opposite of what is important when it comes to the concept of a form of life.

Three attributes can be extrapolated from Simmel's analysis of fashion for present purposes: the dynamic of fashion is constitutively unstable, constitutively extraneous to reality *[sachfremd]* and constitutively nongeneralizable.

Dynamics of Change

The first characteristic feature of fashion of interest here is its dynamics of change, the rapid disappearance and permanent interchangeability of the phenomena that constitute fashion. Simmel describes it as follows:

> In the practice of life, anything else that is similarly new and suddenly disseminated in the same manner will not be characterized as fashion, if we believe in its continuance and its *objective* justification. If, on the other hand, we are convinced that the phenomenon will vanish just as rapidly as it came into existence, then we call it fashion.[29]

Fashion, one may conclude, is a phenomenon that is distinguished not only factually but constitutively by constant change. Someone who follows fashion does not follow what has proven its worth, but seeks variety and hence constant novelty. The character of fashion, as Max Weber also puts it, is such that "the mere fact of the *novelty* of the corresponding behavior is the basis of the orientation of action."[30] However, the fact that phenomena of fashion depend on constant change of contents, on perpetual transformation, is not only a matter of a contingent need for variation; the systematic reason is (on Simmel's conception) that fashion always aims simultaneously at conformity and differentiation. Fashion generates a pull toward conformity: once something has imposed itself as a fashion, there is a kind of imperative to follow it.[31] Without this conformist trait, a transient phenomenon of whatever kind is not a fashion; only when others join in does something become a fashion. At the same time—and this constitutes to a certain extent the paradox of fashion[32]—a phenomenon immediately loses its fashionable character again the moment it has achieved wide acceptance. The change in question only really counts as fashionable, therefore, as long as it can be regarded as a distinguishing feature.

Things are completely different with forms of life. Although it is difficult to make a quantitative assessment of how long something must exist in order to be able to qualify as a form of life, there are nevertheless good reasons for the assertion that something which (like fashion) is constitutively unstable cannot be a form of life. Thus, even if in-line skaters or ravers as a group share a variety of practices and attitudes over and above the mere preference for a sport or a musical direction, and even if here very different aspects (clothing, music, lifestyle) may develop into a life-determining identity for the individual at least temporarily, the result is at most what can be called a (perhaps subcultural) life*style,* but not a form of life. And this is precisely because, as we learn from Simmel, such lifestyles share the dynamics of change typical of fashion described above and hence are not merely factually transient, but by their very constitution cannot be geared to permanence.

Lack of Conformity with Reality

The second feature observed by Simmel is the fact that fashion is not purposeful *[Unzweckmäßigkeit]* and that it does not conform to reality *[mangelnde Sachgemäßheit]:*

> Whereas in general our clothing, for instance, is adapted to our actual needs *[unsern Bedürfnissen sachlich angepaßt],* there is not a trace of purposefulness *[Zweckmäßigkeit]* in the method by which fashion dictates, for example, whether wide or narrow skirts, pointy or wide-brimmed hats, or colored or black ties should be worn. Judging by the ugly and repugnant things that are sometimes modern, it would seem as though fashion were desirous of exhibiting its power by getting us to adopt the most atrocious things for its sake alone. The complete indifference of fashion to the material standards of life *[sachlichen Normen des Lebens]* is illustrated by contingency with which it recommends something adapted to purposes *[das Zweckmäßige]* in one instance, something abstruse in another and something materially *[sachlich]* and aesthetically quite indifferent in a third case. Thus fashion points to different motivations, namely formal social ones as the only ones left.[33]

The succinct contrast drawn here between being adapted to reality or purposefulness, on the one hand, and the fact that fashion lacks purposefulness, on the other, is in our context perhaps the crucial aspect for understanding the criterion of depth. Simmel conceives of fashion as purely a matter of distinction whose contents (not its effects) are not subject to the requirements of adequately fulfilling purposes in accordance with the "material standards of life." Fashionable clothing is not better at keeping us warm, it is not more practical, and it is not even more beautiful than unfashionable clothing; fashionable beverages are neither better nor more wholesome than those that have just fallen out of fashion. What is fashionable is at best indifferent to our needs. Fashion, in other words, does not have any intrinsic content or any substantive quality (in the sense of reference to the real conditions of life outlined above). Rather, it derives its meaning (and purpose), as Simmel says, from a "formal social" effect, that of distinction. Thus, not being oriented to purposes is a qualitatively decisive feature of fashion.

Once again, things are completely different with forms of life. Forms of life have a reference to reality *[einen sachlichen Bezug],* and they react to real circumstances. They have to be constituted in intelligible ways with regard to their determining conditions. Just as clothing that serves to protect against cold or heat or serves a representative function cannot, in contrast to fashionable clothes, be designed in any arbitrary way—regardless of how it looks, it has to insulate, protect, or be presentable[34]—forms of life cannot be arbitrarily constituted either. Even though it is more complicated to recognize their purpose and their conformity with reality, the problematic situation and the appropriate response to it, here we can identify factual or substantive criteria or criteria of purposefulness arising from the inferential relations to other social facts.

This can be seen, among other things, from the dynamics of change of forms of life in contrast to fashion. Fashionlike phenomena change for no substantive reason, based only on the dynamic of fashion inherent in them. One does not wear "pointy hats today, but wide-brimmed hats tomorrow" because wearing pointy hats has proved to be impractical or wrong. On the other hand, forms of life change for *reasons* grounded in features of reality (at any rate, I will argue for this contention in the course of my reflections), be they changed problem situations or changed perceptions of problems. In contrast to developments in fashions in headwear, the development of the rural-feudal extended family into the bourgeois nuclear family was the result of changed socioeconomic conditions and changes in normative expectations.

So forms of life change because something *has* changed. And *the fact that* they change has consequences in turn in the social field in which they occur.[35] For if transformations in forms of life are the result of changed problem situations, they in turn have consequences: something changes when forms of life change. On the other hand, lifestyles and fashions can be replaced without consequences. While the form of life of the nuclear family is in this sense a constituent part of the modern form of life that cannot be replaced without consequences, in-line skating or techno music is a contingent (and replaceable) feature of late bourgeois recreational behavior. This is not to say that the phenomenon of in-line skating or that of raves lacks social importance (much less that it has no importance for those involved). The fact that leisure time is increasingly filled with changing forms of physical activity certainly tells us something about a certain social situation. And insofar as in-line skating and raves embody a different self-understanding and give rise to different forms of community from traditional card games, for example, they are also meaningful alternatives.[36] Nevertheless, skating and techno can be replaced by other things (on the same level) without essential aspects of a social structure immediately changing as a result.

The difference between lifestyles and forms of life as regards their adaptation to reality is also shown by the fact that, when criticizing phenomena below the level of a form of life, we are inclined to switch to the next higher level. This occurs, for example, when we interpret the spread of certain sports as a symptom of social individualization processes. It seems that genuine criticism of forms of life can only begin at this higher level, even though one may have access to it only via the contingent phenomena described. This is where the transition from mere matters of taste to the ethical dimension of practices takes place. As suggested above, what began as aesthetic discomfiture over red cowboy boots can develop into a discussion about a form of life once we begin to see the boots as a symptom of the overarching complex of a form of life.

Nongeneralizability and the Avant-Garde Principle

The third and final feature implicit in Simmel's description of fashion is the avant-garde principle, and hence the *nongeneralizability* of fashion: "The essence of fashion consists in the fact that it should always be exercised only by a part of a given group, the great majority of whom are merely on the road to adopting it."[37]

Thus, if it is constitutive of fashion that being in fashion means always having to be where the others are not yet, then it lives off the avant-garde principle. It is sustained by a permanent and institutionalized avant-garde that not only takes the lead so the masses follow, but always hurries ahead once the latter have followed suit. This not only drives the dynamic described above forward, but it also means that fashion can never have the character of an exhortation to everyone to emulate it.[38] But from this there also follows a specific incompleteness or lack of self-sufficiency of fashion.

Here, too, one can comprehend the contrast to forms of life: a social formation that cannot be generalized as a matter of principle is not a form of life. Even though there may be gradual transitions, subcultural movements like the rave and techno scene, for example, also remain below the threshold of a genuine form of life insofar as the corresponding ways of life depend on the mainstream society, and not only because they cannot subsist independently of the latter. Although social formations that function analogously to fashion are related to society in the mode of "distantiality" (to use Martin Heidegger's term), they still do not thereby raise a normative claim.[39] Forms of life, on the other hand, even where their specific manifestation is tied to a particular history or place, claim to be appropriate, good, or even better. If the invocation to everyone to emulate them that emanates from fashion and fashionable lifestyles is paradoxical, this is because, notwithstanding their social pioneering role, they still cannot make any proposal addressed to everyone about how one should live one's life. Someone who follows fashion is original and claims to be *different* from what went before (and/or from the others), but not to be *better.* Herein resides an important difference from the shape assumed by forms of life, which in this respect are shown to be inherently normative formations with a claim to more comprehensive power to interpret or shape our lives, but also with the actual possibility of comprehensively shaping them.

Useful clues for this thesis are provided by phenomena of dissident life plans situated to a certain extent at the frontier of forms of life or in an intermediate domain between lifestyles, fashion, and forms of life. If the American hippies of the 1960s and 1970s and the rural commune movement in Europe were in many ways on the verge of realizing a new form of life, this was because they claimed to be in competition with the dominant systems of production and reproduction. Moreover, they not only strove for a certain (if not, of course, economically comprehensive) self-sufficiency, but also sought to a greater or lesser extent to generalize their form of life.[40] So these phenomena of social dissidence can be said to come close to forms of life to the extent that they contradict the dominant norms and values and want to represent a complete alternative to the established culture, in other words, insofar as they aim to transform the dominant culture. With this claim, they tend to shape how their members conduct their lives in a comprehensive way. Here, in contrast to subcultural lifestyle phenomena, the reference to mainstream society is not merely parasitic but critical and competitive. Such a formation of dissenting practices and attitudes posits itself (voluntarily or involuntarily) as an alternative.[41] But as a result, the difference that separates them from the mainstream culture is no longer a distantial one. Also, the distance that separates them from the mainstream culture is not that of the unattainability of an avant-garde set on permanence described above, which is as it were merely parasitic on the mainstream form of life and hence does not compete with it in the proper sense.[42] The movements that present themselves as alternatives to the established forms of life compete directly with the status quo and thereby raise a claim, albeit one to which they cannot always live up. The claim here is that these are not just *different,* but *better* forms of life. And this is a normative claim that we will deal with again later.

We have now reached a point where we can also make sense of self-sufficiency as a criterion of forms of life. Forms of life, as I surmised above, must have a self-sufficient character, and this self-sufficiency has turned out to be connected with the nature of the relationship to more comprehensive social frameworks (of norms). Thus, we can imagine lifestyles that to a certain extent color almost all expressions of the life of a group—from clothing, to music, to cooking, to habitation—yet which do not constitute forms of life because they lack the characteristic claim of forms of life to generalizability. Conversely, something that has a relatively restricted object domain can also count as a form of life, provided that it raises a comprehensive validity claim and not the restricted validity claim typical of lifestyles.

But how does establishing the criterion of generalizability in the way proposed here cohere with the fact that forms of life refer to real, substantive conditions (substantive, that is, in the sense of being grounded in the relevant subject matter)? Forms of life are differentiated precisely *by virtue of* their reference to real, substantive conditions *[Sachbezogenheit]:* they must perform different functions, and they pursue different purposes. If we differentiate peasant-rural from urban forms of life, for example, then they cannot be constituted in such a way that they can be shared by all, since—insofar as they refer to real, substantive conditions—each of these forms of life constitutes a specific field of practices and attitudes.

As it happens, here a different kind of differentiation and nongeneralizability is involved from the one described by Simmel as "formal-social." Differences of the last-named type are not the same as those that arise from the constitutive nongeneralizability of fashion: they are not formal-social but *functional* differences. In this case, different ensembles of practices could be said to be grouped in a division of labor around different areas of activity of social reproduction. The resulting scope of a form of life is on the one hand particular: it concerns one part of society and could hardly affect everyone.[43] On the other hand, the claim associated with these practices is that anyone in my situation or anyone who occupies this particular social position should act in such and such a way. The operative differentiation, therefore, is a functional-substantive one and not a formal one driven by the principle of avant-gardism, which is concerned with difference for its own sake.

1.3 A Modular Concept of Forms of Life

According to the reflections developed thus far, forms of life are nexuses of practices, orientations, and orders of social behavior. They include attitudes and habitualized modes of conduct with a *normative character* that concern the *collective conduct of life*, although at the same time they are *not strictly codified* or institutionally binding. To this characterization we have now added the criteria of adaptation to reality, permanence, and self-sufficiency, criteria that acquired sharper contours through the comparison with the social phenomenon of fashion.

The practices, beliefs, and attitudes that constitute a form of life and the institutions, symbols, and artifacts in which it is manifested are not, to use a somewhat problematic metaphor, arbitrarily interchangeable "surface phenomena." Although forms of life are changeable, they are not *constitutively* unstable like fashion. Although they are not in fact permanent, forms of life are in certain respects geared to permanence. Similarly, it can be asserted that forms of life, although not straightforwardly generalizable, nevertheless cannot be constitutively distantial either. In this respect, they raise certain claims to validity that will have to be specified in greater detail in what follows. Forms of life do not concern just any arbitrary practices, but *normatively imbued* practices; they are part of the social-norm structure, of a normative social order with a claim to validity. Finally, if forms of life must in certain respects be "appropriate to the subject matter" *[der Sache angemessen]* (in the way that weatherproof clothing must be appropriate to the weather), then it follows for the question of the self-sufficiency of what can or should count as a form of life that they must be social formations capable of satisfying such real (factual or substantive) requirements. Thus, forms of life, viewed from the other side, are individuated through the reality or matter they address (or, as I will suggest below, in terms of the problems they are supposed to solve). As we shall see in Chapter 4, their success and appropriateness can also be understood in terms of this reference to real conditions and to problems.

What follows from these reflections for evaluating the connection to the above-mentioned everyday use of the term "form of life"? Judged by what has been said so far, the bourgeois family, the South Texan way of life, and the Aztec way of life are forms of life, but raves and in-line skating are not. But to what extent is the urban way of life, capitalism, or modernity a form of life? Although modernity as a generic term may appear unspecific, it is composed of modern forms of life. Capitalism is a form of life insofar as it shapes (small-scale) forms of life. The urban way of life is a form of life even if it is not defined by a narrowly circumscribed domain of collectively binding practices but is only loosely held together by a certain attitude and certain habits of perception and of relating to the world. On the other hand, the talk of "Tupperware as a form of life" or the advertising promise that to buy a new fitted kitchen is to enter a new form of life are merely derivative, metaphorical, although not completely unjustified or even unintelligible, usages. One thereby expresses (possibly in an ironically exaggerated way) that buying and selling nondescript plastic containers develops for those engaged in this prototype of direct merchandising into an encompassing experience that begins to shape their lives beyond its immediate practical effect. Or one wants to express that "Tupperware" stands for the form of life of the suburban housewife, just as "iPhone" or "BlackBerry" stands for the mobility and permanent availability of those for whom work and leisure time merge.

With a view to the considerations presented thus far, we are now in a position to plot a kind of system of coordinates in the confusing field of the criteria of demarcation and semantic elements of the concept of a form of life described at the beginning.

First is the relationship of *whole* and *parts.* The nuclear family as a form of life is part of the whole constituted by the comprehensive form of life of bourgeois society or modernity, which also includes other parts. But, terminologically speaking, there is nothing to be said against calling both—the more and the less comprehensive formation—a form of life. The talk of "modernity as a form of life" should then be understood as an attempt to provide an overall characterization of a nexus of more small-scale forms of life. On the other hand, these together constitute modernity as a form of life. For precisely this reason one can belong to several forms of life at the same time (for example, to the form of life of scientific research and to that of the family). And precisely for this reason a group of people can live simultaneously in the same and in different forms of life. Between the forms of life of a manager, a member of the educated middle class, and a proletarian there are, on the one hand, differences and, on the other, also commonalities, if one compares them to a form of life shaped by a different era. Thus, it is conceivable in one respect that the way of life of a feudal lord has more in common with the form of life of a modern entrepreneur, and that the form of life of a proletarian has more in common with that of a vassal or a serf, than entrepreneurs have in common with proletarians or feudal lords with vassals. On the other hand, however, following the historical demise of the agrarian world of vassals and feudal lords, proletarians and entrepreneurs share the same form of life shaped by electricity and traffic. Or, in Martin Seel's succinct remark: "On the one hand, the winegrower from the Palatinate, the London businessman and the Parisian intellectual belong to the same form of life, if you compare this with other large-scale cultural formations; at the same time, they belong to fundamentally different forms of life, if you compare them with each other."[44]

Next is the relation between *substantive* and *accidental features* of a form of life. If the separation between work and leisure time, for example, is a feature of modern bourgeois society, the specific guises that recreational activities can assume constitute an accidental feature compared to this substantive state of affairs. Thus, if lifestyles are accidental elements or even colorings that a form of life can assume, then we should distinguish between lifestyles and forms of life. This does not mean, as I said, that these accidental features are unimportant for a social diagnosis. And, in case of doubt, criticism of forms of life begins with accidental features and proceeds to the underlying problems—for example, when it infers from the phenomenon of "bowling alone" that individualization is on the advance.

Some questions can now be posed concerning the common talk of the modern pluralization and transformation of forms of life: When can one say that a form of life is undergoing change or that one form of life has been replaced by another, new one? And when, on the other hand, does something turn out to be merely a variant of a familiar form of life? How difficult it is to make demarcations and how context-dependent the relevant criteria remain can be seen from the example of the so-called new forms of life of the family such as the "patchwork family." These are treated in the literature in sociology and psychology straightforwardly in terms of the spread of "new forms of life."[45] But on closer examination it is not so easy to decide whether the spread of single-person households and patchwork families really points to the existence of new forms of life, or whether it is merely a shift in emphasis within the familiar form of life of the bourgeois family.[46]

Third, the various factors *condition each other* and *interact,* but the parts also retain their distinctive identities relative to the whole. Theodor W. Adorno's thematization of forms of life in *Minima Moralia* can throw some light on this. However much certain details stand for the whole of the capitalist or the fascist form of life for Adorno—the capitalist logic of exploitation permeates the forms of life into their capillaries—his diagnosis by no means adheres to a simple deterministic schema of base and superstructure. Rather than a matter of causal relationships, it seems to be a matter of a kind of interaction and of relationships that are also in principle reversible. The small front lawn popular among the lower middle classes—for Adorno, the harbinger of fascist exclusion—is bad insofar as it stands for what is bad about the capitalist way of life as a whole; conversely, the depravity of this form of life is shown especially by the fact that it drives individuals into regressive modes of behavior such as tending front lawns.[47] The family is not the direct product of bourgeois society either, and yet it is part of this society. The family coheres with bourgeois society and fulfills functions within it, even if it is not its causal product. Thus, here we must examine overlaps and relations of influence, connections, associations, and relationships, although these must not be conceived as bottom-up causal relationships.

Last but not least, the foregoing reflections enable us to distinguish between *different kinds of possible diversity* among forms of life. So there are gradual differences and variations (thus differences in coloration), functional differences (differences arising out of substantive differences in orientations and tasks, but ones that complement rather than conflict with each other), and the genuine plurality of forms of life, where how practices are configured and the type of orientation actually oppose each other as alternatives or competitors. In answering the question of how forms of life can be evaluated and criticized, it will be important to establish what kind of difference is involved in the alternatives under discussion.

CHAPTER TWO

Forms of Life as Inert Ensembles of Practices

In this chapter, I would like to shed light on the internal texture of the ensembles of social practices that I characterized in the previous chapter primarily in a descriptive sense as forms of life, with the aim of identifying the constraints that this understanding of forms of life places on the task of criticism. This will be done in a number of steps.

In my remarks so far I have spoken in a rather unspecific sense of forms of life as having something to do with *social practices*. In the first section of this chapter, I will develop a more precise terminology for this conception by explaining what is actually meant by social practices. Assuming, as I have claimed, that forms of life do not occur singly but always as *clusters* or *ensembles of social practices,* in the second section I will explain how such an ensemble is constituted. These clarifications will make it possible to examine the specific features of the practical context of a form of life that I will characterize in the third section when I describe forms of life as ensembles of practices *marked by a certain form of inertia*. With this I am alluding to the at once tenacious and mutable character of forms of life, and hence also to the fact that, on the one hand, they are shaped by those who act within them but, on the other, we always encounter them as already existing entities that facilitate and shape our actions in the first place.[1] Therefore, forms of life are at once products and presuppositions of our practical activity. In the fourth section, I will sum up by asking whether, in the light of the moment of inertia thus diagnosed, it is even possible to criticize forms of life.

2.1 What Are (Social) Practices?

A practice is something that we do. To be active is to engage in practices. Putting something into practice means actually doing it and not just thinking about it. In contrast to this common notion of practice as an activity and practices as instances of this activity, the philosophical concept of practice and the reflections in social theory based on the analysis of social practices have a more specific meaning.[2] Here I do not want to pursue the individual ramifications of this complex paradigm in detail, but only to highlight some of its core elements insofar as they have implications for my inquiry.[3]

Practices in the most general sense are complex activities in which we engage alone or with others. Examples of practices are lining up at the checkout when shopping, making a bank transfer, inviting friends over for dinner, throwing a party, playing basketball, playing hide-and-seek with children, conducting a seminar, and taking an exam. Thus, practices may vary in complexity and in the demands they make on participants, and they can have very different contents. However, a number of aspects of the concept of practice should be highlighted here.

(1) Single actions are rarely called practices. Rather, practices typically involve a *sequence of several actions,* of verbal or nonverbal utterances and gestures. This is true even of the most nondescript practices, such as lining up and paying at the supermarket: you search for the end of the queue at the checkout and take a couple of steps in the corresponding direction in order to take your place behind the last person in the queue; you place your items on the conveyor belt, exchange a few words with the cashier, rummage around for your purse, take out a couple of bills and hand them to the cashier, wait for your change, and bag your groceries.[4]

(2) Not everything one does, and not everything several people do, is already a (social) practice. A practice is not only not a single action; above all, it is especially not an action performed just once. A sequence of actions becomes a practice only if it is performed more than once or if it is so constituted as to be performed several times. Thus, only something that is in a specific sense *repeatedly* and *habitually* performed can be called a practice. The term practice designates courses of action for which some kind of pattern exists or in which such a pattern is discernible. Frequent repetition means that routines and habits develop, so that the action sequences do not have to be reinvented every time. Rather, their course is already laid

out in advance. Habits—as quasi-automatized reaction schemes—are followed involuntarily without the subject having to form new intentions on each occasion.[5] The resulting practical routines are based at least in part on *implicit* knowledge and practical know-how, which are not consciously accessible to the individuals involved in all respects.[6]

(3) Practices are *socially constructed*. This classification is not meant to imply that it is always a question of activities—such as playing basketball, playing hide-and-seek, or having a party—that are usually, or even can only be, performed with others. Practices are social in the fundamental sense that what is performed can be understood only in a context of socially shaped meanings and as a move within socially constituted institutions (broadly conceived). Making a bank transfer, even if it is done alone at home on the computer, is also a social practice in this sense. Socially constituted entities such as money, banks, and loans are required in order to turn the activity at the computer into the procedure of transferring money. Strictly speaking, therefore, the attribute "social" before the term "practices" is redundant. Social practices are not a subclass of practices in general. Rather, practices have a genuinely social character. By contrast, practices that are in fact performed together with others are often called "collective" actions or practices.[7] Thus, playing basketball is a social practice even when in the limit case I practice my moves alone beneath the basket. But in the standard case it is both a social *and* a collective practice, insofar as basketball is played in teams and the teammates coordinate their actions.

(4) Practices are *rule-governed*. The formation and performance of practices involve more than just observable regularities. They always involve sequences of actions governed by rules and regulations, hence by a division of the possibilities of action into what is and is not appropriate to do.[8] This means that practices involve not just regularity but also rule-governedness. As Titus Stahl puts it, "The central idea is that a practice invariably involves an internal distinction between right and wrong action."[9] The decisive point is that the operative criteria are *internal to practice*. If one can act wrongly in different ways with respect to practices, then this is a matter of rule violations that miss the point of the practice itself.[10] The practice of playing hide-and-seek involves one participant closing her eyes while the other one hides and is then searched for by the participant who has kept her eyes shut. If no one hides, if no one seeks, or if the one who was supposed to seek did not keep her eyes shut, then the participants

have made a mistake. They are playing the game wrongly or (in the limit case) are not playing hide-and-seek at all.[11] Similarly, someone who walks straight past the queue to the checkout without actively intending to jump the line has failed to understand what waiting in line at the checkout means and involves. All of these mistakes are internal to the practices in question: they are failures to comply with a given practice, violations of the norms that constitute these as practices. Central for understanding the character of practices is that they involve such *internal* criteria, which are different from the criteria by which we judge a practice *externally* as wrong. What counts as such an internal violation of the meaning or the norms of a practice depends on its specific character and description. For example, depending on how one understands the practice of shopping, talking loudly on one's cell phone while in the store or leaving the store without saying goodbye can constitute an internal violation of the norms associated with shopping. ("Shopping at Hillmann's grocery store is not the same as shopping at the supermarket. Here people speak with each other.") But one could also find the habit of leaving the store without a word and with a sullen expression, or of talking on the phone in the store, to be impolite and wrong without claiming that it is a constitutive part of shopping to greet sales clerks and give them your attention, so that the objectionable behavior violates the meaning of this practice.

(5) Practices have an *enabling* character. In a text published in 1955, long before the heyday of the debate over social ontology and before the ascendancy of the theory of practice in social theory, John Rawls drew attention to what he called the "stage-setting character" of practices in a way whose impact and interpretive power cannot be overestimated:

> In the case of actions specified by practices it is logically impossible to perform them outside the stage-setting provided by those practices, for unless there is the practice, and unless the requisite properties are fulfilled, whatever one does, whatever movements one makes, will fail to count as a form of action which the practice specifies. What one does will be described in some *other* way.[12]

With this Rawls is alluding to the fact that certain things are possible only against the background of established (social) practices. One can throw balls into a net hanging from a circular frame or block others from doing so even without the practice of playing basketball. But only if basketball and its constitutive rules exist is there such a thing as scoring a field goal, dribbling, or defending the basket. In his attempt to explain the institutional character of social practices, John Searle took up this finding and formulated it in terms of the distinction between regulative and constitutive rules.[13]

Crucial for any theory of practice in the light of such reflections is the reference to the enabling character intrinsic to practices: their normative moment not only regulates already existing social behavior (regulative rules) but also gives rise to new forms of social conduct and first makes certain behavioral traits, certain activities and certain social roles possible and definable as such (constitutive rules).

(6) Practices as I understand them here *posit and have purposes* and, among other things, are determined by these purposes.[14] So they are what they are because of the purposes that they pursue or are pursued with them. The practice of shopping or of standing in line at the checkout and paying serves the purpose of buying groceries; the practice of attending seminars serves (among other things) the acquisition of knowledge; the purpose of playing (basketball) is recreation, physical training, or social connectedness—or it is practiced just for fun, but even then it is good for something.

Practices should be individuated in terms of their purposes. This means that a sequence of actions is recognized as a certain practice based on knowledge of their purposes. ("Are you just standing here for a chat, or are you in line to pay?" Depending on my answer, I am engaging either in the practice of shopping or in that of small talk.) Moreover, practices are internally *structured* by their purposes, practical connections of *in-order-tos* (to use Heidegger's term). I move toward the counter in order to stake my claim to a place in the line, I place my items on the counter, I ask the vendor whether this cheese is suitable for a Swiss cheesecake, and I take out my purse to be ready and not to hold things up. All of this taken together as a sequence of interrelated purposes serves the purpose of buying groceries.[15]

However, here we must make three modifications. First, the fact that practices are constituted, structured, and individuated by purposes does not mean that any given action, or even the whole sequence of actions, may not also be associated with different purposes. In this respect, practices can be overdetermined. The purpose of the conversation in the grocery store is not just to make a successful purchase but also to flirt with the shop assistant, and the activity as a whole may serve as a distraction from work. Playing basketball may serve all three of the purposes mentioned (training, having fun, and communication) together. Strictly speaking, one would have to say in such cases that a single practice is not determined in several ways but that one and the same sequence of actions simultaneously constitutes several practices—flirting as well as shopping. Still, most of these cases involve something like primary and secondary purposes, so that it seems justified to speak in terms of the several meanings of a practice.

Second, to assert that practices have purposes and that they are structured internally by these purposes is not to posit that they must be based on intentions that are fully known. Purposes, as Seamus Miller emphasizes, do not always have to be formulated, but can be implicit and remain latent.[16] Moreover, the performance of a practice need not involve the implementation of intentions and purposes that are formed and determined in advance. Here, therefore, a prior answer should not be given to the question of who the bearer of the purposes pursued is and how these purposes take shape and are implemented. Some purposes take shape only gradually in the course of performing an action. Other purposes exceed the subjective intentions of the actors or are even implemented behind their backs.

Third, nothing has been said so far about whether purposes are subjective or whether they have an objective character. Is it merely a question of the purposes that individuals associate with certain practices? Or are there purposes (in the social field) whose realization goes beyond this individual ascription and determination of purposes or is required in a context-transcending sense?

(7) Another striking feature of the concept of social practices seems to be that, although they designate an activity, they have in several respects both an active and a passive, hence an *active-passive,* character. A practice consists of activities, of action as opposed to omission and, as a sequence of actions, a practice is not merely an event or occurrence. Nevertheless, the overall context of a practice refers to something that characteristically is not associated with intentions that must be newly formed in every case and hence is not associated with purposes that have to be constantly revised. This is bound up with the above-mentioned routine and habitual character of practices.

Associated with this is the fact that practices transcend the subject-object relation. Practices are to a certain extent subject-independent patterns of action that are still not entirely transsubjective; or, to put it in more concrete terms, they arise as it were *through* subjects and yet exist *prior* to them (and their intentions) and hence cannot be reduced to the intentions of the subjects concerned. That practices are *antecedent* in the sense described implies that subjects can form intentions in the first place only with reference to and through practices and that individual actions can be understood only in terms of existing practices. Nevertheless, particular practices (and practices in general) do not exist without the individuals who constitute them through their actions. When engaged in a practice, we are participating in something that already exists and at the same time creating it through our actions.

Practices and Their Contexts

Practices are habitual, rule-governed, socially significant complexes of interlinked actions that have an enabling character and through which purposes are pursued. We will have to deal with the features listed here again when we ask how forms of life should be understood; insofar as I understand forms of life as ensembles of practices, these features are decisive for understanding what constitutes a form of life. But one aspect in particular leads directly to the topic of the next section.

The culturally and institutionally constituted nature of practices alluded to above is bound up with the fact that individual practices are embedded in additional ensembles of practices or depend on a *context of corresponding practices* and objects that goes beyond them. The practice of shopping (as described above) is possible only in market societies, standing in line at the checkout is possible only where money and cash registers exist, and making money transfers requires banks. Also, playing hide-and-seek with children is conceivable only in a specific cultural and historical framework in which there is such a thing as a conception of childhood as a distinct developmental stage and of play as the activity appropriate to childhood and to which correspondingly belongs a whole complex of further practices.[17]

Even the practice of inviting people to dinner depends on other practices, not just in a factual, material sense (for example, that the hosts have to go shopping in order to be able to entertain their guests). Rather, its character and how it typically unfolds are shaped by further practices (for example, who may invite whom, how, and with what consequences, a question that extends in turn into other domains of practice).[18] Individual social practices, therefore, have *preconditions* in other practices and offer *connections* for further practices. Thus, practices are interwoven with a whole variety of other practices and attitudes from which they first derive their specific function and meaning. Such interrelations and contexts can be called forms of life.

2.2 The Interconnected Character of Practices

It follows from what has been said that practices are always "practices in a nexus." Conversely, as I claimed, forms of life are ensembles of social practices. Then identifying a form of life *as* a form of life means identifying and understanding a particular nexus of practices as such. So forms of life constitute a certain *segment* of the field of possible practices. But they are also the organizing principle of this field insofar as forms of life do not merely represent a loose assemblage of disjointed practices.[19] But how is this organizing principle, this nexus, constituted? How do the individual practices that make up such a cluster of practices fit together? And what effect does it have on them that they are grouped together in this way into a form of life? What determines what belongs (potentially or necessarily) to a form of life, and what accordingly constitutes the nexus of a given form of life?[20]

Ensembles of Practices and Attitudes

If forms of life must be understood as nexuses or "ensembles of practices and orientations,"[21] then they consist trivially of *several* practices that stand in some relationship to one another. Greeting or shopping, playing hide-and-seek with children or conducting seminars taken in isolation are not forms of life but parts of a form of life. But if, in addition to regularly playing hide-and-seek with children one also engages in further practices—for example, often having dinner with children, reading to children, bringing children to daycare, attending a parent-teacher meeting, preparing the lantern for the lantern parade, and many other of the like—then a context of practices takes shape that can be called a form of life (for example, a family). Depending on how one understands this context, and depending on what further practices and relations are added, then we are dealing with the form of life of a traditional or a patchwork family, of a queer or homosexual family, or of a nuclear or an extended family. Similarly, conducting seminars in conjunction with many other practices becomes the "academic form of life," just as going shopping together with many other practices becomes the hedonistic consumerist form of life of late capitalism.

Having now adopted the talk of forms of life as ensembles of practices and orientations, it becomes apparent that in the phrase "practices and orientations," the reference to the associated orientations, attitudes, and beliefs is actually redundant.[22] Practices are inextricably interwoven with attitudes and orientations, insofar as they are always interpreted and not "raw" practices, as Charles Taylor has demonstrated.[23] We not only engage in practices, therefore, but understand them simultaneously *as something* (as a game, as an expression of *joie de vivre* or intimacy, or as hospitality). This means that the individuals concerned not only do something (crouch behind the bush, cook dinner, eat), but also understand this doing *as* something (as playing, as a family meal) and invest it with meaning (intimacy, care, refinement).[24] In certain respects, the attitudes of the actors in this way first endow the practices with unity; on the other hand, the attitudes, values, and purposes are not even conceivable apart from the context in which they are put into practice. Without exchange relationships, the expectation of fairness in exchanges would not exist; without intimate relations, certain forms of solicitude would not exist; and without social contact, courtesy would not exist. Therefore, the attitudes toward and interpretations of practices go hand in hand with the practices and lend them their specific character. Conversely, the orientations we are dealing with here are not free-floating. Rather, they are orientations in view of (and interpretations of) practices.

Forms of Life as Functional and Interpretive Contexts

From what has been said so far, we can derive some initial clues for answering the question concerning the nexus of individual practices.

First, forms of life are always a nexus founded on *interpretation*. To share a form of life means not only engaging together in practices but also sharing the interpretations—but above all the *schemata* of interpretation—for these practices. Alasdair MacIntyre explains what this involves:

> Consider what it is to share a culture. It is to share schemata which are at one and the same time constitutive of and normative for intelligible action by myself and are also means for my interpretation of the action of others.[25]

Such schemata of interpretation enable me to understand particular practices as such (for instance, to understand hide-and-seek as a game or the shared evening meal as an expression of familial well-being). They specify—in a prescriptive, normative sense—how these actions should be performed and which practices belong here so that the actions fulfill this meaning (orders belong in the barracks, but not in the nursery). And they provide me with the means to interpret the actions of others so that I understand that the child standing behind the tree is playing hide-and-seek. In the process not only do I know that the child is playing this specific game, but I also have a notion of what it means to play as such, because my scheme of interpretation includes a distinction between play and work or between play and serious matters, and the like. This observation is not independent of the fact that I regard the small person I am dealing with here as a "child" in the first place as opposed to an "adult." Moreover, the entire assessment and evaluation of the situation with which I am faced will be dependent on all of these schemata and the background thus posited.[26]

The second clue follows from the fact that the collections of practices that come together to constitute the form of life are in part interrelated and intermeshed in practical-functional ways. The rules and norms of a practice refer to elements constituted by other practices, and some of the practices that fit together to constitute the form of life are even interrelated in the quite tangible sense of an interdependent *functional nexus*. Agricultural practices in the production of food are a prerequisite for urban consumption, and practices of exchange with their diverse implications are a prerequisite for goods gaining access to markets—all of which is based on specific ways of organizing work, transport, ownership, and so on. The same kind of (functionally) interlocking elements can be reconstructed for the form of life of the family or the academic form of life. Thus, the latter is based on practices of acquiring and imparting knowledge, on media for transferring knowledge and the practices in which it is applied, but also in turn on economic practices that make it possible to set a portion of the population free for education and research. Similarly, there are also different kinds of conditions for the form of life of the nuclear family that make different versions of family life possible and mark them—for example, the existence or nonexistence of day-care institutions together with the associated interpretations of parenthood.

As it happens, it is quite obvious that not all practices belonging to a particular form of life are functionally interrelated in this immediate palpable sense that applies to the nexuses described above. The existence of childcare institutions outside the home is indeed a functional prerequisite for the existence of nuclear families with double incomes, and the existence of exchange relations is a precondition for shopping. But in what sense are playing hide-and-seek or building a kite (component practices of the form of life of the family) functional prerequisites—and for what exactly? Not only must we bear in mind here that there are functional equivalents for almost every function and that in the case of the family these equivalents are particularly diverse and variable. Much more important is that the functions are not independent of the interpretations of the practices, their context, and the form of life to which they (are supposed to) belong. If one wants to assert about playing hide-and-seek—and even if one generalizes it to play as such—that it is an indispensable part of the form of life of child-rearing or parenthood, one can assert this only if one interprets playing with children within the framework of a particular conception of child-rearing and childhood as a precondition for a successful life of and with children.

Then the practices bring both the interpretations of practices *as something* and the functional assignment of practices *as being good for something* into correlation with each other. Conversely, it is because practices are more than raw facts and because they are directed to ends within an interpretive framework connected with other ends that they can combine to constitute a form of life.

The Practical-Hermeneutic Circle

What I meant when I assumed at the outset that forms of life do not only consist of loose bundles of practices should now be clearer. We assume that the practices and attitudes we associate with a form of life stand in an internal or qualitative relationship to each other. This is supposed to express that these practices not only regularly occur together, but that in doing so they stand in specific relations to each other. Moreover, the fact that they occur together is not contingent but is intelligible in the broad context of determining what is supposed to be expressed and realized in forms of life.

The relationship between the nexus and its individual elements can be understood in the case of forms of life and their constitutive practices as a practical-hermeneutic circle: practices that feature in the nexus of a form of life or constitute it are interpreted in the light of an anticipatory reference to the (imagined) whole of a form of life. Conversely, the latter is constituted and progressively concretized by the interrelated practices in question. Thus, the form of life takes shape step by step and develops into a context. In this way, practices come together to constitute forms of life and at the same time are brought together by the latter. The individual practices are geared to the nexus and derive meaning from it; conversely, it is the practices themselves that constitute this nexus.

The interpretative framework in question, therefore, is not an ominous entity situated above or beyond the practices themselves. Rather, it is a matter of a reciprocal relationship between whole and parts in which each is constituted through the other and neither is conceivable independent of the other. This is (very much in keeping with the hermeneutic idea[27]) not a *vicious* but a *virtuous* circle, because one must think of this process as one in which the parts are reciprocally enriched, differentiated, and determined by the whole and the whole in turn by the parts.[28] The process in question is an open one, however, in which the whole with reference to which we interpret the individual practices is not known from the outset. Rather, it is first constituted in the interplay with the changing elements and in the process is continually reconfigured and transformed.[29]

The nexus that was sought, therefore, is not something that only externally organizes the practices collected by it, and the framework or schemata of interpretation of which MacIntyre speaks should not be sought in some place beyond the practices. Rather, they designate an orientation of the practices themselves and their semantic content and hence are to a certain extent embedded in them.

Controversy over the Context

If we understand forms of life as interpretive and functional nexuses, therefore, this means that for every practice situated in such a nexus it must be possible to reconstruct a coherent understanding in the context of the further practices with which it is interrelated. But this very understanding is often controversial and a matter of conflicting interpretations from which we can learn a lot about the shape of forms of life (and the possibility of criticizing them). To enter into a dispute about what exactly constitutes or should constitute a form of life, therefore, means not least to argue about which practices and attitudes together constitute a certain form of life and how they should be understood in this nexus.

Thus, we often have quite a precise intuitive idea when it comes to forms of life about which practices and attitudes fit and which do not fit or are incongruous within certain ensembles, and also about what does and does not belong to a specific form of life. If we consider the phenomena, connections of very different strengths (and different interpretations of them) are involved here.

Take, for example, the city as a form of life. The big-city dweller rides the subway. Her home and place of work are typically separated from each other. She lives in an apartment, moves frequently, and does not grow her own food. To the form of life in (big) cities also belong certain habits of consumption and a certain style of furnishing, a certain way of moving around the city,[30] and the ability to filter out stimuli that Georg Simmel called a "blasé attitude" and considered to be a typical trait of the big-city dweller.[31] Here, too, belongs the "aloofness" also attributed by Simmel to the big-city dweller as an "elementary form of socialization" of the big city.[32] Another trait that can be attributed to the big-city dweller is dealing with and being able to deal with public spaces and the proverbial open-mindedness and independence invoked by the German saying "City air makes you free" that goes back to the Middle Ages.[33]

Thus, it is sometimes asked in the light of recent urban developments whether a city that lacks freely accessible spaces for public assembly is still a city, or whether one must not instead speak of a decline of urbanity in the face of the privatization and the "mall-ification" of public spaces. Underlying these questions is the idea that not only a large number of human beings but also certain forms of social relations belong to the form of life of a big city, so that a big city first becomes a city through the corresponding practices and attitudes.

Let us consider further the form of life of the classical bourgeois family. To this belongs conventionally the "sharing of table and bed," living together under one roof, and concomitant practices such as the shared evening meal and its preparation, celebrating birthdays and other festivities, and caring for each other in various forms appropriate to each case, such as childcare and care of the elderly. Families involve shared projects and emotional connectedness but also mutual dependency and possibly even relationships of domination. These practices manifest themselves at the level of consumption in so-called family cars (with a large trunk), family homes (close to playgrounds), and family hotels (with high chairs).

Here, too, we find notions about what belongs to and what constitutes a family. Thus, in some families disputes over the shared evening meal become heightened into a test of the resilience of a family—something familiar from conflicts with teenage children. The debate over the new laws governing marriage, the turn away from the provider model to the idea of financial independence in an equal partnership, is also a debate over which practices and attitudes belong to the family and which do not. And in the debate over modern family forms, the slogan "Children are what make a family" pointedly advocates a new understanding of what constitutes a family. Therefore, the form of life of the family is fulfilled for the proponents of the respective positions only if certain moments deemed to be constitutive for the family—the evening meal, a shared bank account, children who have to be cared for—are given.

People also have strong intuitions about what *does not fit into* or belong to the ensembles sketched here. While it may be appropriate in a small-town diner (or at any rate what a city dweller imagines by a small-town diner) to greet everyone on entering, someone who introduces himself to passersby on Fifth Avenue during Christmas shopping is either an oddball or a troublemaker. The acceptance of anonymity and the constitutive aloofness toward others belong to the form of life of the big city. Accordingly, there are strategies specific to big cities for nevertheless forming contacts, even if these strategies differ between New York, Paris, Istanbul, and Berlin.

A family father who kept detailed accounts of all of the expenses associated with the upkeep of his children and presented his offspring with a bill, inclusive of (compound) interest, on reaching adulthood would not only be considered callous (based on traditional family values); the associated attitudes also seem incongruous in view of the form of life of the classical bourgeois family. The practice of "cashing in" on parental care does not belong to this specific formation and interpretation of the family—when viewed against the backdrop of the modern ideal of familial relationships based on intimacy and authenticity. Instead, this form of life is informed by a conception of reciprocal intimate connectedness that contradicts the objectified model of a service provided with an expectation of recompense.[34]

But what does not fit or is incongruous *[unpassend],* and in what sense, with reference to the cases presented here? The relations of fit *[Passungsverhältnisse]* alluded to here can be understood in a number of ways.

Relations of Fit

First, it can be argued that the practices described do not cohere with the other practices involved in the corresponding situations. Thus, they do not cohere or fit *with each other.* For example, presenting one's children with a bill for rearing them does not cohere with the kinds of emotional ties that the father in this case nevertheless also expects from his children (even if they do not go beyond authority and obedience) and that are not covered by a contractual relationship. Introducing oneself to passersby on Fifth Avenue does not cohere with the fact that the people concerned will probably never see each other again.

Second, one can point out that a certain practice seems incongruous within the interpretive framework defined by the context of a form of life. In this sense, presenting a final bill for child-rearing does not cohere with the customary—hence culturally operative—interpretations of the relationship between parents and children; it does not fit with the intimacy and mode of authenticity of relationships in the bourgeois family. And introducing oneself does not fit with the self-understanding of the big-city dweller.

Thus, the practices in question *do not fit together* and *are not a good fit with us* to the extent that they cannot be placed in a coherent relation with the other practices that comprise a form of life and the interpretive framework constituted by the latter. Then expressions like "That is no longer a family" and "That is no longer a city" suggest that, just as in the case of individual practices, also with forms of life (as nexuses of practices), there are *internal* conditions of success or fulfillment—conditions against which, conversely, a form of life can also infringe or which it can realize only in a deficient way.[35]

Practices can, of course, be changed, just as individual practices as well as the nexus in which they stand can be continually reinterpreted. But in line with the observation above concerning the demarcation from fashion, then something would *change*—namely, an entire structure (in effect, a form of life).[36]

This leads to a third way of conceiving of the appropriateness of certain practices in the nexus of a form of life. For the relation of fit can also be interpreted in teleological terms (hence based on the purposes posited together with the practices). If many practices first derive their meaning and their conditions of possibility from being embedded in a further nexus of practices and interpretations—hence, if the good and the purpose that a practice is supposed to realize cannot be realized in it alone—then forms of life turn out to be structured ensembles in which complex goods or purposes are pursued. Identifying something as a particular form of life means, accordingly, identifying nexuses of practices and attitudes as a nexus that is *good for something*. Then within such a nexus there are practices that serve to realize the purposes it posits and practices that run counter to these purposes. And there are also practices that are neutral in this regard. The shape and character of a nexus of practices can then be explained in terms of the fact that the individual elements can only fulfill together what is required by the form of life as a form of life. On this basis, one can no longer argue only that certain practices do not fit or are inappropriate (which was indeed the initial tentative starting point), but also (positively) that certain practices must be components of the nexus of a form of life if it is not to remain deficient.

Substantive or Factual Adequacy

We are now in a position to offer a more detailed, systematic account of the motif of substantive or factual adequacy *[Sachangemessenheit]* or the reference to real conditions *[Sachbezug]* that was mentioned above in the discussion of fashion. The practices that appear incongruous within a form of life and seem inappropriate with reference to the latter not only do not fit *with each other.* Insofar as they do not fit with the interpretive framework of this form of life, they do not fit the matter *[passen nicht zur Sache]* they are supposed to serve either, whether it be from the perspective of the purpose posited with them or from that of the conditions they must expect to encounter when realizing their purposes.

The problem, as my foregoing reflections suggest, is that it is not entirely arbitrary which practices can function within a particular form of life at all. It is not a merely contingent convention that it is unusual in big cities to introduce yourself formally to everyone who passes by; rather, this is a result of the density and the intensity of interactions in big cities. Likewise, the absurdity of the idea of presenting a final bill for child-rearing services is already ensured by the fact that the constitutive conditions for concluding a contract for caring services are missing here.[37] A civil contract cannot be concluded between underage and initially helpless children and adults because it presupposes that the contracting parties are self-sufficient and independent. If practices are to fit the form of life of the family in this sense, then they must take into account the underlying reality that here there are children in need of care and there is an original asymmetry. Moreover, care is a different currency from money, and it is questionable whether the one can be converted into the other. Therefore, here too, presenting a bill for child-rearing services to one's offspring does not strike us as absurd because it would violate a mere convention. What is at stake is a culturally and historically saturated understanding of what constitutes familial relationships anchored in a complex of practices and their interpretations. This also has a substantive or factual reference, even though this is not as obvious as that of interactions in a metropolitan setting, because it is a second-order factual reference. Thus, the fact of contractual capacity or the understanding of dependence and independence itself is not simply something objectively given, but is a result of historical cultural positings.

Then, on closer examination, the difference between the two conceptions of appropriateness initially introduced here separately (appropriateness, on the one hand, to the interpretive framework and, on the other, to the purposes of a nexus of practices) is not as great as it appeared at first sight. It is difficult to distinguish between "fitting together," "fitting the interpretive framework," and "fitting the matter" precisely because the matter with which certain practices fit (or do not fit) is not or only seldom a raw fact and is normally a state of affairs sustained by practices and interpretations that cohere with each other.

Therefore, if the practices belonging to the nexus of a form of life represent the moments required to facilitate the *functioning* of a particular practical nexus, then, conversely, this functioning is not something objective, because our understanding of this functional interlocking already depends in turn on attributions of meaning and interpretations of the practices in question. Only in limit cases, therefore, is the adaptation to reality

[Sachhaltigkeit] to which I alluded independent of interpretation in this sense objective and given with the matter. However, there are criteria of appropriateness for interpretations. We can approach this notion of appropriateness in a preliminary way by recalling that forms of life take shape around what can be called "initial conditions." These initial conditions are in part natural, such as the biological condition of helplessness of newborn human beings or certain geographical and climatic conditions, and in part (and mostly) self-created, such as the initial conditions of the urban form of life; even the latter, however, are based in turn on natural initial conditions.[38] As we shall see in Chapter 4, however, this foundation is not especially informative, and the assumption it involves is not especially dramatic. It is simply a matter of limiting the possible scope for interpreting and shaping, from which not much follows for a positive account of forms of life. Only the understanding of the forms of life as problem-solving nexuses—hence as a higher-order conditionality—can lay claim to a higher explanatory value in this respect, as will have to be shown.

Summary

In the rather confusing field of possible relationships between the individual practices of a form of life, there are obviously very different types of interconnections, and these exhibit correspondingly different kind of interdependence. The assumption seems unproblematic that the connections between the practices that make up the ensemble of a form of life will be constituted one way in some places and differently in others and that, taken as a whole, the connections involved will sometimes be stronger and sometimes weaker. Some specific clusters within the overarching context of a form of life stand in a close (and even functional) interconnection; others may fit in in a looser and unspecific sense. Some of them fit well together but can also be imagined independently of each other (and as not being part of the form of life as such); others are "nodes" (to stick with the image of a network). Forms of life are variable nexuses of practices, not closed and extensively integrated wholes. Thus, one can imagine the dynamic of change of forms of life as involving shifts in weight and the emergence of new constellations, but also individual practices falling away or being replaced by others. One may find that the family does not disintegrate if it no longer eats its evening meal together. Similarly, the center of gravity of this form of life shifts with the move away from the provider marriage, without as a result immediately calling the family as an emotional center and locus of mutual care into question.

Therefore, forms of life as nexuses of practices are held together and individuated as interpreted functional interconnections against the background of substantive or factual initial conditions. The social field is subdivided into such distinct areas or regions of forms of life insofar as here we encounter different, interdependent nexuses with the corresponding complex practices and attributions of functions.

In this regard, the nexus should be understood in a moderately holistic sense, insofar as being situated within this nexus changes the individual practices. This means that it is constitutive for the practices in question, and the fact that they are interconnected in this way is not something external but something that defines their character. Conversely, the nexus, as an open context of meaning, is constituted by these practices.

In the following section, I will attempt to throw light on the character of the context of a form of life in yet another respect.

2.3 The Moment of Inertia

If, as we have seen, a form of life is a nexus or ensemble of social practices, then it is a result of what people do, an instance of human activity. However, forms of life are in many respects not fully available to individual actors, but instead present a moment of inertia or resistance to their actions and activities. Describing forms of life as "nexuses of practices marked by inertia" is an attempt to take these features into account.

At Once Given and Made

The relation of tension thus implied manifests itself as follows: forms of life (as asserted in the introduction) are *forms* in which life is lived; they concern the domain in which something can be *shaped* and hence also *reshaped.* Animals *live*—and they often even live together in a kind of social order; however, this order is not something that is shaped and imprinted but is instead a product of instinctive routines.[39] On the other hand, when human beings *share a form of life,* this involves a certain scope for shaping, justifying, and deciding—and this is even the precondition of the fact that it can be appropriate to engage in the activity of criticism with regard to forms of life.[40] Where something cannot be other than it is (or, at any rate, where the changes it undergoes cannot be deliberately influenced), criticism would be absurd.

As it happens, however, forms of life (as something formed) include—besides the aspect of freedom, stability, and malleability—also a prereflexive aspect, an aspect of antecedence and ineluctability. This ambiguity is captured by the expression "second nature." As second nature, forms of life are both: on the one hand, they are created by human beings, and hence are artificial and therefore not nature; on the other hand, they are *like* nature in that in certain respects they confront human beings as a precondition that is as incontrovertible as first nature. They *become* nature; they present themselves no longer as *made* but as *given.* Forms of life in this respect are always already there and create and shape the space of possibility of our actions. Does this mean that the scope for shaping that is decisive for forms of life does not exist after all—a scope on which the very *possibility* of criticizing forms of life essentially depends?

My thesis is that forms of life are both—they are always *at once given and made*.[41] Even where they confront the acting subject as a formative structure and have become hardened into habits, they originate and are reproduced in practical performances. Even the customary, fixed, and antecedent aspect that forms of life present to us can be traced back to human activity. It is "sedimented" human activity. The point now is to understand the mechanisms underlying this sedimentation or consolidation.

Materiality and Institutionalization

A first mechanism of sedimentation can be traced back to the fact that forms of life are *as much material* as they are *spiritual formations.* As I have emphasized, forms of life as ensembles of practices also include their materializations. It is precisely the advantage of the concept of a form of life that it includes material manifestations and embodiments of attitudes and practices. It is not for nothing that one can infer from the artifacts left behind by a past social formation to the character of the life lived during that epoch. Forms of life have a material—or better a "thinglike"—side by which they are shaped and which they shape.[42]

For example, the ways of distinguishing between the public and the private specific to forms of life are also manifested in the urban landscape.[43] Conversely, such materializations make certain forms of life possible (or necessary). Here it becomes apparent how the two aspects—the material and the immaterial dimensions of forms of life—interpenetrate, mutually influence, and condition each other. Simplifying somewhat, if city planning and architecture are expressions of a form of life, then conversely the resulting shape assumed by the city dictates—at least in part[44]—how to live in the city.[45] It is this moment of materialization that contributes to the fact that practice appears here not only in a current or fluid shape, but also becomes firmly established. The things are already there when we act, and they do not disappear again so quickly. As Hannah Arendt explained for the material world in general, they outlive our actions and our existence in the world.[46]

The same holds for institutions and for the institutionalized parts of forms of life. If institutions and forms of life (as explained in Section 1.1) differ in their fixed aggregate states, then the fact that forms of life also contain institutionalized parts in addition to material aspects is a further reason for the inertia of the practical nexus of forms of life. After all, institutions also typically outlast the living practices they comprehend, or they are able to lend practices a form that outlasts these practices. And just as with the material dimension, institutions prescribe forms—witness the legal codification of romantic relationships into the institution of marriage—in which individuals find themselves involuntarily and which shape their possibilities of life and action.

Habit and Tacit Knowledge

In addition to the processes of materialization and institutionalization, the third moment of the inertia characteristic of forms of life as nexuses of practices arises from the above-mentioned fact that practices (and hence also forms of life) have a *habitual character*. This also has consequences for the aggregate state of forms of life. Habits and routines facilitate practical processes and sometimes even make them possible in the first place—as stable frameworks. But this also makes them into moments of inertia, insofar as it means that they cannot be easily changed. One may fall back into habits and routines even when one wants to change them. William James did not call habit the "conservative agent" within social life for nothing.[47]

If habits are not always available and cannot always be shaped, this is partly due to the aforementioned fact that in the case of habitual processes one does not form new intentions every time. When David Hume conceives of custom or habit as the propensity "to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding," he explains the moment of persistence that goes along with habit formation as a matter of bypassing the reflection that could provide the basis for a new decision and a new course of action.[48]

Therefore, if forms of life rest to a considerable extent on habits and practical routines, then the processes and dispositions—as well as the attitudes and attributions—connected with them sometimes never even find their way into the reflexive foreground in which the corresponding practical dispositions could be changed. This is why Joachim Renn makes a connection between the existence of forms of life and the concepts of "tacit knowledge" and of practical know-how:

> Forms of life . . . can be regarded as forms of communalization that are not integrated through formal organization, nor even through self-chosen concrete explanations, but through the collective agreement between implicit, complex dispositions of speech and action. . . . Sociocultural forms of life rest on cultural agreement insofar as culture here refers to habitual know-how that operates in the mode of implicit taken-for-grantedness.[49]

Then we do not so much *know* our forms of life as we *know our way about* in them. According to this thesis, we operate primarily *practically* in forms of life and are acquainted with the constituting norms through practical activation. We have only implicit knowledge of them insofar as mastering and activating the practice in question involves such knowledge. However, this knowledge does not have to be updated in each case and does not have to be—consciously—available in every respect.[50]

As it happens, the motif of implicit or *tacit* knowledge inspired by the reflections of the philosopher and theorist of science Michael Polanyi and the associated motif of know-how (in the sense of abilities based on practical knowledge of courses of action, which is mostly implicit) are sometimes used in a rather undifferentiated way.[51] The relevant respects in which knowledge can be tacit and abilities genuinely practical can be explained well using the example of driving and driving experience.

We have good reasons for saying that, even after passing the driving test, someone still has to acquire driving experience in order to be really able to drive. Firstly, this does not mean, for example, that the individual concerned has to learn the rules of driving even better than when she took the test. On the contrary, to a certain extent she has to forget the rules. She has to internalize and develop a feel for what she has learned—release the clutch slowly and then depress the gas pedal; the first driver to reach a four-way stop sign has priority—so that it becomes a routine, quasi-automatic sequence of actions that she does not have to reflect on it over and over again. This knowledge is *implicit* when, assuming sufficient experience, one does not always have to have the rules one has learned consciously available and at some point one is no longer able to access them either. Secondly, there may also be aspects of being able to drive that one has not forgotten or has not let fade into the background but whose rules one has never known. Just as some people apply grammatical rules correctly without being able to explain them, one can perform aspects of driving without having learned a corresponding rule—even though these rules can in principle be explicated. From these aspects of driving must be distinguished, thirdly, those which are so closely bound up with experience that corresponding (formalized) rules cannot even be found or the rules would be far too complex to be illuminating or communicable at the practical level. Here it is not a matter of rule knowledge having become implicit or only existing implicitly; rather, these rules cannot even be formulated on account of the specific circumstances of implementation. Even the simple sequence "carefully release the clutch until the gear engages and then depress the gas pedal" is a procedure that one can ultimately learn only by trial and error—hence only *in* practice—even if the sequence may be clear in principle in advance based on knowledge of the corresponding technical conditions. In such cases, practical skills cannot be fully expressed as theoretical knowledge: "We can know more than we can tell."[52] Then practical learning of competences can no longer be conceived as the implementation of what was previously grasped cognitively; knowing and doing cannot be separated into two distinct steps.

Knowledge can be implicit, therefore, either because we have *forgotten* its explicit version (the rules) in routines, or because we *cannot verbalize* what we know (we do not know the rules explicitly even though we apply them), or because it is a matter of practical knowledge based on experience that is too complex or cannot be formalized and can be acquired and exercised only *through practical implementation*. The corresponding influential thesis is that this kind of knowledge is not a secondary phenomenon but rather allows systematic inferences about our dealings with the world and the relationship between knowledge and practice. Correspondingly, what Stuart Hampshire in a widely admired essay has called the "inexhaustibility of description" is based on the fact that the intentions and reasons that are effective in action stand, or even can stand, only in part in the foreground of our conduct.[53]

The concept of implicit knowledge and know-how does in fact explain some aspects of our interactions with and within our surrounding forms of life. Here, too, we seldom know all of the implications of the various practices or ensembles of practices in which we are involved and which we practically master. They are too complex to be fully accessible to reflection. This is what Stuart Hampshire, in his analysis of manners, has aptly called *condensed thinking*, which expresses the idea that we act habitually and intuitively even with regard to social customs and that in these cases the rules governing our conduct are overdetermined and are not fully explicable.[54] But then we are acting here on a ground of self-evidence (in a Wittgensteinian sense), in a mode of implicit self-evidence in which we cannot—and do not have to—constantly keep in mind all of these rules for dealing with things.

The motifs of implicit knowledge and the moment of the know-how associated with the mode of implementation of practices thus provide additional pointers for explaining the moments of unavailability that together constitute the inertia of the practical network of forms of life. What one does not know explicitly one cannot change so easily, or so it seems. And for what is self-evident one does not need any reasons; hence, countervailing reasons cannot carry any weight here either.

Sources of Disruption as Occasions for Explication

As it happens, some authors tend to bring these moments of sedimentation, habit formation, and implicit knowledge too hastily into position as a contrasting model to (on their interpretation, exaggerated) notions of reflection and criticizability, and thus to absolutize the aspect of unavailability of forms of life. If, by contrast, one wants to explain the moment of configurability nevertheless associated with forms of life as a "second nature," then one can also tell a different story that accentuates another aspect.

That knowledge can be implicit does not mean that it cannot be made explicit for the most part; that habit formation tends to overshadow the formation of intentions does not mean that intentions were not in the foreground at some point or that there are no rules or principles by which they are guided. And the fact that one assimilates practices through performance does not mean that they are not in principle open to change. This applies to both the individual and collective sides of habit formation. In fact, the process of rendering explicit what is implicit and of thematizing practical performances is also commonplace.

Even actions that we normally and routinely perform involuntarily, and whose internal rules we know only implicitly, are regularly made explicit when a disruption occurs that interrupts or problematizes their course—that is, when the otherwise unproblematic unfolding of sequences of actions grinds to a halt for some reason. Stuart Hampshire expresses a motif that is familiar from Martin Heidegger via William James to Wittgenstein and John Dewey in a nutshell as follows:

> It is a well-known fact that most of our routine actions are performed without our being aware of how we perform them, unless we happen to encounter a difficulty when performing them.[55]

In the case of a disruption or irritation, therefore, the action routine becomes "conspicuous" (Heidegger) and the implicit and practical knowledge has to be reactivated, made transparent, or reformulated. If a process does not function as it is supposed to, then knowledge must be remobilized, and the routine sequences of actions must be made explicit once again, reevaluated, and, if necessary, readjusted. Such disruptions occur not only at the level of technical-instrumental processes, when, as Heidegger puts it, the "tool becomes conspicuous" because it is not "ready to hand" in the usual way (for example, because it is broken). They also arise in everyday interpersonal relations. If the person I want to shake hands with withdraws her hand in a gesture of irritation or annoyance, then I am forced to recognize that I may be in a country in which greeting with a handshake is uncommon and will make a corresponding adjustment to bridge the situation by switching to a different greeting ritual.

However, it is not only individual practices that are susceptible to disruption in this sense. Forms of life as such (as interpreted nexuses of attitudes and practices that normally recede into the background or form the "ground of self-evidence" of whose precise shape the participants only seldom are explicitly aware) are in certain situations also prey to disruptions that elevate them above the threshold of attention.

We are all familiar with the phenomenon of the imprint of certain forms of life suddenly becoming apparent when they are confronted with differently shaped forms of life. In such cases, not only do we find certain practices or their materializations disconcerting (think of the greeting rituals alluded to above or dating practices or of the confrontation with the urban public space when one finds oneself for the first time in an American suburb or in a provincial town in western Germany), but they confront us with the disconcerting otherness of a whole form of life against which our own habits and what we take for granted first emerge by contrast. It is precisely at such moments of disruption that we reflect on the contexts of practices that we have brought forth *as* a form of life, that we become aware of them as such and as a context.[56] In such situations, a form of life becomes conspicuous, and the nexus of a form of life is actualized in the form of the articulation or rearticulation of the self-understanding of something *as a form of life* (analogous to the readjustment of practices described above).

Such occurrences may be more or less frequent. These kinds of explications, interpretations, and manifestations of one's own form of life as a form of life acquire urgency in situations in which it is confronted with unexpected conditions so that it has to demarcate itself or is drawn into a conflict. Thus, it actually seems to be characteristic of the forms of life of modernity at their zenith (which were also times of conflict) that they found themselves in a state of reflected and programmatic demarcation from nonmodern forms of life. And traditional forms of life also become programmatic and explicit when they come under pressure.[57]

Here one can assert that if forms of life become explicit as forms of life under such conditions of conflict and transformation, then the ground of self-evidence becomes unstable. The nexus of a form of life is a background that specifically is not and does not need to be thematized as such. Nevertheless, it is also the case that this nexus sometimes—generally in cases of disruptions—intrudes as a context of practice, but then it also does so in ways that are explicit and understandable and hence can be shaped and negotiated. But precisely such cases demonstrate that implicit knowledge is also a form of knowledge, that implicit reasons are also reasons, and that the mode of implicit communication and implicit "cultural agreement" (of which Joachim Renn speaks) have become ingrained through repeated performance, and thus were produced and must sometimes be reestablished through further performance.

This finding becomes important once we recognize that the motif of disruption is not necessarily confined to the glaring exceptions or dramatic crisis situations that it seems to suggest. Large- or small-scale disruptions are by no means infrequent occurrences. As every artisan knows, the appearance of practical impediments is the rule rather than the exception. Of course, we rarely find ourselves compelled to make all practices and all aspects of a form of life explicit simultaneously, to relate to them, to communicate about them, or to readjust them all at the same time. But this occurs more often with regard to one aspect or another than the term "exception" would suggest. Indeed, one could even assert that negotiating and adjusting is a constitutive moment of establishing and maintaining forms of life.

Appropriation and Negotiation Mechanisms

It follows that the ground of self-evidence itself is not as a self-evident as it may appear. This must also be prepared in the first place, and it is produced in the partly implicit and partly explicit negotiations between the participants in a social world. The fact that the practices embedded in forms of life are in part implicit and prereflexive in no way alters the fact that the procedure of adopting and participating in them can nevertheless be described as an active process. For it is not just the knowledge and self-understanding embedded in the practices that can be implicit but sometimes also the negotiation mechanisms through which what is self-evident is produced in the first place. Then even the adoption of social customs has an active character if we follow the descriptions of ethnomethodologists. Here, too, there are implicit positions and elements of practical constitution which show that the participants are active producers and not just passive recipients. According to this description, even the functioning of mundane practices should be understood as a continuous, if not necessarily verbal, negotiation process.[58]

Social actors are always both recipients and producers. They find the social structures already there just as much as they constitute them. But then one should not imagine the gulf between the initial creation and the adoption of the practices embedded in forms of life as being excessively large either. For in the process of being adopted (which should be conceived in active terms), forms of life are always also re-created. Even if they are not created out of nothing, they are always shaped and transformed in such a process of appropriation.[59] Therefore, it seems to make sense to speak of *participation in* forms of life as a *reproduction of* forms of life insofar as the latter includes active participation, but also involves dealing with what is already given (and hence is not a matter of shaping *ab ovo*). Such reproduction is not merely repetition but is itself a creative process that includes the transformation of what is reproduced.

Are forms of life therefore something created by our actions? Or are they what shape our conduct and make it possible, and hence something more like background conditions of our actions? According to what has been said so far, this is a false alternative. Forms of life are created by our actions *and,* as something we create, become background conditions of our actions. Where forms of life have a component of inertia, of unavailability and givenness, this is because practice has become sedimented in them. Forms of life are formations in which past actions have become submerged. But these elements also have to be continuously reactualized if they are to become the living nexus of a form of life, and they can be reactualized when forms of life are exposed to the process of examination and transformation that I want to call "criticism."

Institutability of Forms of Life

This finding also coheres with the fact that the development of a particular form of life must often be conceived as a process in which it has in part *emerged* in a naturelike way (which here only means "without planning intervention") and in part was in some sense initiated or *founded* (for example, a political creation or the outcome of a planned program).[60] Elements of planned positing go hand in hand with elements of unregulated development. However, it is important for the character of a form of life that, whatever programmatic aspects may have played a role in their genesis, they must have taken root. Not every program can develop into a form of life; there are forms of resistance that elude instituting. This point can be illustrated by the early twentieth-century debate over architecture. The Art Nouveau manifesto and later also the manifesto of classical modernism called expressly for a new architecture for a new form of life, not only in the sense that the new architecture was supposed to correspond to this form of life as something that already existed, but also in the sense of founding or initiating new forms of life.[61] Architecture was supposed to serve as a forerunner and initiator of a "Lebens-Reform" (in the peculiarly German tradition of calls for reforming ways of life). But in precisely this context the criticism was made that this program ignored the realities of everyday life, a criticism expressed succinctly in the writings on architecture from the 1920s by architectural theorist Julius Posener. The criticism was that the new architecture had not combined with the established customs and needs to create a new form of life, or that it was not able to establish itself as such a form of life because it was incompatible with people's well-established habits of life.[62]

Therefore, forms of life are based on practices that develop but that, as practices, also undergo change (and can be changed) and that sometimes owe their existence to an external or institutional stimulus. Thus, Pierre Bourdieu's study of the construction of family homes in France teaches that it is important to examine the institutional and political framework conditions within which forms of life emerge (in this case, for example, lending practices and politically motivated development plans).[63] At the same time, however, one should not overestimate the power of such moments of conscious shaping either. Establishing or changing a form of life calls for a relationship of fit with already established sources of practical authority. In the final analysis, it is the formation of habits and customs and the always stubborn persistence compared to the original concept that will constitute a form of life.

2.4 Practice, Criticism, Reflection

I would now like to summarize the thrust of what has been said so far for understanding forms of life and the possibility of criticizing them. The specific question that arises in connection with the dimension of unavailability of forms of life (and their self-evidence) is the following: Is it even *possible* to criticize forms of life? More precisely: Are forms of life, understood as inert ensembles of social practices, formations that it makes sense to criticize at all?

If we conceive of "criticism" as providing an impetus for transforming a (social) formation based on reasons, as a process in which the worthiness of criticism of the corresponding situation or relationship is recognized and demonstrated and a change for the better is sought, then only a certain type of formation qualifies as a possible object of criticism. This is because criticism needs an *addressee,* the possibility at least in principle of *implementation,* and a *yardstick.*

It is a truism that bad weather is not open to criticism. Where something cannot be other than it is (or at any rate the changes it undergoes are not open to deliberate influence), criticism is absurd, even if the corresponding state of affairs is a source of suffering. What happens (to us) without anyone causing it and without anyone being able to change anything about it even in principle cannot be made into a meaningful object of criticism. With my question concerning the *criticizability* of forms of life, therefore, I am asking whether forms of life are formations that are changeable and can be shaped and reshaped by human activity at all. I have already tried to provide an answer to both of these questions. Forms of life are established practices and routines; they form a context that signifies the self-evident and defines our possibilities of action. But this does not mean that the corresponding nexuses of practices cannot be shaped or justified. Even while recognizing the nonreflexive moments of forms of life, we must at the same time emphasize that they not only leave room for reflexivity but that the latter is even among the constitutive conditions of forms of life and their conditions of preservation. Forms of life, as *second* nature, are shaped and are (re)shapeable, in spite of the moments of inertia described above. To this we must now add a third aspect: if something is to constitute a possible and meaningful object of criticism, then it is not enough that it is *bad* and that it is *open to change;* someone must also have *done something wrong.* In the next chapter I will examine whether we can say with regard to forms of life that something is (has been made) "right" or "wrong." The question, therefore, is in what sense forms of life are normative formations.

II

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

Forms of Life as Normatively Constituted Formations

> Society is of interest here primarily . . . in connection with the fact that it is something with teeth that can bite.
>
> —HEINRICH POPITZ

We fulfilled the first precondition for criticizing forms of life in the first part of this book by developing an understanding of forms of life as ensembles of social practices in which these ensembles—notwithstanding all moments of inertia—were shown to be human constructs and hence to be *open to change in principle.* A second precondition will be the focus in the second part. It will aim to show that only objects that can be *normatively qualified* are open to criticism in the strict sense.

I had claimed that only what can be changed is open to criticism. However, not everything that can be changed is criticizable. Human beings can change the natural course of a river by technical means because it turns out to be unfavorable for navigation or because it conflicts with our aesthetic notions of symmetry. But it would be strange to say they were "criticizing" the river in this case or that the technical change was preceded by a "critique" of the course of the river.

Why is it nonsensical to speak of criticism here? Because nobody has done anything right or wrong as regards the course of the river. One can only criticize states of affairs with regard to which someone has *done something* that can be described as a success or a failure, as appropriate or inappropriate. This is not the case with the river, although it would be true of a building where the architect had failed or the foreman had done shoddy work. In other words, we can only criticize something if a *norm* was violated that applies to the corresponding formation or occurrence, and only if there is an agent or institution that can be made *responsible* for this violation.

This also applies to the criticism of forms of life. We criticize a form of life insofar as it is not only different from what it *could* be, but also different from what it *should* be. Forms of life are situated within a space of action and reasons in which people can do something and hence do something right *or* wrong. This is why forms of life, in contrast to the river, can not only be *evaluated* but also *criticized,* as appropriate or inappropriate, successful or failed, good or bad. Forms of life have a normative trait, and it is in virtue of this trait that they are criticizable.

With this, a further difference between a river and a building becomes relevant. Although we can apply standards to the river—standards of beauty, for example, or standards of functionality—there are no normative expectations associated with the river as such that it could meet or fail to meet. The river is just as it is, and every claim (to beauty or functionality) is applied to it *from the outside.* Therefore, it is not only that the river does not make a mistake if it happens to be too shallow or too meandering for navigation; it does not fail to satisfy a claim that it makes itself either. Things are different in the case of the building. It is not nonsensical to assert that a building makes a claim not to collapse at the very first gust of wind or that it claims to correspond to our sense of beauty, even if the more precise formulation of these claims may in each case be contentious. Here it can be established whether the structure fulfills the meaning posited *with it*—or fails to do so.

Analogously, it could be asserted, not only can we evaluate forms of life as good or bad, but they also embody claims and norms themselves. My thesis, therefore, is that where forms of life succeed or fail, they do so with reference to normative requirements that are posited with and by them and are connected with their own conditions of fulfillment.

In the next two chapters, I want to examine this normative trait, and hence the twofold circumstance that forms of life have an internal normative structure and as such (can) raise validity claims. There are two interconnected problems that demand our attention. On the one hand, the assertion that forms of life have a normative character refers to the fact that forms of life are themselves held together by norms or that it is norms that make them what they are. Chapter 3 will deal with the character of this in the first instance *internal normativity* of forms of life and the criteria that determine whether it is fulfilled or not. There I will develop the thesis that forms of life, understood as nexuses of practices, are normative formations, and I will examine what kind of norms are at work here, how they generate effects, and what kind of basis of validity they lay claim to. Whereas this first question concerns the requirements that forms of life make on themselves and are objectively posited with them, a second question concerns whether there is a context-transcending normative point of reference for the failure or success of forms of life as forms of life, and hence whether there is something that is good *about them* and not only good *for them.* When Martin Seel speaks of an "ethos of forms of life," this is bound up with the assertion that forms of life imply stances, specifically stances on *how to live one's life.*[1] One can argue—and it is often argued—that forms of life as such specifically cannot provide any reasons for how they are constituted or for their existence but, as closed systems of reference, simply are as they are. In Chapter 4 I will argue that, on the contrary, forms of life can be understood as (different) ways of solving problems encountered in historically and culturally specific and normatively predefined forms. Understood in this way as problem-solving entities *[Problemlösungsinstanzen],* whether they succeed or fail is determined by their ability to solve these problems that arise for (and with) them. This means that forms of life do not hold simply because they are accepted as such; on the contrary, they raise justified or justifiable claims in terms of which they can also be criticized.

CHAPTER THREE

The Normativity of Forms of Life

That forms of life are constituted by norms, and conversely that they embody norms, is a widespread notion. In his study of medieval forms of life, historian Arno Borst defines forms of life as "*sanctioned* forms of social behavior" and thus as collectively binding formations constituted and held together by norms.[1] Correspondingly, in his standard work *Geschichte der abendländischen Lebensformen*, Wilhelm Flitner understands forms of life as "structures of norms that exercise effects in our lives."[2] Forms of life, on this conception, consist of historically instituted norms that are embedded in the practices of everyday life. However, it is far from clear what "normativity" is actually supposed to mean in this context and in what sense and in what ways norms are embedded, embodied, or realized in forms of life.

As it happens, the normative constitution of forms of life already demands our attention in virtue of the conditions governing the performance of the individual practices described above. If one can do something wrong with regard to practices or miss their point ("It's not a game of hide-and-seek if you don't close your eyes"), then forms of life as ensembles of such practices can also be deficient. We also sometimes say with regard to forms of life: "That's no longer a family!" "That's no longer a city!" or "And that's your idea of recreation?"

The circumstance described here is more remarkable than it initially appears; it points to the specific character of the normativity at work in forms of life. For a normative claim seems to be inscribed in the very description of the forms of life in question, a claim that nevertheless does not have the character of a merely freestanding "ought." To describe a form of life in this way is not only to state how it is and how it presents itself to us as a matter of fact, but it is not to make any abstract demands concerning how a form of life *should* be either. My assumption is that the key to understanding the specific normativity of forms of life resides in the simultaneously descriptive and normative character of such judgments that comes to light here. To put it in Hegelian terms, the question here is whether a given social formation corresponds to its concept or not. Thus, forms of life are normatively constituted not only in a general but in a specific way.

Therefore, several questions must be answered in this chapter: In what sense are forms of life normative formations, and in what specific way do norms operate in forms of life? How are the norms of ethical life at work in forms of life justified? And how can the success or failure of forms of life be explained in terms of the specific character of the internal normativity at work in them?

In the first section of this chapter, I will make some preliminary suggestions about how norms and normativity as such should be understood. In the second section, I will ask *what kind* of norms are at work in forms of life and *in what ways,* drawing on a categorization developed by Georg Henrik von Wright. However, as we shall see, the specific character of norms of ethical life becomes apparent only if we inquire into the sources of their validity. In the third section, therefore, I will distinguish between three kinds of justification of norms (conventional, functional, and ethical) in order to establish the thesis that the norms at work in forms of life are not conventional but can only be justified in terms of a reciprocal relation of reference between ethical and functional aspects. The fourth section will evaluate this result and attempt to interpret the nature of norms of ethical life with the help of the Hegelian formula that a form of life can "correspond to its concept" or fail to do so. The failure of forms of life to satisfy intrinsically raised claims will then be explained in accordance with this formula as a failure to measure up to historically sedimented social generic properties *[Gattungseigenschaften].* Finally, the concluding summary will make the transition to the question concerning the context-transcending validity of the norms thus characterized.

3.1 Norms and Normativity

At first sight, the thesis that forms of life have a normative content seems banal, if not even tautological. If a social norm is "a rule for behaviour, or a definite pattern of behaviour"[3] and operates accordingly as an "institution whose intention is to structure and regulate social life,"[4] then every functioning social formation depends at least in a basic sense on being structured by norms. To formulate it in very general terms, wherever things do not occur spontaneously, norms are at work. But then the existence of norms is a precondition for the functioning of social practice in general. But what exactly are norms, and what is meant when we speak of the "normative character" of certain circumstances?

In what follows, I will sketch some characteristics of the concept of a norm as a basis for approaching the complex ways in which norms operate in forms of life. In doing so, I am basing my approach on a very broad concept of a norm, not on the narrow concept of moral or ethical norms.

(1) To put it bluntly, there are norms wherever one can do something wrong. Norms specify a *standard* that someone or something can meet or fail to meet.[5] The origin of the concept is instructive in this regard: The Latin word "*norma*" refers to the set square, a geometrical instrument for testing the perpendicularly of angles. The domain of application of norms can vary widely depending on whether it is a question of technical coordination or of rules of social cooperation.

Thus, technical norms such as DIN paper formats specify what dimensions a sheet of paper must exhibit in order to fall under the relevant norm or how a gearwheel must be constituted in order to be classified as a gearwheel of a certain type. The norm for the gold standard stipulates that the fine-gold content of a piece of jewelry must be at least 24 percent if it is to count as gold. And the norms of etiquette determine who should defer to whom when entering a restaurant and who may address whom by their first name. Then the size of a sheet of paper, the constitution of a certain kind of gearwheel, the fine-gold content of a bracelet, or the behavior of a guest when entering a restaurant either conform to the underlying standard or they do not. The existence of norms entails certain effects on reality, and these are supposed to be influenced or shaped in a certain way by the norms.

(2) The term "normative," therefore, is often understood in contrast to the term "descriptive." "Descriptive" refers to our attempts to describe

reality appropriately; “normative,” by contrast, refers not to what *describes* but to what *prescribes,* hence to what claims to steer human behavior. An example of a descriptive sentence is the following: “The Berlin State Library at Potsdamer Platz is a building flooded with light, with a terraced design containing approximately eight hundred study places.” An example of a normative sentence is the following: “Public buildings must have at least one emergency exit per two hundred users and have a fire protection plan subject to annual review.” Another example of a normative sentence is the following: “We should be quiet in a library so as not to disturb the other users.”[6]

The frequently used expression concerning different “directions of fit” is helpful here: descriptive statements claim to fit *the world;* normative statements want the world to fit *them.*[7] To these different directions of fit correspond different ways in which the corresponding sentences can be true or false, confirmed or refuted: The descriptive sentence about the state library is correct if the latter is in fact a building flooded with light. It would be inaccurate if the building on Potsdamer Platz turned out on closer examination to be a gloomy pit. Things are different in the case of normative statements. The statement that a public building of this size should have ten emergency exits or that we should be quiet in a library to avoid disturbing the other users does not become untrue because a certain building does not have emergency exits or all library users use their mobile phones in the reading room. (Indeed, it would not even be false if we could not empirically establish the existence of a single building with emergency exits in conformity with the regulations.)[8] Reality is “wrong”—where the normative statement applies—and if necessary it must be adjusted to the normative statement; therefore, emergency exits have to be identified and the telephone calls have to stop. The aim of normative statements, therefore, is not to *represent* reality in a descriptive way but to *create* reality in a normative sense—specifically, to bring reality into conformity with the norm. In other words, descriptive sentences deal with the world as it *is,* normative statements with the world as it *ought to be.* Accordingly, normative criticism points to the fact that something in the world is not as it ought to be. In other words, it opens up a normative difference between is and ought and connects with this the call to overcome this difference.

(3) According to a commonplace definition, norm-conforming behavior is rule-guided or *rule-governed* as opposed to merely *regular*. The decisive

issue here can be illustrated by juxtaposing two cases. If I always walk on the right side of the street on my way to the subway, or while walking never step on the lines between the paving stones, then this can have simply come about that way. That would be merely regular behavior. In this case, if on one occasion I walk on the left side of the street or step on the lines after all, then I have done something *different* from usual, but I have not done anything *wrong*. The other conceivable case is that—because I am compulsive or my young son wants to play "Don't walk on the lines" with me—I make it a rule not to touch the lines or always to walk on the right side. In this case, walking on the left or stepping on the lines is a violation of this rule. Regularity per se is not a norm, therefore, provided that it does not prescribe any standards for actions that could also remain unfulfilled.[9] Only when a certain regular behavior is required, so that one can also violate this requirement, are we dealing with norm-governed behavior.

(4) Norms direct our behavior, and where we comply with them they require us to do something. It is characteristic of norms in this respect that they are *man-made formations,* hence that they are (in principle) shaped and shapeable.[10] The normative pressure they exert is not the same as the constraint exerted by natural laws. In this sense they are *artificial.*[11] Social norms apply against the background of alternatives. Accordingly, they only occur where one could also act differently, hence where there is a certain latitude concerning how to behave. Norms would be superfluous where one would be forced to act in a certain way in any case or where one would act in that way automatically.

(5) Whenever something can be done in a certain way but also differently, one can in principle ask *why* it should be done in this way, and a *justification* can always be provided or demanded for this. The "space of norms" is thus a "space of reasons."[12] This is not to imply that these reasons are always transparent or that it would always make sense to ask for them. Above all, however, the basic embeddedness in a space of reasons does not mean that the reasons that are at work here are always inherently *good* reasons. Even the remark "We do things this way because that's how our grandparents did it" is a justification in this sense, just not an especially good one because it is dogmatic. But, where appropriate, one can read a more complex structure even into this justification. (Fleshed out, it might go as follows: "And this shows that it has proven itself. Until now, nothing has ever gone wrong when things were done this way. So there's no reason

to change it.") And such justifications also contain a point at which they can be doubted and additional, better reasons can be demanded. (For example: "But circumstances have changed, so it's not a good idea to stick to the way your grandparents did things" or "On closer examination, even your grandparents failed with that approach.")

Forms of Life as Normative Belonging

In what sense are forms of life normative formations? First of all, they are normative entities because the demands to which they give rise, in contrast to the conditions that nature imposes on us, are normative expectations. Even if it should be the case that complying with them has become second nature for us, that laws of second nature do not exist like natural laws can be seen, among other things, from the fact that they must be instantiated—for example, qua education—but also that they can be violated or modified. The fact that forms of life steer conduct and set standards, however implicitly, becomes apparent when one asks what it actually means to *share* a form of life. Specifically, it means participating in the practices that condition the form of life in question, behaving appropriately with regard to the patterns and rules that constitute it and acting in conformity with them—of course, within a range of possible modes of conduct. Someone who does not at least try to do that in key respects does not meet the criteria for belonging to the form of life in question. These criteria of belonging are genuinely normative in kind. They refer to right or wrong behavior, and in this they differ from inclusion and exclusion criteria based on features entirely independent of human activity. Membership of the group of redheads, according to this distinction, does not have an intrinsic normative connotation.[13] It is not based on rules or regulations that one could follow or not follow. But for this very reason it should not be equated with belonging to a form of life either. Belonging to the group of family fathers, by contrast, does have normative connotations, insofar as being a family father is not merely a matter of biology but involves certain behavioral expectations and decisions.

Forms of life, therefore, are normative ensembles insofar as participating in them involves the expectation that one should participate in the constituent practices in appropriate ways and share the interpretive framework laid down with this expectation. Of course, these expectations may be flexible. Not only can one make mistakes or deviate from norm-conforming behavior in certain respects. One could even conceivably be in partially conscious opposition to some of these rules, hence adopt a negative stance on them, and nevertheless remain within the framework of a form of life.[14] Then, even while deviating from the form of life in question, one would still take one's orientation from it.[15]

However, norms exert effects in forms of life not only by explicitly prohibiting certain things and permitting other things within social interactions. They also operate implicitly.[16] And they first define and establish the conceivable modes of behavior within a form of life by normatively structuring the space of possibilities of action itself that is given with this form of life, by dividing up the domain of human action into right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, intelligible and unintelligible. Normativity in this sense does not first come into play with the evaluation, but already with the identification of possible modes of behavior.[17] However, it is precisely this diffuse and sometimes unspoken effectiveness that makes the normative forces at work here seem in many respects all the more incontrovertible.

The sociologist Heinrich Popitz aptly describes the situation we encounter as follows:

> The conformity to norms of social behavior means that social situations are weighed down with certain alternatives that seem to be based on some kind of agreements; but we do not know who actually made these agreements and we cannot eradicate them if we do not accept them in specific cases. They are somehow geared to permanence in such a way that they cannot be arbitrarily overridden by individuals.[18]

But then it is not so easy to explain *how* norms can become effective in forms of life. How can the soft, informal, and habitual character of forms of life be reconciled with the prescriptive character of norms? And if forms of life already normatively structure the scope of action in a subtle way, who prescribes normative standards here for whom—and with what effect? The reasons at work in forms of life—insofar as the space of norms is a space of reasons—are also rarely specified explicitly when it comes to establishing and transmitting forms of life.[19]

Evidently, therefore, the norms at work in forms of life do not guide life in the same way that the rules laid down by the director of a clinic, for example, determine life within the clinic. In the case of forms of life, neither the author nor the addressee of a norm can be easily identified, and what is said is not only at times implicit but also typically takes the form of a blending of description and evaluation against the background of a complex horizon of understanding in which empirical and descriptive assumptions about the constitution of the respective domain of practice are blended with notions about what constitutes right action in this domain. Thus, the fact that one can act rightly or wrongly where norms are concerned does not say very much. Not all norms are constituted in the same way; they not only presuppose different standards in different areas but they also differ in their constitution and how they operate.

3.2 Modes of Normativity

A critical examination of Georg Henrik von Wright's now classic classification is helpful when it comes to specifying the type of norms at work in forms of life. In his study *Norm and Action,* von Wright begins by distinguishing three principal types of norms: rules, prescriptions, and directives.[20] Common to all of them is that they seek to influence behavior in the sense developed above. However, they do so in very different ways.

Prescriptions, according to von Wright, are *given* or *issued* by someone. Hence, they have their origin in the will of a person who lays down a norm, the "norm-giver," who wants to steer the behavior of the addressees, or "norm-subjects," by means of the norm. The standard case in which prescriptions are at work and which seems to provide the prototype for the category of prescriptions is that of a legislator and legal norms enforced by means of sanctions.

By contrast, *games* serve as the model for the *concept of a rule.* Rules are standardized patterns that lay down what is allowed or forbidden within a given constellation. As such, rules *define* the type and character of practical performances, just as the rules of a game define this game. Such a canon of rules can be spelled out in more or less detail, the rules can be implicit or explicit, and knowledge of them can be acquired gradually not only by studying the rules in advance but also through practical reenactment—that is, by playing the game.

Finally, *directives,* also referred to as *technical norms,* provide instructions regarding the use of appropriate means for achieving a certain goal.

Customs as a Mixture of Prescriptions and Rules

All three types of norms may be present in one way or another in forms of life.[21] My question, however, is how to describe the kind of norms that lend forms of life their specific character as forms of life, that make them what they are (as forms of life). Here the recourse to von Wright suggests another type of norm that he qualifies together with *moral principles* and *ideal rules* as "mixed forms" that exist alongside the main types—namely, *customs*. Customs are "patterns of behavior for the members of a community," they "determine, or as it were 'define,' ways of living which are characteristic of a certain community."[22]

That customs are in principle normlike is shown, according to von Wright, by the fact that they influence conduct and thereby steer something that would be different without them. If we now ask how conduct is steered by customs, then the latter prove to be a mixture of two of the three main types of norms. They behave like rules but also like prescriptions: "customs resemble rules in that they determine, quasi define, certain patterns of conduct—and prescriptions in that they exert a 'normative pressure' on the members of a community to conform to these patterns."[23]

Thus, it speaks for the prescriptive character of customs that they represent general "patterns of behavior for the members of a community," which are "acquired by the community in the course of its history, and imposed on its members rather than acquired by them individually."[24] On the other hand, however, customs usually do not have an author (or at any rate not one who can be identified individually). They lack a clearly identifiable norm-giver and, in general, the clearly defined hierarchical relationship between norm-giver and norm-addressee that was characteristic for the norm type of prescriptions. Von Wright explains, "If we can speak of an authority behind the customs at all this authority would be the community itself, including both its past and present members."[25] Therefore, he aptly describes customs as "anonymous norms." Furthermore, customs often remain implicit and do not have to be made public by means of symbolic marks. Thus, whereas traffic regulations—as prescriptions—only apply insofar as they are made public and written down, customs operate also at the unspoken level.[26]

This anonymity of customs and their implicit character (which does indeed correspond to what I stated above about the norms at work in forms of life) already moves customs away from prescriptions and into proximity to rules. What is decisive, however, is another aspect. When von Wright says that "customs determine, or as it were 'define,' ways of living which are characteristic of a certain community," he is pointing to a particular mode of operation of customs that distinguishes them from the direct prescriptive normativity of prescriptions and lends them the appearance of rules.[27] Therefore, we must examine more closely the "defining" character of rules merely alluded to above in order to understand what is at stake here.

The difference between defining and prescribing can be put as follows: A prescription states that you should or should not do such and such. (You should not park incorrectly; you should pay taxes and not lie; you should keep meat and dairy products separate from each other.) Violations of prescriptions result in sanctions. By contrast, the definition that constitutes a game states that if you do this or that, then that counts in a particular context as this or that. (If in Go you place the stone on this point, the opponent's stones are deemed to be captured, and you may now remove them from the board.) With the act of defining, therefore, something is stipulated to be something: certain (game) moves are invested with a certain meaning and assigned certain consequences. A whole complex of interrelated definitions makes the game into the game it is and determines its character and how it unfolds. A decisive characteristic of rules in contrast to prescriptions, or of defining in contrast to prescribing, is that, through the act of defining, they first make the social practice or the game that they regulate possible.[28]

The game first comes into existence through the application of the rule. The rule formulates conditions for participation in a social practice, which conversely arises through the corresponding rule, because the corresponding behavior is first made possible as such in the course of applying this rule.

The Normative Pressure of Rules and Prescriptions

There is a significant difference between the two types of norms, of which customs according to von Wright are a "mixed form," as regards their ability to exert the above-mentioned "normative pressure."

The difference is that, although someone who does not follow the rules acts inappropriately with regard to the meaning of the game and its rules, he does not do anything wrong in a sense that would provide a reason for condemnation. He is just not playing this game or is actually playing a different game. It would not make any sense for someone playing Go to ask, "Why can I take my opponent's stones only when I have surrounded them?" Placing the stones in a certain way is just what playing this game (and not some other one) involves. Accordingly, the answer would be "Because that's what the rules of the game require." So if the conceivable justification of the game rule is, in a very curtailed form, "That's just what it means to play this game," then rules exert at most weak normative pressure. Although they sort out right (rule-conforming) from wrong (rule-violating) behavior, this kind of sorting is—hypothetically—subject to the very narrowly defined condition that one claims to be participating in the system of rules in question at all, and hence it exhibits a characteristic kind of self-reference. Thus, whereas rules to a certain extent only formulate the conditions for participating in the game, prescriptions seek to control the actions of the norm-addressee in a stronger sense. In the light of what has been said, one can now express the point as follows: they not only seek to *define* participation in certain games or practices, but also (at least) to *enjoin,* and (sometimes) to *compel,* participation.[29] The normative pressure they exert is stronger in precisely this sense—even though the metaphor of strength used here has only limited explanatory potential.

The Normative Pressure of Customs

But how does von Wright explain the normative pressure exerted by customs in relation to these two norm types, and how can this pressure be understood? Customs and social habits also exert normative pressure on individual members of the community in which they apply.[30] But this seems to be similarly weak in certain respects to the pressure exerted by rules. Failing to observe the social expectations associated with customs leads not so much to punishment, according to von Wright, as to being declared to be an outsider, a stranger. Someone who disobeys customs is not a wrongdoer. He is more like the child who refuses to join in the game of his schoolmates than the outlaw or criminal who breaks the law and is legally prosecuted.[31] If this is correct, then, strictly speaking, someone who does not conform to the customs of a community does not do something *wrong,* only something *different.* Here the distinction between right and wrong conduct translates into the distinction between inside and outside, between belonging and not belonging. But what pressure can be associated with the threat of not belonging if, conversely, one does not simply want to say that this is normatively neutral?

A lot depends here on how the expression "customs" is understood and which practices are included under it. Only those alternatives can have normative significance that refer to the deep structure and not only to the different colorations within a form of life, whereby the dividing line will be difficult to draw in case of doubt.[32] If we stick to the customs mentioned by von Wright himself, these include—in addition to conventions of greeting or hospitality—practices that play a role in life events such as death or marriage. Whether a community practices burial or cremation, whether the dead are placed in coffins or are wrapped in shrouds may be of no consequence and normatively neutral as long as such differences are not charged with more fundamental dissociations and conflicts. However, whether the deceased members of a community are given a ceremonial burial at all or their corpses are left to rot in a mountain ravine (as depicted in Shōhei Imamura's film *The Ballad of Narayama*[33]) is an issue that will elicit strong emotions. Insofar as the alternatives at issue here refer to more fundamental differences in the "depth grammar" of social ways of dealing with descent, life, and death,[34] how they are constituted shapes the life and self-understanding of a community in fundamental ways; they define "ways of living which are characteristic of a community."[35] Correspondingly, in this context not belonging or being an outsider is fraught with a certain normative pressure.[36]

In what follows, I will explain the normative force at work here with reference to the whole complex of the ethos of a form of life, hence with a view to the context of interconnected practices within which individual customs are situated. In so doing, I will also refer to the norms at work here as "norms of ethical life" in order to avoid the rather old-fashioned term "customs."

Norms of Ethical Life as Involving Constraint to Participate in Ensembles of Practices

My contention is that even if they have a defining effect, the norms of ethical life in question can be clearly distinguished from rules with regard to their normative weight. Someone who does not follow the rules in a game of Parcheesi is simply not playing Parcheesi. However, a father who does not read bedtime stories to his child (this being one of the practices that on a widespread understanding belongs to the form of life of living with children) or a doctor who does not examine her patients thoroughly (as required by the professional ethos of the medical profession in the context of a particular form of life) not only does not belong but is a bad father or a bad doctor. And Antigone would be a bad sister if she failed to bury her brother. To allude to the way of speaking mentioned at the beginning and to be explored below, the father is not a real father, the doctor is no longer a doctor, and the sister is no longer a sister. The actors thus described, according to a common understanding, not only do something *different* from the others in a relatively innocuous way; they do something *wrong,* albeit in a specific sense.

In order to gain an understanding of the specific normative power of the norms of ethical life that constitute the forms of life in question, let us examine more closely the observation that the individuals concerned do not seem to have done something wrong *as human beings,* but instead *as a father, a doctor* or *a sister.* They have not fulfilled a certain social role, or they have failed to meet the social expectations connected with a certain practice.[37] As a result, to put it in terms of this distinction, they have behaved badly not in an *unconditional* but in a *conditional* sense; the inappropriateness of their actions is subject to the hypothetical condition that they act or claim to act *as* a doctor, a father, or a sister. How does this hypothetical reference differ from the one that I outlined in the case of participation in games? Thus, what is the difference between the statement "If you want to be a (good) doctor, you should examine your patients carefully" or "If you want to be a (good) father, you should read to your child" and the observation "If you want to play Go, you must try to encircle your opponent's stones," if, as it seems, they share the structure of a merely conditional and not an unconditional obligation?

Of course, you do not have to become a doctor or a father any more than you have to play Parcheesi. Therefore, the normative pressure, which is supposed to lead us to engage in and accomplish the corresponding practices in a certain way, may seem at first sight to be limited in similar ways to the normative pressure associated with games. One might think that here, too, one has done something wrong only insofar as one accepts the corresponding conditions at all, hence only if one claims to be a doctor or a father. The corresponding norms do not hold for those who do not claim to fill these roles. It would then be clear, similar to the case of games, what one should do *provided* that one adopts a certain role, but there would not be any reason to adopt it.

On closer inspection, however, there are some important differences between games and social roles. In the case of games, there is not only no particular reason why a given person should participate in them. There is no particular reason (at least on an initial reflection) why this game should exist at all.[38] Things are different with social practices involving a division of labor that gives rise to the roles of father and doctor. Even if nobody (that is, nobody in particular) is absolutely required to become a doctor or a father, at least not in modern societies, there is nevertheless a certain compulsion within the social nexus of practices to ensure that such roles are available and to render their exercise in one form or another plausible. Thus, the existence of the practice itself is not unfounded to the extent that it is situated in a constraining context with an intricate complex of practices or a form of life; whether these practices exist or not does make a difference for this form of life. And also the specific way in which they are interpreted and exercised (thus, whether the dead are buried in one way or another, whether marriage is understood in monogamous or polygamous terms, and whether diseases are conceived as divinely ordained scourges or as disorders to be diagnosed by differential diagnosis) has implications for the specific form that this nexus of practices assumes—and, I will argue, for its functionality.

The argument I have developed thus far suggests, therefore, that the normative pressure exerted by norms of ethical life stems from the (social) *consequences* that result from accepting or spurning, reproducing or rejecting, a specific set of rules and practices within an existing social structure of cooperation. Ultimately it is derived, as we shall see, from the *goals* associated with the corresponding social practices.

Forms of Life as Nonautonomous Normative Systems

In my further reflections, I would like to draw upon a characterization developed by Joseph Raz in his study *Practical Reason and Norms*. Raz conceives of games and the corresponding normative formations as "autonomous normative systems" and analyzes their validity on this basis.[39] Such "systems of joint validity" are "autonomous" insofar as they are self-referential in a certain sense.[40] Which specific rule should apply cannot be justified by appealing to a normative reference system to the game. Viewed in this way, the validity of such rules cannot be justified at all but can only be established. This is because games create "the reason for their own validity."[41] Instructive for my inquiry is the explanation offered by Raz for this nonjustifiability or groundlessness of games: Because the values of the game are "not systematically related to wider human concerns," reflections on their general justification hardly make sense.[42] Such values are "artificial values," according to Raz, precisely because there is no such connection.[43]

The motif of "wider human concerns" can now be made useful for the questions I raised above. Specifically, the consequences of the existence of certain norms of ethical life for the content and shape of a form of life suggest that the more comprehensive nexuses of practices or forms of life constituted by norms of ethical life are not autonomous, but on the contrary are *nonautonomous* normative systems that, as we can now say, are connected with "wider human concerns." As "systems of joint validity," they would then be internally structured by the goals and tasks posited with them, which simultaneously lend them, figuratively speaking, an anchor or reference point in the world that goes beyond the internal principles of validity. Compliance with and implementation of these norms would be the precondition for realizing the concerns or interests in question. And this is precisely what would explain the normative pressure they exert.

This can be made clear in terms of the different practices of reason-giving in the different normative contexts. If it does not make sense to ask for reasons in the case of autonomous normative systems, such queries are quite conceivable in other cases: "But *why* should I pay taxes or not lie? Why should I keep meat and dairy products separate?" In such cases, the answer I receive could be "Because that is God's will; because the state must build schools; because otherwise no one will trust you; because that is what respect for the moral autonomy of others requires of you." However contestable and diverse they may be, these are points of reference that, according to their claim, are located outside of the system of rules created by the corresponding norms.[44] The norm "You should pay taxes" is justified (at best) not on the basis of the bare fact that taxes exist, but with reference to our interest in a well-developed public infrastructure or the interest in education, and ultimately the interest in a particular type of society.[45]

But the norms of ethical life we are interested in are also connected in corresponding ways through chains of reasons and states of affairs with more far-reaching, comprehensive values and interests. Reading bedtime stories to one's children and taking their needs seriously or examining one's patients thoroughly, as attitudes, are founded on our notions of love, family, democratic education, or the art of healing, and they contribute to the existence and functioning of extensive complex nexuses of forms of life. But then in the case of norms of ethical life, not only how the "game" is constituted but also whether or not one participates in the game is not a matter of indifference.

If we take a closer look at the nexuses of practices under consideration here, yet another difference between norms of ethical life and game rules becomes apparent: In contrast to the option of playing or not playing Parcheesi, participating in social roles often (or even typically?) involves nexuses of practices that are not purely optional for us. Norms of ethical life refer to contexts of social cooperation that—as antecedent nexuses of interpretation and practice—already exist and into which we are incorporated whether we like it or not.[46] Here one is not so easily an outsider or even a stranger, to return to von Wright's characterization of those who do not participate in customs. Since we are already involved in them, we relate to them already *based on this position.*[47] Then the question is not, as in the case of games, *whether,* but only *how*—that is, how does one participate in them, and could one also do so in a *different* way than usual?[48]

Thus, we can already assert that norms of ethical life not only formulate conditions of participation but also suggest participation in certain practices within complex formations of social practices. Where they have a defining, enabling-constitutive character because they define roles and assign functions within a structure of social practices, they define positions that they deem to be necessary and justified because they are bound up with goals and the objective conditions of the forms of life in question. This is the specific reason why forms of life are not autonomous. Specifically, the norms of ethical life that constitute forms of life exhibit a *world-reference* and a *reference to real conditions* that can provide the basis for affirming something like the appropriateness of social practices. Thus, insofar as forms of life, in contrast to the self-referential autonomous systems discussed by Raz, are justifiable in this sense (and are subject to a context-transcending justification), the next step is to understand the character of the reasons and justification procedures at work here.

3.3 Three Types of Norm Justification

In what follows, I will first distinguish three kinds of justifications of norms—namely, conventionalist, functional, and ethical justifications—and examine the extent to which they can constitute the normative character of forms of life. Whereas conventionalist justifications of norms refer to the fact that we have actually agreed on a particular norm and thereby established a convention, functionalist justifications trace the validity of norms back to their role in establishing or maintaining a particular practice. Ethical justifications of norms refer in turn to the goodness of a practice. I will reject conventionalist norm justification with regard to the constitution of forms of life; on the other hand, I would like to show that ethical and functional justifications are intertwined in a characteristic way in the case of norms of ethical life. It follows that norms of ethical life aim at the *good functioning* of a practice in the context of a nexus of practices.

Norm Justification qua Convention

My contention is that norms of ethical life cannot be justified in conventional terms. To the question "Why is this norm valid? What is it based on?" the conventionalist justification answers: "It applies because we have agreed on it qua convention." Conventions are (roughly speaking) agreements between a set of actors who are relevant for the existence of the convention in question and who thereby coordinate their present and future actions and make them predictable. Whether the oldest or the youngest player makes the first move in Parcheesi or whether turns to roll the dice are taken in the clockwise or the counterclockwise direction are conventional stipulations like the exact dimensions of a sheet of letter-size paper or driving on the left or the right side of the road. Their content is contingent in a decisive way, and the relevant agreement is a joint stipulation, without there being any reason beyond this stipulation for its content. Therefore, the conventional character of such an agreement is shown above all by the fact that it is neither grounded in nor conditioned by anything else. Conventions are up to us and are constituted in such a way that in each case there are conceivable alternatives that are equally good or workable, which may serve as a criterion that we are dealing with conventions.[49] Taking turns in the clockwise direction is just as good as in the counterclockwise direction; driving on the right is just as good as driving on the left. It does not matter on which convention we agree, only that we have agreed on something or other. The options are interchangeable without complications or consequences. Thus, conventions are a very weak ground of justification. If all that can be said in response to the question of why a conventionally justified norm should apply is "Because we have agreed on it," then that *is* a reason—but one that does not go very far. And it is not merely pleonastic to say that conventions apply simply *because* they apply.

Nonconventional Character of Games and Forms of Life

It is obvious that many social practices have conventional components. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to conceive of forms of life in general as expressions of conventions. It is helpful to realize that even games, which in key respects are in fact beyond justification and hence to a certain extent belong to the core area of conventional normative validity, should not be understood in exclusively conventional terms. It is true that, in Parcheesi or the card game Uno, the oldest player can start instead of the youngest without changing the nature of the game in any way. Here the alternatives are equivalent. However, this is not true of a considerable number of further rules that constitute these games. Without the luck of the dice or without the rule that a piece can be sent back to its starting area even just before it has reached the home path, Parcheesi would be a different game. And whether you play Uno with or without the "Draw four additional cards" card has implications for how quickly you can get from a favorable into an unfavorable position, hence how quickly the tide can turn. Modifications of the rules can make games more or less complicated, faster or slower, more or less exciting—to the point where they cease to be games of a particular type (for example, a game of chance or a strategy game).

Therefore, one can, of course, change the rules in any conceivable way; after all, game rules are made by us and apply only as long as the players agree on them. However, these changes, unlike in the case of pure conventions, make a difference. For each game there are several possible sets of rules and, within these sets, functional equivalents for each rule. However, complete arbitrariness without consequences does not prevail even in the domain of games.

This points to a further issue. What Maurice Hauriou has called the *idée directrice* in connection with social institutions also seems to apply to games—namely, an idea that motivates and directs the institution or, by implication, the game.[50] In the case of Parcheesi, at the first level there is the objective of the game, namely, to win by getting one's pieces home before the other players get theirs home. At a second, as it were, metalevel, however, the *idée directrice* of the game can also be understood as learning to deal with the ups and downs of the luck of the game without getting annoyed (at least not too much).[51] The corresponding idea in the case of Go or chess would be the cognitive training of strategic skills. With regard to such guiding principles, then, there are good and bad, coherent and incoherent, more and less complex games, as is shown clearly by the flood of ill-conceived new games trying to capture the market for children's games.

What is true of games is even truer of forms of life: they are not (or not only) composed of the stuff of conventions. To return to the example introduced above, it may be a conventional matter whether we drive on the left or the right, but regulating traffic *as such* is an objective necessity under certain conditions. Firstly, if we are interested in ensuring that traffic flows and, secondly, if it is true that this would be rendered impossible by everyone driving whatever way they liked without any regulations, then regulations such as that one must drive on the left or on the right must be introduced. Not to do this—which a society is, of course, free to do in principle—would be to undermine the goal (of ensuring that traffic flows). But it is precisely at this level and in accordance with this logic that the justification of norms of ethical life operates. It may make no difference whether it is customary to marry in white or to dress in black, but whether or not intimate relationships occur in a given society at all and whether they are monogamous or polyamorous will be decisive for what a form of life can be and can accomplish. The question of what even needs to be regulated and which norms and practices are even conceivable here depends (as in traffic regulation) on the goals of the practice and on the real (factual or substantive) conditions under which these goals must be realized.[52] Thus, the norms at work here are *justified* by something and *grounded* in something. Whereas conventional norms are only weakly normative, here a stronger mode of justification comes into play, namely, a *functional justification* of norms.

Professional Ethos and the Reference to Real Conditions

The role of functional justification is made especially clear by an example introduced above: The doctor who in spite of increasing financial pressure insists on examining her patients thoroughly is not acting on the basis of convention but is instead adhering to the quality standards of medical practice because this is required by a certain professional ethos. Therefore, she does not act from abstract philanthropy either. Rather, what guides her is the fact that she identifies in this action the requirements of medical practice, what it means to be a doctor (for her and in the light of the existing standards). This normativity internal to a practice does not define conventional membership criteria such as the criteria for membership of a club. The aforementioned criteria are not based on an arbitrary agreement between doctors who want to establish these criteria as a distinguishing mark of their profession. Their existence is founded on the belief that only by adhering to precisely this procedure (careful examination) can one achieve the *goal* of medical practice (the correct diagnosis and appropriate therapy) and thus fulfill the task associated with this practice. What is decisive for the normative qualification of such a practice, then, is not that one must do such and such in order to *count* as a doctor (in order to play the game of "being a doctor"), but that such and such is necessary in order to achieve the inherent goal of the practice (the recovery of the patient) against the background of the given factual conditions (the constitution of the human body and a particular interpretation of this).[53]

An important consideration is that an orientation "to the thing" and the real conditions governing the achievement of the goal comes into play here. And both points of reference, the goal and the real conditions, are what underlie the process of realizing this goal and lead us to treat a certain way of participating in practices—the thorough examination, the conscientious procedure—as the yardstick not only for our conduct, but also for all others who find themselves in the corresponding situation. Not everyone need become doctor, but anyone who is a doctor should act in accordance with the professional ethos described here. A good doctor will despise her sloppy or mercenary colleagues; the latter not only do not belong, but are doing something wrong. It is important in this connection to recall the particularity emphasized above: the colleagues who act in this way are bad *as* doctors;[54] however, they are not bad doctors because they have disregarded conventions, but because they have disregarded the *conditions of appropriateness* of medical practice. Thus, here we are already in the domain of functional justifications of norms.

Functional Justifications of Norms

What is meant by the *functional justification* of norms? To the questions "What is this norm based on? How is it justified? Why should it apply?" the answer is now the following: "It should apply because it is *functionally necessary* for the existence of a social practice or of a nexus of practices."

That something (an object, an element, or a state of affairs) has a function means that it contributes to achieving or maintaining a certain state of affairs within a context in which it is situated. So something is functional always in relation to a goal or a purpose. The function of the giraffe's long neck, to take a popular example, is to enable giraffes to reach leaves on tall trees, which in turn enables giraffes to survive. In this case, the function of the individual element (the neck) is related to the goal of the survival of the larger entity (the giraffe). If the goal (the self-preservation of giraffes) were to become null and void, or if it could not be achieved by the means in question (the long neck)—for example, because there were no trees in the areas in which giraffes live but only moss—then the functional description of the giraffe's neck just given would be groundless.[55]

Given what has been said, how can norms be functionally necessary for the existence of a social practice? Norms can constitute social practices or contribute to their preservation. Conversely, the function of a social norm can be inferred from its contribution to maintaining or constituting a practice or a more extensive system of interrelated practices and can justify the validity of the relevant norm by appeal to this function. Thus, the function of the norm "You have to drive on the right" is to enable the practice of driving under conditions of heavy traffic. Observance of this norm has the causal effect that people do not drive whatever way they like, thereby enabling the traffic to flow, and it is enacted in order to facilitate this objective. Similarly, one function of the norm "You must keep your promises" may be to facilitate relationships of trust and long-term informal relations of cooperation. Likewise, it may also be a function of the norm at work in many contemporary educational practices—"It is good to speak to children in a reasonable way and to explain to them why they are allowed or not allowed to do something"—that as a result children learn to understand themselves as autonomous persons whose needs are effective and relevant.

Such norms are functionally necessary or functionally justified from the perspective of maintaining a nexus of practices; they establish a particular practice and enable it to function, just as the giraffe's neck makes feeding on the leaves of tall trees possible. Therefore, the reasons why these norms are essential for the existence of a particular practice have something to do with the conditions under which this practice operates and its factual underpinnings: giraffes need leaves, and the available leaves are high up in the trees. When cars are driven in an unregulated way, they obstruct each other. Children to whom nothing is explained become stubborn, moody, and discontented. Thus, reaching an agreement over the side of the street on which one should drive is *functionally required* for the existence of an extensive system of road traffic, which in turn enables the mobility of goods and persons (as a comprehensive nexus of practices), and (if we follow my interpretation) it would be in the interest of successful family relations and of promoting the preconditions for socialization on which a democratic culture is based to treat children with respect and in ways that take their needs into account.

Here, however, a series of modifications regarding how functions are understood is appropriate. Firstly, one cannot make direct inferences from attributions of functions to the motives and intentions of actors. Even if promises are functionally necessary for enabling social cooperation, and providing explanations is functionally necessary for the development of the autonomy of children, this does not mean that people keep their promises only in order to be able to cooperate, or that they provide explanations only in order to bring about autonomy. Functions may also operate behind the backs of the individual actors and may also operate as effects that are not directly intended.[56]

If we speak, secondly, of functional norms in connection with sociocultural forms of life, then we must take the existence of *functional equivalents* into account: It is rarely the case that there is exactly one means of achieving a specific goal. Since they cannot climb ladders, the only means for giraffes to reach leaves may be their long necks. In the human world, however, there are typically several equivalent options for every function to be described.

Thirdly, it is important to realize that the question of whether a norm is functional or dysfunctional for a particular practice depends on the goals and the conditions of the corresponding practice. Thus, a regulation to legalize double or triple parking would be dysfunctional with regard to the unimpeded flow of traffic; on the other hand, it would be quite functional if the aim were to calm traffic.[57] Attributions of functions, therefore, are contingent on the purposes to which they refer, but also on those real conditions that must pertain if these purposes are to be achievable. (Just as the giraffe's neck would lose its function for the nourishment of giraffes if there were no longer any tall trees, so too the pedagogical principle of explaining why certain things are forbidden would have no function if it transpired that such explanations merely confused children, as some proponents of conservative or so-called black pedagogy maintain.) Thus, functional justifications of norms are dependent in a crucial respect: they can serve as justifications only if they are supplemented by a definition of what is supposed to be achieved by functioning in a certain way, that is, only if they are supplemented with a "wherefore" of the functioning. We will return to this point below.

Ethical Justifications

First, however, I want to discuss the third mode of justification mentioned above, namely *ethical justification* of norms. Social practices and institutions cannot be described in purely functional terms. It seems that the ethos of good medical practice or of good fathering cannot be subsumed entirely under mere "functioning." So why then should a father read to his child and tell her certain things? And why should one, as a doctor, examine one's patients thoroughly? The obvious answer is because it is good to do so and because only that set of practices and attitudes can count as good rearing or good medicine that includes such (partial) practices as reading aloud, examining, and explaining. Thus, the ethical justification of a practice or of part of a practice involves the claim that this is necessary in order make a practice a good practice of its kind.

Thus, the ethos of a practice defines the conditions under which this can count as a good practice of its kind,[58] and the ethical justification states accordingly that a practice should be performed in a certain way because this kind of performance corresponds to the ethical requirements for this practice.[59]

The thoroughness of a medical examination is in this sense one criterion (among others) for the goodness of medical practice and hence for the ethical norm to which it is subject; the suitability for children of parental communication is a criterion of the goodness of pedagogical practice; and the transparency, precision, or originality of an argument are criteria for the goodness of an academic practice. In this regard, the ethical norms inherent in the individual practices (or also the forms of life as a whole) need not be fully explicit. The participants in a form of life observe the norm of goodness inherent in it by reenacting the norm in practice, and this reenactment contains a mixture of more and less conscious, more and less explicit elements.

Mutual Permeation of Ethical and Functional Norms

Having made an analytical distinction between a functional and an ethical dimension of the justification of norms, I must now question this distinction in turn. Specifically, with regard to the norms of ethical life that are of interest to us here, these two dimensions do not occur separately but instead permeate each other. In the case of norms of ethical life (that is, regarding forms of life), I want to claim that functional and ethical dimensions are constitutively interrelated. Functioning and (ethically) *good* functioning, practice as such and *good* practice, are inseparable. In the domain of human activities, there is no such thing as functioning *per se* but only always more or less *good* functioning.

At first glance, there does indeed seem to be a difference between whether a norm refers to the functioning a practice or to its goodness—specifically, in the sense in which there is an intuitive difference between whether a practice is merely exercised or whether it is exercised in a qualified way, that is, well. Can't one either barely manage to play a Bach prelude on the piano, so that all of the notes are played somehow, or play it well or even excellently? Can't one peel asparagus sloppily or meticulously? On closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that (in the domain under discussion) one cannot even grasp what constitutes a practice without reference to what is involved in exercising it *well.* "Functioning" always means functioning more or less *well.* There is no such thing as pure functioning without reference to criteria of goodness immanent in the practice, just as there is no such thing as raw facts or pure survival with regard to human forms of life. What turns a practice as such into a particular practice seems to take its orientation from the qualifications aimed at the *good exercise* of the practice.

This can also be seen from the fact that the "good functioning" remains the point of reference for describing a practice even when its actual instances are deficient. Only a practice that conforms to certain ethical norms (or at any rate measures itself against them) *is* such a practice; we satisfy the meaning of the practices only when we exercise them appropriately and well. Therefore, the reference to the ethos of a practice is part of the description of the conditions under which it is fulfilled. Being a doctor *means* examining one's patients thoroughly and wanting to help them as far as possible. By contrast, of a doctor who not only does not actually do so but also does not even take her orientation from these guidelines we would not just say that she is a *bad doctor*; rather, we would also be inclined to say that she is not a doctor at all (but instead a pure moneymaker).[60]

But if the practices and beliefs that together constitute a form of life do not contain criteria of functioning *per se* but, interwoven with these, also criteria of goodness or of good functioning, then these criteria take their orientation from what it means for these practices to *succeed* or *go well [Gelingen]* in an emphatic sense, which is also meant when we say of a work that it "turned out well" or "came off" *[gelungen]*.[61] In this formulation it becomes clear, conversely, that ethical norms also have a functional side. Ultimately, they provide criteria not only of *good*, but also of *factual* success within a functional context shaped by real (factual or substantive) conditions grounded in the subject matter. The good here is not free-floating, but a qualification of the conditions of the fulfillment of a practice, which can therefore be questioned as to their good functioning and can be judged in accordance with the latter.

In summary, then, norms of ethical life can be conceived as *ethical-functional norms* that operate as conditions of fulfillment of nexuses of practices in forms of life, define the latter, and make them what they are. Hence, norms of ethical life are not a kind of free-floating "value heaven" situated above social practice. Rather, as conditions of the normatively predefined *success* of a practice, they are embedded in the practices that constitute the forms of life. Conversely, there is no purely functionally definable moment to which the question of the success of a nexus of practices could be directed; rather, this is always already ethically colored. Social formations, when they function, inherently function in an ethically qualified way. Accordingly, the norms that constitute them can be justified only in terms of the fulfillment of conditions of a practice that is both ethically and functionally determined.

Controversial Determinations of Purposes

But does such an ethical-functional justification of norms of ethical life go beyond the immanent context of a complex of practices? How strong is the normative pressure they exert? A norm based on convention states that as a motorist you must drive on the right side of the road. Traffic regulations (not the specific convention of driving on the right) are justified on functional or ethical-functional grounds in terms of facilitating the smooth flow of traffic. But why it should be necessary or good to facilitate the smoothest possible flow of traffic at all is not explained by the justification strategies listed here.

If conventional justifications do not go very far—they apply because they apply—then the strength (or depth) of ethical-functional justification can indeed be said to go further: justifying norms in functional or ethical-functional terms means that they are held to be *good for something*. However, the validity of such norms within forms of life is established only in the context of a further determination of the purpose for which the practice and the overarching ensemble of a cluster of practices is good. Hence, a functional justification seems to depend on a further specification of the purpose that it does not provide itself. This does not change even if we conceive of the functionality as always already ethically defined, that is, if we conceive of the functioning of a practice as ethically predefined functioning.

This brings us back to the above-mentioned dependence of norms of ethical life on ends or purposes and to the question of the context-transcending validity of these norms. Whether a particular norm—for example, one that allows triple parking—is functional or dysfunctional depends, as I said above, on the purpose or objective that guides the corresponding practice. A function is a function, therefore, only with reference to a goal to be achieved. The functional utility of the giraffe's neck for the survival of giraffes depends on the existence of factual framework conditions (for example, that the attainable forage is high up in the trees) and, of course, on the validity or plausibility of the goal (the survival of the giraffe). As it happens, however, in the case of human forms of life there is a certain leeway regarding not only the means that it makes sense to employ but also the purposes themselves, a leeway that does not exist in the giraffe example. Among giraffes, the long neck may be the most obvious means, and the purpose with respect to which the long neck is functionally necessary may be uncontroversially that of self-preservation. In the case of child-rearing, however, one can dispute both that offering reasons makes children autonomous and that autonomy is a sensible educational goal. Thus, within the same nexus of practices, one can also pursue goals besides autonomy and happiness—for example, discipline and calmness—hence, goals for whose realization completely different norms and practices could be functionally appropriate. In the case of medical practice, too, one can both deny that a thorough examination is the inescapable precondition for a diagnosis and claim that the goal of the practice itself (a certain conception of health) is not sufficiently understood by orthodox medical practitioners. Thus, in the social domain there is sharp disagreement over both the ends and the means and correspondingly leeway when it comes to how they are interpreted and shaped. But as a result, the ethically-functionally justified ethos of a practice discussed here would be determined in the first instance only in ways *internal to the practice*.

In the context of a particular nexus of practices, therefore, someone who conducts thorough examinations is a good doctor, and someone who reads bedtime stories can claim to be a good father. But that something is a good or successful instance of a practice does not say anything yet about whether the practice is itself a good practice (worthy of promotion) and thus whether it is a good thing that it exists. Even bad, reprehensible, and socially questionable practices take their orientation from standards of goodness; one can be an excellent pickpocket or a particularly conscientious contract killer. And the little witch in Otfried Preussler's eponymous story has to learn the hard way that being a good witch does *not* mean doing good but doing as much harm as possible. The criteria referred to here are thus standards that apply to the successful performance of a given practice from the perspective of the conditions of this performance, but they are not yet criteria of the goodness of this practice as such.

In other words, the subpractice of thorough examination or the subpractice of conscientiously researching a contract killing is required in order to achieve the goal set by the medical or mafia practice as a whole. But they can only be understood against the background of a system of reference in which murder or orthodox medicine as valued as such. Thus, contract killing represents a very specific practical nexus with very specific purposes that not everyone will share, but the medical practices described also depend on the context of a particular form of life in which being a doctor has a specific meaning and the practices of medical care are interpreted, performed, and valued in a certain way. Thus, the individual practice or role and the ethos associated with it depend on the practical-interpretive context of a complex form of life. For example, unlike an orthodox physician, a spiritual healer may believe that examination and diagnosis are not the decisive precondition for healing the patient, but instead successfully establishing contact with a higher spiritual order. If one does not believe that medical practice contributes to healing the patient, and if one does not believe that it makes sense to combat disease, then one will not establish the standards of medical excellence described above, and one would not have any reason to adhere to such standards.

Divergence and Connection between Internal and External Points of View

Conversely, mustn't someone who observes the *internal criteria of excellence* believe in the *context-transcending meaning* of a practice? On the one hand, it cannot be ruled out that one can share the criteria of excellence of a practice (to an extent) even though one does not approve of the practice itself or approve of it entirely.[62] Thus, to evoke a topos of many detective novels, I can feel a certain grudging respect for the perfection of a contract killer, even if I consider his actions to be reprehensible. And even the convinced orthodox physician who believes that homeopathic preparations are at best placebos might distinguish between the thoroughness of one homeopath and the sloppiness of another. Nevertheless, even the best contract killer is abominable in the eyes of most people, and even the most thorough homeopath is a charlatan according to the judgment of the strict orthodox physician.

For us as observers, therefore, these two things—the evaluation of a practice as meaningful and the recognition of its internal excellence—may diverge in certain cases. But with all due respect for the technical perfection of the contract killer, I will still hope that he will slip up in executing his task, and one will not expend immense effort in developing one's critical faculties regarding homeopathic practice if one considers the notion that substances diluted tens of thousands of times can be effective to be nothing but superstition. Thus, it is unclear how internal standards can be ascertained at all if one completely ignores the evaluation of the practice as such. This is even more the case from the perspective of the actor herself. Although one may take pleasure in technical perfection regardless of consequences, the permanent divergence of the two moments (the internal quality and the meaning of a practice that transcends this) should probably be regarded as dubious or even as a pathological symptom. Then the corresponding practice seems to be at very least strangely empty, and those who engage in it seem to be compulsive perfectionists. Accordingly, the formation of a professional ethos and, more generally, of ethical-functional qualifications of practices is not entirely independent of identification with the corresponding profession or the corresponding practice against the background of the context of which they are a part.

This first indication that *internal* and *external* criteria—standards of goodness within a practice and the goodness of this practice itself—may not be completely separable is instructive concerning our problem. If the standards of the goodness of a practice are embedded in a form of life, in a context of interrelated practices and interpretations within which these standards apply, then the insistence on the standards that apply within a practical nexus typically also involves at least implicit claims to validity regarding the overall appropriateness of these practices and thus regarding the context as such. Sometimes we may act out of empty perfectionism or out of an independent "functional pleasure." In case of doubt, however, we consider thorough medical examinations to be indispensable because we share the corresponding assumptions about the meaning of medicine, and we think that reading to children or offering them reasons makes sense because we support the corresponding pedagogical assumptions. This is to assert that *as a matter of fact* we make claims to validity regarding the appropriateness of our practices. But against the background of what has been said so far, it cannot be decided whether, given the dependency on context and interpretation described, there is in fact a foundation for these very claims and what this foundation could look like.

In Chapter 4, I will argue that these validity claims are ultimately a result of the ability of forms of life to solve problems of a specific kind. In order to lay the groundwork for the thesis that the decisive norms of ethical life in this context are in a certain sense both internal and external (a thesis that in the third part will be related once again to the mode of immanent critique), in the next section I will first reexamine the specific character of the normativity of forms of life developed here. Norms of ethical life follow the normative logic of what can be called, (loosely) following Hegel, the *normativity of the concept.* Recourse to this logic enables us to develop a nonconventionalist and nontraditionalist conception of the assignment of functions to social practices and institutions and the establishment of criteria of excellence or standards to which the latter are subject. The (Hegelian) motif of "not corresponding to its concept" around which this explanation will revolve is in addition a proposal for understanding how social formations can also fail to measure up to the norms of ethical life that make them what they are.

3.4 Lack of Correspondence with Its Concept

Let us start from the specific feature mentioned at the beginning that, when it comes to forms of life, everyday linguistic utterances like "That's not a family (any longer)!" acquire a special normative meaning. It is a philosophically interesting fact—and not merely a *façon de parler*—that one can say of a social formation in which no one talks to or takes care of anyone else that it is no longer a family, even if, judged by the raw facts of biological descent, it is a family and even though we clearly do not immediately stop measuring the formation in question by the criteria associated with the status of a family. In exactly the same way, states beyond a certain degree of failure are *no longer states* in certain respects but *failed states,* whether because they can no longer ensure the safety of their populations or because they undermine the common good. And one will also say of democracies beyond a certain stage of insufficiency that they are no longer democracies. Nevertheless, a failed state is still in a certain way a state, albeit a bad or deficient state, and the family that is no longer a family is somehow still a family. Otherwise the corresponding formation could no longer be identified *as* a (failed) state or *as* a (broken) family and would no longer have to be judged in terms of the conditions laid down with these concepts. I do not think that the way of speaking outlined here is inauthentic, as if denying a specific status really only means that one finds something bad. In speaking thus, one is saying something more and different—or at any rate, one is drawing attention in a specific way to the deficient character of the formation in question. That one can make such a judgment reveals the normative-descriptive (or "thick") status of many of the concepts that we deal with in social life.

Hegel's Concept of the Concept

In Hegel's *Science of Logic* we find, corresponding to these mundane observations and ways of speaking, the expression that some existing entities (of ethical life), as they exist empirically, "do not correspond to their concept."[63] The distinction between concept and (empirical) actuality at work here seeks to explain how an object can lack essential characteristics that typically define it (they can, in Hegel's words, be "stunted," "immature," "defective" or "entirely missing") without ceasing to be an instantiation of this object. In contrast to a merely "empirical groping in the dark" *[das empirische Herumsuchen]* which thinks that it can derive the essential characteristics of an object from the totality of its "immediate properties" and hence must assume that the loss of these properties means that the object thereby ceases to be this particular object, here Hegel establishes the notion that in "the concrete things" a difference may arise "between the *concept* and its *actualization*":

> Therefore, although an actual thing will indeed manifest in itself what it *ought* to be, yet . . . it may equally also show that its actuality only imperfectly corresponds with its concept, that it is *bad.* Now the definition is supposed to indicate the determinateness of the concept in an immediate property; yet there is no property against which an instance could not be adduced where the whole *habitus* indeed allows the recognition of the concrete thing to be defined, yet the property taken for its character shows itself to be immature and stunted. In a bad plant, a bad animal type, a contemptible human individual, a bad state, there are aspects of their concrete existence that are defective or entirely missing but that might otherwise be picked out for the definition as the distinctive mark and essential determinateness in the existence of any such concrete entity. A bad plant, a bad animal, etc., remains a plant, an animal just the same. If, therefore, the bad specimens are also to be covered by the definition, then the empirical groping in the dark for essential properties is ultimately frustrated, because of the instances of malformation in which they are missing; for instance, in the case of the physical human being, the essentiality of the brain is missing in the instance of acephalous individuals; or, in the case of the state, the essentiality of the protection of life and of property is missing in the instance of despotic states and tyrannical governments.[64]

The merely empirical search for features and characteristics that constitute a natural or social formation is aimed, following Hegel's explanations, at the attempt to define an entity with reference to its essential characteristics. However, such a definition faces the alternative of either not being able to conceive of a formation that lacks the constitutive properties as an instantiation of its kind (no longer being able to conceive of a rose without thorns as a rose, a short-necked giraffe as a giraffe, a despotic state as a state) or of including the deviations indiscriminately in the definition. Each of these alternatives is unsatisfactory. The first alternative misses the fact that a rose without thorns is still a rose and that a despotic (or failed) state is still a state. The second alternative cannot distinguish between essential and inessential features. It completely misses the "essentiality," the essential or constitutive character of certain properties for the corresponding entity (the brain for human beings, the protection of life and property for the state). This dilemma can now be resolved with the concept of the *concept* and the conceptual, as opposed to definitional, attitude to the objects to which this seems to point. For if the conceptual (unlike the definitional) approach no longer rests on the mere subsumption of an empirical accumulation of properties under a name, one can now assume that a difference between the concept and its actualization is possible. The distinction between the concept and its actualization makes it possible to distinguish essential from inessential properties in ways that are not quantitative (for example, based on the frequency of their occurrence). If something can fall under a concept without being in conformity with it in all respects, then properties will still be attributed to the corresponding object even if the latter does not actualize them or if the properties that in fact constitute a natural formation or a formation of ethical life are, as Hegel puts it, "stunted." Then the concept *[Begriff],* as it is sometimes explained, is a matter of *comprehending [Begreifen].* It comprehends, which means that it understands, subsumes, describes, and determines something as something. In comprehending, it takes account of what *is* and at the same time specifies how it *should* be. In other words, the concept neither merely grasps what is given (passively), nor does it imprint its own determinations on actuality (in an active and external way). In this way it shows itself to be not only a sorting and classifying but also a normative-evaluative court of appeal *[Instanz]* in terms of which a reality that is itself normatively constituted can be judged, and at the same time comprehended, in normative terms.

The possibility of a divergence between actuality and concept and the normative definitional power of the concept with respect to actuality (if I may express myself in such un-Hegelian terms) now opens up the possibility of a particular variety of normative criticism of social phenomena—namely, criticism of incomplete or deficient instantiations of concepts (for example, the state, democracy, or the family), even if this is not the perspective of primary interest for Hegel himself. In what follows, I will try to spell out the kind of normative use of the concept involved here and to make it productive with reference to formations of ethical life or forms of life.

Neither Descriptive nor Normative

In several respects, such a figure of criticism is normative *in a different way* from a simple prescription that would be imposed on a form of life from the outside. The tension between the concept and its actualization is not a matter of a simple difference between what is normatively required and what is empirically redeemed. Rather, such an argument derives its standards from the conditions laid down with a practice or a form of life and from the claims they raise. But what is implied by such a way of speaking? What does it mean to say that a form of life does not correspond to its concept? And in what sense does correspondence with its concept determine whether a social practice succeeds or fails?

First, if it is said of a social formation that it does not correspond to its concept, then this is neither a strictly descriptive nor a strictly normative statement. It is not merely a matter of stating what this formation *is* or *is not,* but neither is it merely a matter of prescribing what it *should* or *should not be.*

The corresponding assertion is *not purely descriptive* insofar as it is not exclusively concerned with the empirical observation that a social formation lacks features usually associated with it. Thus, with regard to the mixed-generation group sitting across from you in the subway, one could make it clear that this is a small daycare group accompanied by teachers and not, as an observer had assumed, a six-member family. This is the fact-based clarification of a state of affairs. If, by contrast, the claim is that a family is no longer a family in the sense that it does not correspond to the concept of a family, then this statement has an *evaluative* undertone. It contains a reference to a *normative shortcoming* of the corresponding constellation and implies a reproach. Nevertheless, the operative assertion is also not a *purely normative* one or a normative one in the narrow sense that the practices of interactions among family members encountered here are different from what they *should be* because they do not meet standards or guidelines laid down for the form of families.

To return to a distinction introduced above, here *internal, not external, norms* come into play, thus norms that are given with a formation itself and are connected in its normative evaluation with the *description* of a particular practice, with its functional conditions and with the meaning of the practices interwoven with these conditions. The "concept" of a social formation comprehends or understands a social formation or practice as something and through this comprehending, hence by grasping what constitutes the practice or formation, specifies its inherent fulfillment conditions.

Determination of Social Generic Properties

The fact that a social formation (a form of life or institution) does not correspond to its concept can then be tentatively understood as implying that it is not a good instance of its genus or type. The term "concept" then functions analogously to that of "genus" for the social domain. It asserts that the formation in question has or lacks the social generic properties, as it were—that is, it lacks the properties that define what constitutes it as an institution or a form of life.

Accordingly, a formation that did not correspond to its concept would be deficient in that it lacked the properties posited with its genus. These "set properties" should now be understood in such a way that, firstly, they are not external standards applied to the object, but requirements established *with it;* secondly, the properties in question already exist at least in a rudimentary way in the corresponding formation—and they would lack any normative significance if they did not exist at least potentially in the formations in question.

If we think of generic or species properties with reference to biological creatures, then it is comparatively easy to explain the relationship between *is* and *ought* at work here. Among the generic properties of giraffes is their long neck, among those of lions are powerful teeth and jaws, properties that are functionally necessary for the survival of lions and giraffes. A short-necked giraffe or a toothless lion lacks essential features of the species. The animal in question is in a certain sense no longer a giraffe or a lion; it does not correspond to its concept, and it does not realize its generic properties or realizes them only in part. The short-necked giraffe neither represents a different kind of giraffe—the short-necked variety—nor is it simply entirely different from a giraffe. It is a *deficient specimen* of its species; thus, it belongs to something (the species) whose characteristics it at the same time does not exhibit.[65] But why does it remain—even in the absence of the corresponding properties—a giraffe? And why is it *deficient* and not just simply *different* from all the other giraffes?

If the answer to these questions is already complicated in the case of natural species, it is easy to see that transferring this model to social formations will face even greater difficulties. Human forms of life, as fluid, historically variable, and malleable formations, cannot be pinned down through functional conditions and essential characteristics in a similar way to the life-form of giraffes or that of lions. Social practices and forms of life do not have short necks or bad teeth. Hence, they do not have any pre-interpretively recognizable functions and dysfunctions that are given independently of the determinations we have laid down; which of their numerous properties are essential for them is notoriously controversial. If a modern family in which the autonomy of the individual is disregarded, a democracy in which no democratic decision-making takes place, or a city without public spaces represent deficient or incomplete instantiations of the concepts of the family, democracy, or a city, then, in contrast to biological species, what constitutes the type in the social case is itself a result of human design and of the self-understanding that develops within the framework of social contexts of interpretation.

The description of the state of affairs presented here raises two questions in particular regarding social entities. First, there is the question of *continuity:* How can we explain that even the deficient family is still supposed to be a family and that the deficient city is still supposed to be a city? What kind of continuity does a deficient instantiation have with its type even if it simultaneously lacks essential properties of the type? In other words: What kind of continuity does the deficient exemplar of a type have with its type, if "*not* corresponding to *its* concept" suggests simultaneously both continuity with and difference from this type?

Second, there is the question concerning *normativity:* How exactly can the specific tension between *is* and *ought* be explained, a normatively described difference that opens up the possibility of judging the respective instantiation of the corresponding type? From which standpoint can the lack of a public space be conceived as a deficiency and not just in a norm-free sense as a mere difference? Hence, what explains the normative guiding function of the concept in view of a reality that deviates from the concept? And to what extent can this difference be explained in terms of internal and not just external norms?[66]

I will try to answer the question concerning the continuity between inadequate actualization and concept, and then I will go on to discuss the source of the normativity of the concept.

Continuity between Concept and Deficient Realization

Why, for example, is a city in which social homogeneity prevails and in which there are no longer any public spaces, a deficient *city?* Why does "city" remain the concept under which the corresponding formation falls, even though there is a lack of fit between it and the concept of the city? One of the conceivable answers to this question would be in *quantitative* terms. Notwithstanding its deficiencies, the city would still have to be judged in terms of the concept of a city because it still exhibits enough of the constitutive features of the concept of a city: there are still many houses, streets, a subway, and smog. Therefore, it is a city and not, for instance, a forest or a village. However, this answer is of limited value. How many properties exactly still have to be present for the deviant formation to exhibit continuity with what is designated by its concept? Or are there essential *core* (as opposed to peripheral) *properties* that must remain in order for something to be able to count as a deficient instantiation of a concept? However, the answer in terms of core properties would merely shift the problem to the difficulty of singling out such core features.

Another conceivable answer is the following: "city" remains the concept under which the deficient city falls and its normative content remains binding for the city because (as yet) there is no other concept under which it could fall. Obviously, the fact that it has certain deficiencies as a city does not mean that it is suddenly a forest. Nor is it even something akin to a city, such as a village. However, this undoubtedly informative point is of only limited help for our problem—after all, it could simply be that we are at a loss for an alternative and should perhaps create a new concept as soon as possible.

The answer that I would like to venture here is different from the two just mentioned. The reason why a deficient state, a deficient city, or a deficient family still can, or even must, be judged in terms of the concepts of state, city, or family is that the missing properties of the corresponding formations are bound up with a *history of deformation.* To the (ideal-typical European or North American) city belong public space, social density, and different people living together. If these characteristics should ever disappear entirely, then that would be the result of a *development* that the corresponding constellation of social practices and institutions had undergone. The development in question could be described (to anticipate the theses to be developed in the following chapters) as follows: here existing claims to solve problems successfully could not be redeemed, or they have become inverted, because essential practices have eroded, have disappeared, or have been transformed beyond recognition. The disappearance of the constitutive features of a city would then be a history of normative failure, a *history of crisis.* The continuity between the good and the defective instantiation is due to the fact that the corresponding formation not only *lacks* the essential characteristics but that it has *lost* them in a certain way. Thus, the practices and institutions that have become defective and obsolete still bear the inverted traces of the claims and possibilities once posited with them. Not only does the reality not correspond to its concept; rather, it has *failed to measure up to it,* failed to redeem it, and as a result (continues to) embody its claim. Concepts, in this understanding, function as a kind of specification of a problem or a task.[67]

A deficient city, family, or democracy would then still be an instantiation of the respective concept—albeit a failed one—because the problem to whose solution it does not contribute anything (any longer) still exists. It still to a certain extent occupies the place where the practices and institutions belonging to a city, a democracy, or a family are located within the division of labor of the functional nexus of a form of life. The concepts "city," "democracy," or "family" would then function, figuratively speaking, as conceptual and normative placeholders. If this placeholder is called "city," then in cases of normative failure and noncorrespondence, what occupies it is simply no longer a proper city—but it is still deficient *as a city.*

Normativity of the Difference between Concept and Reality

The problem of *normativity,* that is, the validity of the concept in relation to the phenomena it covers, is not yet resolved with the question of continuity. What is the source of the normative guiding function of the concept, and what right does the concept have vis-à-vis reality? When a social formation does not correspond to its concept, why not abandon the concept instead of criticizing the formation in question as deficient? In other words: What in particular lends a certain description of a problem normative relevance? When it comes to answering this question, the case of giraffes and lions once again provides obvious clues. The giraffe's long neck and lion's well-functioning teeth and jaws make their lives easier. Hence, it may seem obvious to define the concept of a giraffe as an animal with a long neck and that of a lion as an animal with powerful teeth and jaws, and thus to understand these properties as the norm for determining deviations. What it means for a form of life to be good or good and functional, on the other hand, or when social practices are worth preserving or rightly undergo change or become eroded for understandable reasons is precisely what is at issue.

Drawing on my understanding of concepts as placeholders for a problem description, I propose to approach the normative validity claim of concepts by demarcating it from two alternatives. The first corresponds to the fact that we ourselves are the authors of the conceptual-institutional relations and hence are free to posit norms and thereby to influence the institutions and practices that determine us. Therefore, the definition of the generic properties or of the concept against which the individual exemplar—in this case, the instantiation of a social practice—is to be measured can be conceived in definitional (or definitional-contractualist) terms. What constitutes a family, a democracy, or a city would then be what we have agreed upon (possibly collectively), in which case particular instantiations of families, democracies, or cities would correspond to our agreement about what they should be and how we want to understand them—or they do not. Not corresponding to one's concept or not satisfying one's generic properties would then mean violating these collective determinations. The result would be a normative difference between the social definition and the reality of a social formation. According to this version, the definition of generic properties would be a simple (and voluntaristic) normative act of positing that existed completely independently of the actual social practices.

The second alternative is to situate the generic properties being sought historically and in the context of a specific culture. What constitutes formations such as families, democracies, or cities would then be the specific historical shape that they have assumed. The concept of a family, a city, or a democracy would include what we have come to associate with it against a certain historical and cultural background. This history would have become sedimented in the concept to a certain extent. The complete set of properties and features that these formations developed over the course of this history—what they have *become*—would then dictate what they should be, hence what corresponds to them (and in this sense to their concept). The normative surplus of the concept over its actual realization, and thus the possibility of a normative difference, would in this case be the result of a historically evolved expectation against which the currently existing instantiations of the concept would have to be measured. On this conception, a city that does not correspond to its concept no longer corresponds to what cities once were, and a family that is deficient in the relevant sense no longer corresponds to what families once were. Then a certain social formation is deficient in relation to its history and tradition and to the specific claims that have developed in this history and tradition. Whether a social formation corresponds to its concept or not would be decided by its successful insertion into a specific historical and cultural context so that it would be normatively binding as the *result* of its history.

In my view, neither of the alternatives outlined here captures what we are looking for, that is, the specific meaning of the normativity of a concept as this is understood here in connection with the Hegelian motif. Whereas the first variant reduces the "concept" to a definitional normative act of positing, the second, the attempt to derive the normative content of a social formation from its historical evolution, falls back on purely factual or descriptive aspects, even if these have a historical dimension. In the first case, *is* and *ought* remain separated from each other in an abstract way; in the second case, they collapse into each other, so that the difference between *is* and *ought* shrinks to the normatively unspecific difference between "being" and "having become."

Uninhabitability

Here I can only offer a provisional outline of my alternative proposal, because it anticipates something that will be explained in the next chapter. According to this proposal, the concept of a social formation is determined by the fact that it reflects a certain manifestation of social practices as they developed historically, and therefore it is not something that has been merely normatively posited (not even collectively). On the other hand, however, this manifestation is not only given as a matter of fact; what is reflected in its concept (as opposed to its merely historical-empirical reality) is something that can claim to be rational against a certain historical background. Translated into the vocabulary of "problem solving" alluded to above, this states that the concept, as the result of responses to problems, captures a historically achieved definition of a problem at a historically achieved level of aspiration—and hence is both an anticipation and the result of a social learning process. Not to correspond to its concept then means (in a pragmatist reinterpretation of the Hegelian motif) to *fall below* the problem level thus described. Hence, although this interpretation takes up the historical character of the concept outlined as the second option—that is, the fact that, unlike definitions, something has historically "accumulated" in it that constitutes its content—it nevertheless insists in contrast to this on the stronger conception of (historically situated) rationality and as a result does not simply level the distinction between *is* and *ought* in a historicist way.[68]

Not to correspond to its concept with regard to social formations then means not to fulfill the tasks posited with the concept and not to solve the historical problems accumulated in the concept. Drawing on the ethical-functional understanding of norms of ethical life developed above, this means that a form of life that does not correspond to its concept does not fulfill its ethically constituted function as this has evolved against the background of a specific problem-solving history.

A form of life or a nexus of social practices is then shown to be deficient by the failure and the crisis-proneness of the practices it implies. The erosion of social practices or whole forms of life and their becoming obsolete is both an ethical and a functional failure. To use an expression of Terry Pinkard's, such forms of life "cannot be lived"; they have become "uninhabitable."[69] Just as short-necked giraffes have trouble surviving, a democracy, a city, or a family that does not correspond to its concept is, each in its own way, an uninhabitable formation—a formation that undermines itself. But, to reiterate, that is not a mere dysfunctionality, and this condition does not involve the factual nonexistence of the corresponding formation either. Whether a social formation does or does not function depends, as we saw above, on normative functional assignments. On the other hand, however, it is not just a matter of failing to satisfy an externally posited normative claim. It is a normative *failure,* a de facto *failure,* albeit a failure within a formation constituted by normative claims.

Whereas above I raised the question concerning context-transcending criteria for the appropriateness or inappropriateness of social practices, here criteria come into view that are at once immanent and transcendent, context-dependent, and context-transcending. I will explain the talk of problems (and their context-transcending character) that is only presupposed here in detail in the next chapter. Here I must content myself with a final illustration of the normative status of the concept which is intended to show that its normativity should not be conceived in static (and not in traditional) but instead in dynamic terms. This is because it is situated in the interplay within the triangular relationship formed by *is* (current empirical state), *ought* (normative claim) and the changing objective conditions. It then becomes clear that the concept should not be understood, for example, on the model of the "standard meter," the eternally valid, immutable normative standard over against a changing reality; on the contrary, the concept itself is subject to normatively guided transformations in interaction with reality.

Conceptual Politics: "Family Is Where There Are Children"

The slogan "The family is where there are children" propagated in German politics in recent years is a very good illustration of this interplay, and hence of the specific way in which concepts can assume a normative function and can nevertheless be understood dynamically. On the one hand, this slogan can be understood in such a way that here an obsolete concept is adapted to changing reality and can thereby learn from the latter. Whereas in the past, "family" may have been linked with the institution of heterosexual marriage (with all of its implications), today we see that there can be families in every conceivable psychosexual and social constellation. Posted on walls, the slogan "Family is where there are children" not only provides information about this changed reality but proposes a new interpretation of the concept of family: according to this interpretation, the essential feature of a family is now the presence of children and the existence of care relationships. In addition, it raises a normative claim to the effect that one should show respect for the corresponding formations (the very same respect that is shown to "traditional families"). So the meaning of the slogan can be spelled out roughly as follows: "What we call 'family' and in the past identified with certain institutions and practices has now changed and become detached in part from these traditional institutions and practices. However, we should respect these new formations as new shapes of what is normatively captured in this concept." Such an appeal is bound up with the hope that as a result the new formation will share in the normative meaning of the old. Thus, if social development and the accompanying conceptual political intervention give rise to a shift in the semantic content of a concept, the latter nevertheless does not lose its normative guiding function.[70]

However, this shift in the content of the concept is not an arbitrary redefinition ("We now mean by 'family' something completely from before"). By pointedly calling the new formations "family," we claim on their behalf that they are in continuity with those features that we traditionally associate with the concept.[71] But the opposite interpretation of the conceptual politics at work here is also only of limited relevance. The point is that the shift in the understanding of the concept cannot be understood as a matter of teasing out a normative core—specifically, an anthropologically universally valid core—which in this case resides, for example, in the (asymmetric) assumption of care obligations. Thus, it is also not simply the case that families are always essentially concerned with caring for children or, more broadly, with assuming responsibility for one another in asymmetric ways and that past societies only erroneously connected this with other practices and institutions.

How can we now explain the normative force or the normative guiding function of a concept if its content nevertheless proves at the same time to be changeable? Evidently it can be explained in terms of its adequacy vis-à-vis a functional description and the objective conditions bound up with it, although the latter must not be conceived at the same time in ahistorical terms. And how is the fact that the change in the content of the concept can still claim normative power to be explained? The necessity of such a change stems from the dysfunctionality of the traditional ways in which the concepts are understood. (One of the reasons for the campaign, which emerged from the center of society, was indeed the fact that clinging to traditional concepts of the family has led to major problems.)

However, if it is wrong to identify the heterosexual nuclear family institutionalized qua marriage as the core of the family, then such a conception is not simply a normative mistake but an error in the context of a particular historical development of problem-solving steps. I will return to this point.

Summary

The motif of "not being in conformity with its concept," as I have developed it here, drawing loosely on Hegel, teaches us three things about the character of the normativity at work in forms of life. First, norms of ethical life (as they are expressed in the "concept") are internal norms. The concept is not an *external* standard; it is not a norm that is only externally imposed on the respective form of life.[72] After all, the point is not that a social formation does not correspond to *our expectations* of it, but that it does not correspond to *its own concept*.

Second, in contrast to the above-mentioned understanding of normativity, according to which it makes no difference to a norm whether it is realized *[realisiert],* the norms and expectations implicit in a concept like "city" or "family" are not independent of their *actualization [Verwirklichung]*. Thus, the concept of the thing grasps what is: it comprehends reality. But in doing so it goes beyond reality and prescribes something to it, assuming that what is meant here by "reality" *[Wirklichkeit]* is not merely what is factually given but also what is implicit in this as potential (hence, what Hegel means by "actuality"). In other words, the concept contains a *surplus* that goes beyond the actual practice.

Third, forms of life are "normatively constituted" in the strong sense that norms are not only an external part or adventitious aspect of their structure but they have an effect that is constitutive for the form of life: they make the practices that constitute the forms of life into what they are. However, they do not create forms of life in the sense that they unconditionally re-create social reality in a radical sense.

From the corresponding domains of practice come functional requirements that in this sense stem "from the world" (a normatively shaped world in which ethical life always already exists). But then not only—internally—determined *instantiations* of a concept can be criticized as deficient, but also *the concepts themselves* against the background of their vulnerability to normative dysfunctionalities. These are to a certain extent set in motion by such a critique.

The gap between claim and fulfillment of a single practice or of an entire form of life that becomes conceivable as a result opens up the possibility of a context-transcending critique insofar as now the success and appropriateness of social practices can no longer be conceived only internally but also with reference to their tasks. It is this point of reference and this motif that I will develop in the following with the thesis that forms of life are problem-solving strategies. I will return to the idea of learning processes also already hinted at here in Part 4 after first developing the motif of a form of criticism that takes immanent contradictions as its starting point.

CHAPTER FOUR

Forms of Life as Problem-Solving Entities

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, I traced what I called the internal normativity of forms of life to the point where the question of the context-transcending claim to validity raised by a form of life arose. Even if each of the norms at work in practices has proven to be good (in the sense of being ethically-functionally necessary) with respect to the internal conditions governing the implementation of the practice, and even if their goodness can be explained in turn with reference to a particular form of life, it still remains open why it is good that this practical context exists at all. What is good *about it* and not just *for it?* Conversely, in what respects could such an ensemble of practices, as a form of life, not be good or fail? The teleological structure that we encountered in Section 3.2 seems to reach a limit here. Forms of life are not "good for something," they are not there to realize a specific purpose—they simply exist. However, they do still more: they have effects. My thesis is that, in exercising effects, forms of life solve problems. Or, in somewhat less misleading terms, they are *problem-solving processes*. As such, however, they are not merely a means for realizing a certain purpose. Just by virtue of their being what they are, the solution to problems manifests itself in them.

Therefore, the thesis to be explained in this chapter is that forms of life are problem-solving entities. They react to problems that confront human beings when they are trying to shape—and not merely secure—their lives. Accordingly, forms of life claim (implicitly or explicitly) to be the appropriate solution to the problem that they confront or that is posited with them. This means that the success of forms of life can be gauged by whether or not they satisfy this claim. Then there may be several appropriate solutions, but at the same time, some attempted solutions are also inappropriate.

But in what sense are forms of life solutions to problems? What *is* a problem, and what kinds of problems are solved by the different forms of life? How does one recognize successful solutions to problems, and how does one recognize that they have failed?

In the first section of this chapter, I will explain my conception of problems (among other things, in contrast to the concept of needs) as normatively predefined and historically situated tasks and conflicts. In the second section, in a critical discussion of John Dewey I will address the problem with problems and their ambiguous position between the subjective interpretation of the problem and the objective problematic situation. In the third section, I will discuss Hegel's theory of the family as an example of my conception of problems; specifically, I will interpret the bourgeois civil family, which Hegel conceives as a relationship of ethical life, as a problem-solving entity. With this it will become possible, in the fourth section, to explain the notion of crisis implied by this understanding of problems, that is, to explain the failure of forms of life as a failure to satisfy a normatively predefined claim to solve a problem. Finally, against this background, I will summarize the conception of form-of-life-problems as second order problems in the fifth section.

4.1 What Are Problems?

What are problems, and in what respects are forms of life problem-solving entities? According to the Greek etymology of the word (*problema,* lit. "something thrown forward"), a problem is something "presented," an obstacle to be overcome that is presented for solution.[1] A problem arises when certain courses of action falter, when interpretations go wrong, when our actions and desires no longer meet with success, or when what we thought we understood turns out to be incomprehensible or inconsistent.

In this context, a characteristic ambiguity is instructive concerning the sense in which I speak of problems. When someone "is faced with a problem," this can either mean that "she is facing a *task*" or that "she is facing a *difficulty*."[2] Accordingly, when we speak of forms of life as attempts to solve problems, this can mean that the forms of social life involved are faced with certain tasks that they have to solve, without necessarily implying that something has already become difficult here. Alternatively, it can mean that forms of life are confronted with difficulties, thus with a state of affairs in which something has already become problematic or has succumbed to a crisis. It is important for how the proposed concept of a problem is used here to see how these two moments are interwoven: when dealing with problems in the sense of tasks, forms of life always encounter problems in the sense of difficulties. Sometimes the task to be performed only becomes visible in the light of the difficulty that arises. Correspondingly, forms of life confront shifting dynamics of change and conflict that, as problems, must be mastered and overcome in different ways. The starting point for evaluating and criticizing forms of life, as I conceive of them here, is therefore the phenomenon of forms of life *becoming problematic,* the possible *crises* to which they can succumb. And the problems in question here are also conceived in practical terms in this sense—namely, as something that arises out of certain social practices and forms of life for the human beings who are active in the latter.

Problem versus Need

The point of speaking about problems and solutions to problems in the context of forms of life becomes clear when this is contrasted with the different way in which we speak about needs and their satisfaction. Instead of saying that *problems* are solved in forms of life, one could also argue (especially if one thinks of the task aspect of forms of life) that forms of life satisfy human *needs* and that the more successful they are in doing so, the better they are. In fact, a common feature of the concept of a problem and the concept of needs is that in both cases it is a matter of remedying a defect that has been identified. In contrast to what I want to stress about the concept of a problem, however, the concept of needs is often used in a *static* and *ahistorical* sense.[3] Then needs, understood in the sense of "basic needs," function as basic, objective, and correspondingly indubitable benchmarks that claim to represent a standard for the adequacy of a specific cultural form of life independently of historical and cultural imprints.[4] Correspondingly, a given form of life would then have to be examined as to whether it is capable of meeting human needs.

However, one of the widespread findings in philosophical anthropology, which already featured prominently in Hegel and Marx, is directed against such an approach.[5] This finding points to the fact that human needs are in principle unlimited and indeterminable and that they are changeable and dynamic. It follows that needs can be formed in ways that contradict the idea of an objective fixed point. However, it also follows that needs are by their very nature historically specific and culturally shaped. In Marx's classical formulation, "Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth."[6] And Theodor W. Adorno provides an accurate illustration of the same point: "The satisfaction of the concrete hunger of the civilized implies that they are able to eat something that does not disgust them, and between the disgust and its opposite the entire history is reflected."[7]

This malleability of needs is reflected in the fact that the differences between the forms of life of human beings are so profound that they do not seem to be held together by any shared foundation. Or in the words of Arnold Gehlen, there seem to be such "striking contrasts among peoples, which reach so to speak into the interior of the human heart, that one is almost led to believe that one is dealing with different species." Gehlen concludes that "we only encounter what is natural in man already suffused by cultural coloration."[8]

In other words, "One never merely survives." Forms of life do not refer to mere survival, but always to a specific life that has always been shaped in one way or another. This is why they cannot be measured in terms of basic needs conceived as a fixed point. Even though there may be (intuitively quite plausible) aspects that are shared by all forms of human life known to us, this often concerns precisely those aspects that human beings have in common with other living creatures.[9]

The talk of "problems" takes these objections into account, namely, the reference to the inherently culturally formed, interpreted, and higher-level character of human forms of life (and of the corresponding needs). Thus, my strategy of argumentation could be described as follows: in contrast to a position that starts from *the* human form of life conceived in naturalistic terms (qua recourse to needs) and determines the adequacy of cultural forms of life on this basis—the latter would then be appropriate whenever they corresponded to *the* human form of life—I assume, based on my conception of "problems," that *the* human form of life is accessible only as something that is socioculturally and historically mediated. This is why, with the question of what forms of life are, I start directly from these moments of mediation themselves and in doing so follow to a certain extent the opposite path to that taken by needs-based approaches. My starting point, then, is not the imaginary zero point of a "bare need" independent of or underlying cultural forms of life, but instead the cultural formations themselves and with them the problems that afflict them and whose solution they embody.

Problems, as I understand them in this context, are thus in the first place culturally specific and historically and socially shaped. They occur only in the context of a specific, historically situated, and socially instituted form of life that always bears the marks of human design, and they emerge from a situation that has already been shaped and interpreted. Secondly, problems with regard to forms of life are in principle normatively constituted in the sense that they—in line with the ethical-functional normativity of forms of life developed above—do not simply represent hindrances or sources of disruption of a particular performance per se. Rather, they are a matter of something becoming problematic in relation to an ethically predefined problem description, hence to an appropriate performance of practices in accordance with their normative meaning. Then, thirdly, problems are always also the result of previous attempts to solve problems; they are problems to which attempts at problem-solving have given rise; hence, they are *second order problems.*

As a result, a problem is something with which a certain form of life is confronted, but also something that is posited *with it.* Tracing problems back to a first point, to an "original" problem—that one could then also call a need—is in vain but it is also superfluous.

Possible Misunderstandings

In what sense do forms of life solve problems? What do they do in order to accomplish this? At this point I would like to anticipate three possible misunderstandings that could make the interpretation of forms of life as problem-solving entities appear counterintuitive. First, it is doubtful whether someone who is, for example, embedded in the form of life of the bourgeois, or also the postbourgeois-postconventional family, or who extols the city as a form of life, would describe them as attempts to solve a *problem.* The affirmation of certain forms of life seems to involve a much more euphoric, positive, and not further substantiated attitude expressed by saying that "this is how we want to live" and not "this is how we must live." In other words, when I describe forms of life as problem-solving entities, does that mean that they merely *react* to problems instead of being able to lay down positive proposals themselves? And wouldn't that contradict my own conception of forms of life as an expression of our ability to shape human conditions of life?

On the one hand, I believe that even if it is not a part of the ever-present self-understanding of a form of life that it solves problems, this conception nevertheless comes into play as soon as a confrontation makes it necessary to defend a particular form of life or to reject another one. As I already asserted at the beginning, insofar as those involved do not simply insist that "this is just how we do things" but raise validity claims, then the claim is that the forms of life in question are better solutions to problems than other variants. On the other hand, behind the reactive character of forms of life there lurks a materialist element that I would like to defend; they are (always also) reactive insofar as they must respond to something and do not unfold in a vacuum. This is not at odds with the conception of forms of life as socially, culturally, and historically shaped conditions of life. Every shaping power *[Gestaltungsmacht]* encounters conditions; it is a confrontation with conditions that constitute its starting point and limit.

Another reason why speaking of forms of life as solutions to problems seems counterintuitive is the following: To say that problems are solved by forms of life sounds as though there are always actors who can form intentions and make plans, as if a form of life arises because one or several persons self-consciously choose a certain practice with which they want to realize a certain purpose. However, it is apparent (in the light of what was said above) that forms of life involve nexuses of practices that are in part antecedent and not completely explicit and may not even always be fully explicable. Taken as a whole, therefore, forms of life are something in which we are embedded and always already involved without being able to specify the purpose of this practice at any moment; still less have we decided to pursue a specific purpose from a standpoint *outside of* or *prior to* this practice. The problem-solving character of forms of life must be conceived differently, therefore, if we want to avoid a cognitivistic and intentionalistic misunderstanding. It is not only that problems invariably arise *in* and *out of* a practice in which formulations of problems and purposes only gradually assume concrete form. In addition, it is sometimes only apparent from outside that certain practices are in effect solutions to problems. This means that, if forms of life solve a problem, this is not transparent at every moment and is not always directly intended, especially since a form of life is not itself a subject that could have intentions.[10]

A third potential misunderstanding is to interpret the talk of forms of life as problem-solving entities in instrumentalist terms. That forms of life are problem-solving processes—that they solve problems that arise with them—does not mean that they are merely means to realizing a preconceived end. Forms of life are not means to the end of solving problems. Rather, they *are* solutions to problems; they are paradigmatic cases of problem-solving. In other words, here the relation is conceptual rather than causal; that forms of life solve problems is part of their meaning.[11] Solving problems is not their task (understood in instrumental terms); it is what they do.

4.2 Given or Made? The Problem with Problems

As it happens, problems on this conception are not simply indubitable, objective, or given prior to all interpretation. Problems depend on interpretations. Wherever a problem arises, something is not functioning as it should. There is a “problem pressure”—that is, pressure to overcome the resulting discrepancy. Accordingly, the yardstick for measuring the correct solution to a problem is whether what is not working properly works better afterward. But what constitutes functioning in this sense, and thus what can count as a correct and appropriate solution to a problem, depends on how the situation is viewed and interpreted—especially if we presuppose the normatively predefined character of the problem.

Here I would like to anticipate two examples that I will go on to discuss in greater detail in the next section. It may seem evident that something is wrong in a society in which participation in social life is essentially mediated by work but where large sections of the population are also affected by structural unemployment. But to construe this situation as a crisis, to explain what exactly constitutes this crisis of the work-oriented society and what an appropriate solution to the problem might look like is nevertheless far from straightforward and is heavily dependent on the concepts in terms of which the work-oriented society as such is understood. This is also reflected by the proposed solutions: those who call for an unconditional basic income generally define the problem already from the outset in a different way from those who advocate the redistribution of work by reducing working hours. And to return to the second topic mentioned above, whether children sitting quietly and reverently at the table is a sign of a disastrously crisis-ridden family situation, as in Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon,* or whether this behavior is regarded as an effect of the successful exercise of parental authority depends on the point of view posited with educational ideals. So problems always have to be *made* into problems. They must be comprehended and interpreted *as* problems, and the mode of interpretation shapes the possible solutions. But then the question "Are problems in fact 'subjective,' something constructed by us or only 'made' through our interpretation, or are they 'objective,' and hence independent of our interpretations?" must be answered as follows: they are both—at once given and made.

Dewey's Conception of Problems

I would like to explain this thesis by taking a brief detour through John Dewey's understanding of problems and his account of the "logic of inquiry." Dewey sees research—or, to use his term, inquiry—as a problem-solving process that, also according to the self-understanding of his theory, points beyond the research process in the narrower sense of scientific inquiry. Dewey's conception of problems provides interesting clues for understanding the ambiguity of problems outlined above, namely, their character as simultaneously subjectively constructed and objectively given.[12]

If a situation becoming problematic constitutes for Dewey the starting situation through which the process of inquiry first gets going, then his description of what constitutes a problem is unusual. A problem, for Dewey, is essentially characterized by the *indeterminateness of a situation.* And a correspondingly inquiry (as a problem-solving process) is the way in which an indeterminate (fragmented, nonuniform) situation is transformed into a determinate (unified) situation:

> Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.[13]

Relevant for my question here is, in the first instance, only the aspect of the Deweyan theory that stands at the very beginning of the process he describes and that concerns the *setting* of the problem as a problem. For Dewey recognizes, on the one hand, that a problem must always first be comprehended and conceptualized as such in order to become a problem. The problem does not exist unless it is perceived *as* a problem—that is, it does not exist without the process of inquiry that detects it and makes it tangible as such: “The indeterminate situation becomes problematic in the very process of being subjected to inquiry.”[14] A situation becoming problematic is thus already an effect of the research process. Conversely: “To see that a situation requires inquiry is the initial step in inquiry.”[15] This also means that how a problem is conceived determines the possible solutions and their nature.[16] Therefore, problems and their solution are something we construct. We do not *find* them somewhere, but *make* them.

On the other hand, however, Dewey insists on the objective character of problems, that they arise out of reality. We do not raise the problems ourselves. Problems arise: “It is the *situation* that has these traits. *We* are doubtful because the situation is inherently doubtful.”[17] But if it is the aspects of reality that become problematic, then we cannot be free to problematize them—or, in a revealing turn of phrase “to make them into a problem”—or not. We do not *invent* the problems, but *react* to them. From this perspective, problems cannot be dismissed without consequences, and one cannot pose them arbitrarily: “To set up a problem that does not grow out of an actual situation is to start on a course of dead work.”[18] Thus, the problem—this is the essence of these considerations—lies on the side of reality, not with us. Here Dewey demarcates a state of doubt or confusion as a reaction to a real occurrence from pathological projections. The theatergoer (to take an example used by Dewey himself) whose anxiety leads him to suspect a fire in every public space is different from someone who registers with alarm the first signs of the actual spread of a fire and tries to interpret and master the situation.

As it happens, this “objectivist” trait in the conception of problems is modified once again by two factors: Firstly, by the fact that Dewey uses the term “situation” in a specific sense. A situation, for Dewey, is always what he calls a “contextual whole”:

> What is designated by the word "situation" is *not* a single object or event or set of objects and events. For we never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in connection with a contextual whole. This latter is what is called a "situation."[19]

Secondly, however, such a contextual whole, insofar as it constitutes a nexus, is always produced in an *active* or an *interactive* way; it is a practical occurrence and not an external state of the world that can be detached from the observer. The fact that a situation is a contextual whole implies that it arises through an interaction between actor and world. Such a connection, as something that is practically generated, is to a certain extent founded by the acting subject who interacts with the world. However, if problems can arise only with reference to situations—insofar, that is, as the problem consists in a situation becoming indeterminate—but these situations in turn refer to us, then the objective status of the problem affirmed above becomes ambiguous. Although the problems arise "from the world," at the same time this world (that is, the situation) is not independent of us. It is, as Heidegger puts it, "round about us" *[um uns herum];* as a practical nexus, it is related to us.[20] How, then, does the "real situation" from which Dewey starts become the real situation? And then, correspondingly, what status do the problems of which he speaks have?

At Once Given and Made

This is where my thesis comes into play: for Dewey, too, problems are always "at once given and made." If the "indeterminate situation," hence a situation marked by fragmentation, inconsistency, and obscurity, is the starting point for the process of inquiry, then here to begin with something still quite undifferentiated and indeterminate "announces" itself as a crisis—indeed, it is precisely the indeterminateness of the situation that makes it crisis-prone. If identifying the problem is already the first step toward solving it, it is because this makes it possible to work one's way out of the indeterminateness and to achieve the first intimations of orientation, identification, and hence determinacy.[21]

In this way we can resolve the apparently paradoxical description of problems as at once given and made. A problem is *given* insofar as a situation exhibits signs of a crisis (of a problem); it is *made* insofar as the problem first has to be extracted from this initially indeterminate material. Thus, identifying the problem is a constructive process (the identification "makes" the problem) insofar as very different shapes could be extracted from the indeterminate. Something that is fragmented, for example, can be fragmented in very different respects (with reference to very different wholes); something contradictory becomes a contradiction only when things are related to each other in such a way that they are opposed to each other. The interpretive tools through which we make something into a problem are drawn from a reservoir of socially predetermined possible descriptions of problems, which in turn can change when confronted with new situations and problems. A problem announces itself, therefore, as something objectively unavoidable. But what announces itself is still so vague and indeterminate that it first has to be made into a specific problem. So, on the one hand, a problem first becomes a problem through interpretation but, on the other hand, it cannot be constructed out of nothing either. Rather, it is made out of what is there independently of our influence and makes itself felt as a disruption. For this very reason, to put it simply, problems can neither be invented nor ignored.

Thus we can distinguish between two "aggregate states" of what is meant by a problem here: problems initially arise as practical, crisis-prone distortions—an interruption of the performance of an action, the collapse of an interpretation—without already assuming the specific shape of what we will later have identified as a problem. The as-yet-indeterminate problem with which we are initially confronted, therefore, is not the same as the one that we will ultimately identify in a first constructive step in the process of inquiry as a concrete problem. It is a matter, as we can now put it, of different states of indeterminateness: a diffuse problem turns into a more determinate problem, which is why the conventional wisdom that a problem well stated is a problem half solved is indeed valid. Whether the problem description, the interpretation of the problem, fits the initial problem—that is, the crisis that triggered the process of inquiry—must therefore be shown by whether the problem pressure is reduced by the solution strategy implied by the description of the problem. Of course, this is also a matter of interpretation: in case of doubt, whether the solution to a problem has been successful—especially when it comes to social formations to which I am applying the talk of problems here—is as contentious as the problem itself. However, if we follow the path sketched by Dewey, one can conceive of the reassurance regarding a problem and its solution as a gradual hermeneutic adjustment of the problem and its description. Only those parts of the problem description that fit the elements of the initial crisis situation in such a way that they give rise to productive changes or productive connections—in Dewey's words, that they mitigate the indeterminateness of the initial situation—have a chance of counting as a problem description. Thus, the description of a problem and its solution are interwoven in the form of a learning or experiential process.

I will discuss the nature of the process addressed here further in Part 4. The preliminary result of my remarks on Dewey is that a conception of problems can be gleaned from his description that enables us to introduce problems as the "anchor point" for assessing forms of life that goes beyond the alternative between subjective and objective formulations of problems (or between constructivism and realism). Thus, insofar as forms of life are the results of problem-solving processes, the resulting dynamic—the adjustments and interpretations accompanying this process—must be taken into account.

Do Problems Have a Universal Character?

The understanding of the concept of a problem we have now achieved enables us to draw preliminary conclusions about the questions raised at the beginning concerning the universal character of problem situations or needs. If problems are always interpreted problems, then the questions that can become important for us in relation to forms of life always arise at the level of culturally and historically specific problem situations. They arise out of the conflict over specific instantiations and interpretations of general problems. Where something can make a difference for us at all, therefore, what is involved is not some initial situation common to all but situations, problems, and tensions that arise only against the background of the very different ways of dealing with the initial situation and of a history in which these ways of dealing are reflected.

Hence, my approach is in a certain sense an intermediate position between anthropological universalism and constructivist culturalism. Just as it is implausible (but also unnecessary) to deny certain universal constants of the *conditio humana,* it is equally absurd to assume that all of us always confront the same problems—as if the problems actually always arise in the same way irrespective of any historical-cultural constellation.[22]

Then the universal character of problems can be asserted at best as a reverse inference from the persistence and regularity of certain problematic situations. Even if it seems obvious that there must be a series of basic problems with which the species is confronted, it would still not be possible to draw up a complete list of these problems. The different expressions and colorings that the "universal" problems assume in different historical and sociocultural situations are not merely accidental. This is because such universals exhibit historically continually renewed, specific instantiations. Moreover, problems have (solution) histories. A problem that arises at a particular point in history and in a particular sociocultural environment is always marked by the attempts previously made to solve it. In this sense, history becomes sedimented in the problems themselves and the problems become enriched. Thus, problems have histories, and each has a different (social or cultural) place so that there is no such thing as a "pure" (that is, problem-neutral or ahistorical) initial situation for problems; to speak of the "zero point" of the problem prior to any interpretation and to all history would be a bad abstraction.

To formulate it in a pragmatist spirit, forms of life represent the social structures of human beings' practical relation to the world. Insofar as problems are solved in and with forms of life, the problems in question are not ones that could be comprehended abstractly before they come to light in practice; rather, these are problems that arise out of the practical references of the forms of life in which those involved live.

4.3 Attempts at Problem-Solving: Hegel's Theory of the Family

In what follows, I will clarify what it means to say that forms of life solve problems by taking as an example the modern nuclear family and bourgeois civil marriage *[bürgerliche Ehe]* (and later the example of work and the crisis of the work-oriented society). In so doing, I will follow Hegel's interpretation of the family, which I believe we still share implicitly or explicitly in its essentials (allowing for the obvious deviations and need for renewal).

When Hegel introduces the family in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* as an institution of ethical life, he is discussing a very specific, historically distinct, and relatively recent form of the family—namely, the bourgeois nuclear family in its European, Christian guise.[23] What makes Hegel's presentation—which is as much a description as a justification of this specific form of the family—so interesting for our purposes is that he attempts to show that it is superior to other institutions and practices, starting from this historically specific shape of ethical life (or, to use my way of speaking, from this historically specific problem constellation) and engaging with the relations of tension in which this formation is located. Translated into the terms of problem-solving (which, needless to say, are not those of Hegel), this means that it is a superior solution to a problem—specifically, it is the normatively imbued solution to a problem that must be understood in normative terms.

Family as an Institution of Ethical Life

The basis of Hegel's interpretation can be stated succinctly as follows: the family is an institution of ethical life.[24] Speaking in terms of "ethical life" implies two things in the context of Hegel's thought. First, it implies a *cultivating* or *civilizing* trait. In marriage, which founds the family, the natural character of sexual relations is transformed into a culturally shaped and normatively determined relationship. A relationship conditioned by nature turns into a human form of life. Thus, ethical life stands in opposition to raw, first nature—that is, to unformed or unmediated need.[25] Marriage as an institution of ethical life signifies the transformation of biological sexual relations into "spiritual," "self-conscious love."[26] That the family is a relationship of ethical life implies, secondly, a structure that is crucial for Hegel's conception of ethical life. A relationship of ethical life is one that can be desired for its own sake and in which the participants realize their individual freedom as social freedom.[27]

How, then, should the problem constellation into which Hegel's theory enters be described? If we consider Hegel's theory of the family as an institution of ethical life in the light of the alternatives against which he argues (explicitly or implicitly), then we can develop two lines of argument.

First of all, Hegel formulates a *specifically modern family ideal* whose central moment is the idea of the autonomy of its members, which is directed against the patriarchal family. This idea of autonomy includes the voluntariness of the relationships that are entered into here and the self-sufficiency of the new family that is established through marriage vis-à-vis the family of origin (hence, the dominance of the conjugal relationship over relations of consanguinity). Connected with this, in turn, is the explicit preference for exogamy (the choice of a partner outside of the extended family) together with monogamy. It could be claimed that in this way, Hegel captures the (secular) essence of the Christian ideal of the family.[28]

In the next step, he brings this ideal of the family "to itself" by defending it against two contemporary misinterpretations. He defends it, on the one hand, against the romantic idea of love, which threatens the ethical-institutional character of the family by attaching excessive value in a one-sided way to the emotional-erotic aspect of marriage and, on the other, against the reduction of marriage and family relationships to a contract; not only does this not do justice to the emotional, but it especially downplays the intrinsic character of the ethical bond as an end in itself that is constitutive of the family.

These two lines of the confrontation—the counterposition to the traditional, patriarchal family and to the two mistaken interpretations of the modern family—together constitute Hegel's justification of the bourgeois family as an institution of ethical life that actualizes freedom. And in both lines, one can identify different problems and their solution in the sense of my thesis.

Let us begin with the first aspect, the self-sufficiency of the new family and the associated principle that "the members of the family become self-sufficient and rightful persons" (§180). What is at issue here is the relationship between freedom and nature or, to be more precise, between the natural character of marriage and its character as an institution of ethical life. In §172 of the *Philosophy of Right,* we read the following about this:

> When a marriage takes place, a *new family* is constituted, and this is *self-sufficient* for itself in relation to the *kinship groups* or houses from which it originated; its links with the latter are based on the natural blood relationship, but the new family is based on ethical love.

In the addition to §172, this self-sufficiency is accentuated even more by comparison with the alternatives:

> Nevertheless [that is, despite the partly contrary rules governing property in older Roman law], every new family is more essential than the wider context of blood kinship, and marriage partners and children form the proper nucleus in opposition to what can also be described in a certain sense as the family.

Thus, the historically and culturally distinctive character of the model of the bourgeois nuclear family emerges by comparison with fundamentally different models that "can also be described in a certain sense as the family"—for example, with the oriental family and with all traditional family forms in which the dominance of the "new family" and the self-sufficiency of the generational members of a family from one another are lacking. Accordingly, in §180 Hegel criticizes the "harsh and unethical aspect of Roman law," which, in addition to regarding children as the property of their parents, resides in the fact that the wife was viewed as belonging to her family of origin and as a result remained excluded from "those who were *actually her family*" in the sense that "the latter could not inherit from their wife and mother" (nor she from them). The emphasis Hegel places on the priority of the new couple, hence of the conjugal relationship, is a direct implication of the idea that the family, as a relationship of ethical life, must overcome and transform the natural relationship. The characteristic lack of self-sufficiency of the new family in the traditionalist models, but also endogamy, which Hegel expressly criticizes (and which was still practiced, as he mentions, in marriage between cousins), are paradigmatic examples of remaining within the natural bonds of blood kinship in contrast to marriage as a free, ethical action. In the latter, therefore, the individual is free or self-sufficient in a twofold sense: she is or becomes free in relation to her family of origin insofar as she is free to form a new bond as an independent individual, but she must also be free within this new bond in order to be able to actualize herself in it as an independent being. To this also belongs the fact that Hegel defends the consensus theory of marriage, hence that for him the will of the two partners is the decisive moment in matrimony.[29]

This brings us to the second of the two lines of confrontation mentioned above, namely, the positioning of marriage, understood as an ethical relationship, between romantic love and the contract model. Here Hegel wants to defend his preferred model of a free, personal choice, of the distinct marriage relationship, and of the autonomy of the individuals who form a bond here against these two interpretations, which he regards as misleading. Whereas the first line of confrontation concerned the relationship between freedom and nature as this is expressed in the family, now it is a matter of the correct understanding of freedom as freedom of ethical life, as manifested in the tension between dependence and independence. Hegel's model of conjugal love as love within the context of *ethical life* also provides the point of reference for this confrontation.[30]

Let us first examine Hegel's critique of the romantic view of marriage. The assertion in §158 of the *Philosophy of Right* that "The family . . . has as its determination . . . *love*" leaves no room for doubt that for Hegel love, in contrast to the economic or political benefits of a marriage alliance, must stand at the center of marriage—specifically, love as "the consciousness of my unity with another" (§158 addition).[31] Thus, Hegel is far from advocating the position close to some traditional conceptions of marriage that marriage can do without love. At the same time, however, he does not follow the romantic interpretation of love as pure feeling. On the contrary, marriage as rightful ethical love balances different dimensions of love. Thus, although Hegel founds marriage on love, he conceives of love differently from Romanticism as he understands this.[32] Love itself, according to Hegel's interpretation, has something to do with recognition of the other within ethical life, a form of recognition that rests on more than just fleeting feelings. Then marriage presents itself, in contrast to the contingency of inclination and the transience of passion, as something that is not contingent and is "indissoluble *in itself*" (§163). In the ethical love of marriage "the different moments which are present in love should attain their truly rational relationship to each other" (§164 addition). To this corresponds Hegel's position on divorce, which tries to strike a balance between the voluntariness and the indissolubility of the bond entered into. Because marriage "contains the moment of feeling, it is not absolute but unstable" (§163 addition). Therefore, although marriage is "indissoluble in itself," it must be possible to obtain a divorce. However, it should be difficult to acquire a divorce, and only institutions of ethical life should be able to declare a divorce. (This contrasts with the Romantic conception, prominently expressed in Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinda,* that marriage is void once love fades.)

Hence, bourgeois civil marriage is not subsumed into romantic love, which means that it is not subsumed into pure feeling. It manifests itself in secular institutions, it must acquire reality, and it rests on a form of stability that must not come to an end when the emotion on which it is based, understood as immediate erotic attraction, fades. Thus, it transcends and transforms its starting point in erotic love. As an institution of ethical life, it serves not only the satisfaction of need—not even need in the idealized form of romantic feeling; rather, it is an institution in which human freedom is actualized. This view loses something of its disconcerting character once Hegel's insistence on the ethical-institutional nature of love is translated into the reflection that settled as opposed to fleeting love relationships always also involve shared projects and interests and leading a shared life based on many different moments—in other words, that what two people feel for each other is actualized or objectified *[vergegenständlicht]* in what they do together.

Whereas the Romantic interpretation of marriage translated the autonomy of the partners into a foundation of marriage in romantic feeling, the second prominent interpretation of this autonomy is based on the notion of marriage as a contract (albeit not as a patriarchal contractual relationship concerning daughters, for example, but as a contract between equals—namely, the two marriage partners). Marriage cannot be conceived in terms of this contractual model, according to Hegel, because the atomistic form of self-sufficiency associated with contracts is incompatible with the kind of self-sufficiency that must be realized in a relationship of ethical life. This argument rests on the second feature of the Hegelian understanding of ethical life already alluded to above: "ethical unity" is a unity of "being itself in the other."[33] As an institution of ethical life, marriage is a noninstrumental relationship (an end in itself) into which the individuals are absorbed while at the same time remaining themselves, or becoming themselves in the first place. A contract, on the other hand, is a mechanical and instrumental connection. This is what differentiates the type of self-sufficiency realized in ethical life from the self-sufficiency of contractual partners conceived in atomistic terms. Unlike a contract, the marriage association is not an association for the mutual benefit of those who participate in it. In the corresponding passage, Hegel makes clever rhetorical use of the involuntary amusement triggered by Kant's definition of marriage as the "union of two persons of different sex for lifelong possession of each other's sexual attributes."[34] Granted, the conception of marriage as a contract does take into account the social, nonnatural dimension of the bond, and it also corresponds to the independence and freedom of the individuals in the marital relationship advocated by Hegel. However, it misunderstands the character of the marital relationship as a relationship of ethical life. In such a relationship, the marriage partners are not independent like two contracting parties, because love is a relationship in which the one becomes free in and through the other.

Problems and Problem-Solving in Hegel's Theory of the Family

I cannot pursue this—admittedly very sketchy—account of Hegel's theory of the family further here, and I will not examine and criticize the contribution of his theses to a contemporary understanding of the family, even though I regard such an undertaking as promising.[35] Instead, I will use this example to illustrate my conception of problems, of normative conceptions of how problems are posed, and of problem-solving entities.

What does Hegel's theory of the family as an institution of ethical life look like when reformulated in terms of my conception of problem-solving? What exactly would constitute problems and their solutions with a view to Hegel's theory of the family? Two tasks are addressed in Hegel's description of the family as a formation of ethical life.

Firstly, the task addressed by Hegel and solved in a certain way by the bourgeois family is to position marriage *between nature and ethical life* in such a way that it does not rest on the rejection or negation, but instead on the transformation and cultivation of the natural element—that is, the need aspect of marriage. Both being captive to the natural side and overcoming it through negation would represent false forms of one-sidedness; hence, it is a question of sublating *[aufheben]* the "natural" side in the relationship of ethical life or of transforming this side into such a relationship and in the process doing it justice.

Secondly, Hegel's theory of the family is an attempt to achieve a balance in the tension between *dependence* and *independence* in which the family as a bond of ethical life stands. As a relationship of ethical life, the family must solve the problem of combining dependence and independence, of living a life of independence in dependence and of dependence in independence. Accordingly, it is indicative of a failed conception of the family when this conception rests either on the illusory notion of the independence of one of the contractual partners who abstracts from every relationship or on the idea of a regressive (natural) unseparateness and lack of self-sufficiency of the marriage partners. Also for this relationship it is a matter of superseding a false, unifying alternative between freedom and being bound. Therefore, if it is the task of the family to establish ethical freedom or to act as a natural basis of the sociality of freedom, then the modern bourgeois civil family in Hegel's description is the appropriate solution by comparison with the deficient alternative ways of accomplishing this task.

What is the source of these tasks? As it happens, they do not arise—quite in line with the notion of the ambiguity of problems as task and difficulty—out of nothing but are a reaction to practical impediments and crises. The dimension of difficulty, disruption, or conflictuality that I associated above with problems can be integrated into the Hegelian theory of the family. It is no accident that Hegel developed his conception against the background of alternatives, hence of relations of tension of which he may very well have been aware as real tensions and actual historical conflicts. Viewed in this way, what seemed above to be a merely dogmatic thesis is the result of the fact that existing familial forms of life no longer function and have become problematic.

The model of marriage as a form of ethical life solves the problem of how to place something as fleeting as a feeling (of love) on an enduring basis, insofar as marriage makes feeling (affection, attraction, and the consent of the individuals concerned) into the starting point and sine qua non of the relationship, though not into its sole content. Conversely, however, both the instability of feeling and the hyperstability of the institutional side of marriage lead to difficulties and crises. So not only are the one-sided models described above theoretically wrong; they also lead to practical distortions. Also, the traditional oriental-patriarchal model (from which Hegel distances himself) is not only a false abstraction; it also runs into difficulties as soon as individuals express a claim to independence.[36] The very act of clinging to this model leads to crisis-plagued instability of the family formation oriented to it.[37] One can see this drama still being played out regularly in Bollywood films: the onset of passion for a woman viewed by the family as unsuitable *[unpassend]* on grounds of social status or caste forces the son to renounce his family, which threatens to break apart as a result.

If bourgeois civil marriage overcomes the problems that arise better than the traditional, patriarchal marriage, and if the interpretation of marriage as a form of ethical life corresponds to its idea (if not necessarily to the lived reality) better than the misinterpretation of bourgeois marriage as a contract or in terms of romantic love, then the appropriateness of this formation of ethical life is shown by the fact that it can cope with the real conflicts described better than the respective alternatives.[38] Therefore, one can understand Hegel's preferred formation as the one that is not only right (or morally superior) in the abstract, but also the one that responds to conflicts that have actually arisen and does the best job of *solving* them. And one can very well imagine—moving even farther away from Hegel—a further development of the problem-solving process outlined here away from the bourgeois family; but these developments, ranging from patchwork families to polyamorous relationships, could also be understood as reactions to the problems now posed in turn, but not solved, by the bourgeois family.

4.4 Crises of Problem-Solving

My thesis was that forms of life as problem-solving strategies claim to be the appropriate and best solution to a problem that arises. Thus, different kinds of forms of life can be regarded as different answers to such problems. The criteria of the success of forms of life that come to light here refer to the resolution of practical contradictions and conflicts, not to abstract norms of social life to which the forms of life in question correspond or do not correspond. In this sense, too, certain forms of life—to return to my earlier remarks in Section 3.4—appear to be, as a practical matter, "not livable" or "uninhabitable" (Terry Pinkard). The introduction of the concept of a problem and of the thesis that forms of life are problem-solving entities has left us in a better position to understand this motif.

As it happens, however, this uninhabitability of some formations of ethical life (or forms of life), when understood in terms of the concept of a problem introduced above, is not simply a raw fact. The problems and crises addressed here are *normative crises,* corresponding to the mediated character of problems and the nature of the ethical-functional norms at work in forms of life. The challenge now is to explain in greater detail the possibility of forms of life failing to solve the problems that are posed with them.

Forms of life fail *normatively* and they fail *as* forms of life because of their normative deficiency. The shortcomings in question can now be conceived as a failure to solve the problem posed with a form of life, which always has a normative imprint. The difficulties that can beset forms of life, their crises and nonfunctioning, would then always also be a normative (and not just a functional) problem; conversely, normative crises always also manifest themselves as problems of dysfunctionality. Forms of life fail *as* normative formations; conversely, they also fail *as* forms of life by failing to satisfy their normative claims. The failure in question is not raw failure, a purely factual matter, therefore, but is bound up with the evaluation of the situation. Nevertheless, it can be identified as the de facto failure of a solution to a problem and as its nonfunctioning. Thus, the difference of interest here is a difference, on the one hand, from a situation in which a form of life is simply bad in the sense of being morally reprehensible and, on the other, from a notion of mere (prenormative and interpretation-free) dysfunctionality.

Two cases must be distinguished here. On the one hand, individual instantiations of a form of life can fail because they fail to actualize the claims raised with them: a given family may fail to actualize the level of aspiration posited by the modern model of the family. On the other hand, a form of life itself can also fail because the normative-practical structure that it describes turns out to be uninhabitable. But both types of failure occur in the mode of normative failure to be explored here and as a failure to satisfy self-imposed requirements. (In the first case, it is a matter of failing to satisfy claims raised by the form of life that the individual shares even though the form of life does not correspond to them; in the second case, it is a matter of failing to satisfy the implications of the conditions of fulfillment.) We must now spell out this relationship between functional and ethical-normative moments—and thus the possibility of the normative failure of forms of life.

Let us return to the example of the family. What does it look like when the bourgeois family normatively fails to live up to this model of the family (as described by Hegel)—for example, because it does not actually grant the members of the family the independence implicit in this model, that is, because it does not allow them to detach themselves from their family of origin? Then it fails to satisfy the claims raised with it, in which case it may also fail (in concrete practical ways) as a family formation. Thus, it is not a matter of indifference to that it does not correspond to the claims raised with it (and hence does not correspond to its concept).

It is clear that in such a case the (normative) idea of the family in question is not actualized in the family concerned. But it remains unclear in what sense (and for whom) this should be regarded as a failure, that is, in what sense something is plunged into crisis here or does not work. Two cases must be distinguished. In one case, an open conflict occurs and the individual members can achieve independence only by bringing about a rupture. In this situation, the family quite clearly de facto no longer exists as a family and in this respect has failed. The second possibility presents us with greater difficulties—namely, the case in which the family members renounce their independence. Here the family still exists, and many of its emotional components and caring functions still work—perhaps all too well—for the individuals concerned. To what extent, therefore, would one be justified in describing such a family as an "objective failure" simply because it does not correspond to the modern ideal of the family (or to Hegel's theory of the family as a form of ethical life)?

At this point it is important to keep two factors in mind. The first concerns the fact that here we are not dealing with *external* but with *inherent* normative claims raised by a particular manifestation of a form of life. That the claims in question are inherent should be understood in the broader sense that it is not just a matter of explicit evaluative assertions, and still less of lip service, but of points of reference contained in social practices and shared through participation in such practices. But then the (ostensible) continued functioning of the family would nevertheless involve an experience of failure to satisfy these claims that makes itself felt within the family formation. (A common indication of such a situation is when members entrench themselves in especially stubborn ways behind the bulwark of the family and aggressively denigrate other models.) The second fact is that the normative claims in question here have not arisen out of the blue and are not simply encountered in the world as solitary entities. The normative ideals and practices of the modern family do not stand alone. Rather, they are interwoven with a whole series of other practices that concern the modern conduct of life as a whole.

This is why it is not easy to say that the corresponding family simply does not share the norms or has ceased to share them. That things are not so simple is shown by the fact that this family nevertheless shares—even *must* share and does not want to do without—many of the other elements of what belongs to the larger catchment area of the modern form of life. If we assume this and in addition that the norms thus shared are bound up with the ideal of independence, then the argument to be defended here states that the family is obliged, as it were by inference, to share the idea of independence as well. Then this is not only a problem of personal consistency but also a problem of a consistent relationship with the environment.[39] However, such a position would remain abstract in the bad sense and insufficiently justified if de facto tensions could not be identified, that is, internal distortions and disruptions in its exchanges with its environment that lead to dysfunctions.

The Hermetic Family

What happens when a family impedes autonomy can be illustrated by the following fictional scenario. A patriarchal father and a caring but possessive mother prevent their older son from detaching himself from their sphere of influence. They entangle him in a regressive family model that does not allow him to lead a life independent of his family of origin by developing his own capabilities. As it turns out, this model cannot work under present-day social conditions. By making him very attractive offers, the family cocoons the older son, who is in any case less dynamic than his younger brother, in their conditions of life in such a way that he has hardly any possibility of escape. Following an apprenticeship in the firm of the father's best friend, the son starts to work in the family business. Although at first he has not made up his mind to actually continue in this profession or even to take over the business, he becomes drawn into the situation ever more deeply through a variety of incentives. For example, although he initially works only half time (so he can pursue his hobbies unhindered), he nevertheless receives a salary that is very generous by the standards of the sector. When they go out to eat after work—the whole family together, of course—the son's meal is paid for as a matter of course, and he always orders the most expensive dishes. He is also free to use his mother's car around the clock. It goes without saying that he does not pay for the annual vacation, which the whole family takes together. In the meantime, he is in his mid-thirties and is showing no signs of developing an independent life plan. When, after a number of years, it is time for him to take over the business—a medium-sized craft business—he agrees to do so. However, this does not change anything in the rather passive approach to work he has cultivated, despite having all along proudly paraded his status as the boss's son. Moreover, he fails to acquire the requisite master craftsman's accreditation. He is quite unreliable in performing the tasks involved in organizing the business; ultimately his father still pulls the strings in the background, even though officially only in a part-time capacity and correspondingly badly paid, and his mother does the bookkeeping. He has only a vague idea of the financial aspects of the business. And it does not even occur to him to make the innovations a family business that is well established in a small town also has to make in order to remain competitive. There are not only individual or psychological reasons for this, but it is rooted in his in general rather static attitude, which seems to assume that things can remain as they were for his grandfather without any need to adapt to the changes wrought by time. The situation comes to a head when it is finally revealed how deeply in debt the business has been for years and how uncompetitive it has become.

The story has a sad ending far removed from a functioning family. The parents, who in the meantime have been performing underpaid work for years, will scarcely have enough to support themselves in old age. Now that the credit line has been exhausted and the bank has foreclosed on the house, the business no longer generates sufficient income to support the standard of living to which they had accustomed their son. They had planned to live in an adjacent apartment surrounded by a caring family amid the bustle of a flourishing workshop until an advanced age. But now they are facing a lonely existence in a small, isolated apartment. This is not how they had imagined the end of their lives. However, the damage is not only financial but also emotional—the relationships within the family have also broken down. The older and younger sons have not spoken to each other in years, and there is a climate of mutual recrimination and resentment. The younger brother accuses his older brother of having exploited and ruined the business. The older brother echoes the mother's accusation against her younger son that he left the family in the lurch. The older brother's irascible outbursts are a sure sign that he ultimately feels inferior to his younger brother, who has made a successful career abroad.

What are the implications of this example for my problem? I interpret this family situation as follows: The family I have described cannot remain intact; hence, it cannot function as a family, because it does not actualize the idea of autonomy constitutive for the modern family (which requires that its members be allowed to become self-sufficient), but instead remains trapped in a (psychologically and socially) regressive, traditionalist model. The example is intended to illustrate the systematic nature of the reasons for the failure of such a model, and accordingly why not being in conformity with the concept of modern family is not only an external problem but also an internal problem.

This is evident in two respects. First, as I interpret it, the one who remains at home can hardly escape the normative expectations of his environment, which nowadays imply that one should go one's own way and achieve something on one's own (even if it is the achievement of advancing the family business through one's own efforts). Hegel puts it as follows in his "School Addresses": In contrast to relations within the family, which are mediated by feeling, trust, and love, "in the world" a person is judged "by what he does; he acquires worth only by earning it."[40] Such societal conceptions of value contribute to forming one's ideal of oneself; that failing to live up to the corresponding ideal leads to distortions is shown by the older brother's lack of composure in his relationship with his younger brother. It is equally unlikely that every aspiration to autonomy and to live a life of one's own can be excluded from a contemporary individual's evaluative and emotional makeup. All of this tends to support the thesis that it is not just a question of not complying with the normative expectations of one's social environment but instead of failure to measure up *to one's own claims*.[41]

Whereas what has been said so far concerns exclusively the emotional breakdown of the family, the second aspect shows that here something has been set in motion that also undermines the stability which was the declared purpose of refusing to grant autonomy. For, on my interpretation, the measures undertaken within the family to inhibit the autonomy of the older son ultimately led to precisely the loss of bourgeois industriousness, and hence of the associated capacity for innovation, that is at the root of the emotional and material demise of the family. This is where the second factor alluded to above comes into play: the normatively deficient model of the family described is not a consistent fit with its environment. And in my example, this not only affects the social relations of recognition as manifested in disapproving glances; it also affects the conditions of reproduction of the family in quite material ways. Put very roughly, a dynamic economic constitution depends on dynamic and responsible personalities, which means that it depends on personalities who realize a certain amount of autonomy.[42]

But why is this an example of normative failure? Because without the existence of the corresponding norms, one could not speak of failure at all and because, without them, the model would not fail either. If the norm of autonomy as a requirement placed on individuals did not exist, then their self-understanding would not come into conflict with their way of life. And if the norm of autonomy were not also actualized in material ways in the social practices surrounding the hermetic family, then it—in our ideal-typically pointed example—would not fall afoul of the dynamic practices of its environment as a result of the static economic attitudes associated with the surrender of autonomy.

Therefore, the family described does not fail only as a matter of fact. Its failure can be understood as such only against the background of the norms embodied in the corresponding form of life. On the other hand, it is also an actual failure—which means that here we not only consider something to be bad; it also does not function. The family fails, as described above, not only by not satisfying its claim but also by not actualizing *its concept*—namely, that of the modern bourgeois family.

The Crisis of the Work-Oriented Society

The fact that forms of life fail to cope with historically situated and normatively predefined problems can also be seen in the case of the failure of a form of life itself—that is, when it is not a matter of a particular authority or an individual failing to actualize a form of life but when this formation itself becomes embroiled in a crisis. I would like to illustrate this with one of the examples mentioned above, namely, the often-diagnosed "crisis of the work-oriented society" in Western post-industrial societies. The bourgeois work-oriented society (again according to Hegel's description) secures the livelihood and the social integration of individuals by enabling them to participate in the (free) labor market. Ideally, the special needs of the individual should be mediated with the interests of the general public through this very context of the market in such a way that the one is satisfied by means of the other. But precisely this ideal type of harmonious problem-solving (outlined by Adam Smith) does not work, according to Hegel's diagnosis, if civil society, as ethical life divided *[entzweit]* and "driven into its extremes," cannot guarantee precisely this participation in the labor market, but instead (as Hegel's early prognosis can be understood at any rate) gives rise to the problem of structural unemployment.[43] (Here, too, one could recount the prehistory which shows that the labor market, like the family, is in the first instance a solution to a problem, but this need not concern us here.) With this, something arises that can be understood, even as the situation was described at that time, as a crisis of the work-oriented society. This crisis, too, is as much a normative as a functional crisis.

The crisis of the work-oriented society, as a "labor society which lacks enough work to keep it contented"[44] (as Hannah Arendt described the problem succinctly, if not exhaustively), can be understood only if we bear in mind the level of aspiration achieved by bourgeois society as a work-oriented society, as well as the value and function that work has acquired in this constellation compared to prebourgeois conditions.[45] In such a work-oriented society, not only subsistence but also social inclusion and recognition ("honor") are mediated through work; conversely, work itself becomes the focus of certain normative expectations.[46] As a result, the crisis of the work-oriented society is not only a crisis of subsistence but also a crisis of the form of social integration thus described. And the concomitant social task is not only to ensure the survival of its members but also to provide work for the members of society who have been deprived of their livelihoods, specifically in a way that does not break with the character of the work thus described as voluntary labor. Neither merely providing compensation and material support through welfare programs nor the planned organization of free labor and its transformation into an administered labor service, therefore, can provide a solution to the problem. (This is why the problem remains an aporetic one for Hegel.)

Therefore, any solution to the crisis—whatever political or economic measures may be employed—must offer functional equivalents for the role played by work as a mechanism of integration in bourgeois society. The crisis of the work-oriented society (its problem), therefore, can only be described within a specific historical constellation, hence only against the background of a specific form assumed by the social organization of work and which involves a certain normative level of aspiration. However, not only the description of the problem but also every genuine solution to the problem must begin at this level. The solution to the crisis of the work-oriented society must therefore be one that is capable of responding to the specific historical, social, and normative shape that this problem has assumed.[47]

Normative Failure of Bourgeois Civil Society

Why is the circumstance outlined here that, as Hegel put it, "despite an *excess of wealth*, bourgeois society is *not wealthy enough*" to solve the urgent problem of poverty qua unemployment a normative as well as functional crisis of that very social formation?[48] What does not function here, where certain things do function, and why does this represent a normative problem for bourgeois civil society—the nonfulfillment of its self-raised claim? Different reasons can be cited for why this is an urgent problem. For example, one can feel compassion for the unfortunate and precarious situation of the excluded and the poor who are affected. Or, as a Kantian, one may take the view that the problem of poverty points to a violation of our moral duties; hence, that it is our duty to help those who are poor and hard-pressed. One could argue from the functionalist perspective of systems theory that the problem is pressing because the rage of the rabble described by Hegel could destabilize society and jeopardize the social order.[49]

But none of this is relevant for the problem as Hegel sees it. The problem of poverty is a problem of social disintegration. As such, according to Hegel's interpretation, it is indicative of a deficit that is as much functional as it is normative. Bourgeois civil society as a comprehensive economic and social context deprives individuals of their livelihoods. It is, to paraphrase Hegel, the enormous power that seizes control of everything and hence has become the individual's "new family" in a factual, functional sense. This circumstance is the source of the normative claim on bourgeois civil society that it should ensure the subsistence of the individual (in place of the family, which no longer functions as the economic context of reproduction but has instead shrunk to the nuclear family).[50] However, this is not an external claim made on bourgeois civil society from the outside but instead follows from what bourgeois civil society *is* according to its historically evolved mode of functioning—what it is *according to its concept*. But direct help for the poor or political intervention in the market would contradict the principle proper to bourgeois civil society. Therefore, bourgeois civil society faces a problem that threatens to divide it *[entzweien]*, or even to tear it to pieces, as a context of ethical life, because it would mean the disintegration of society—the division of ethical life "into its extremes"—and lead to what Hegel calls "the creation of a rabble."[51]

Therefore, the problem of poverty is a *normative problem* (poverty should not exist according to the self-understanding of bourgeois civil society; society must find a solution to this problem), but it is also a *functional problem* (a society marked by such tendencies toward disintegration is in danger of falling apart and of failing as a society). Social integration itself functions on the basis of a norm, namely, the promise of achieving a position within society through work in which one can provide for one's own livelihood and thereby enjoy recognition. Where the fulfillment of this promise is prevented by systematic obstacles, it is in danger of losing its integrative function, so that the form of life founded upon it would also break down. Here, therefore, "disintegration" is a concept that not only describes a state, but an *unacceptable* state, because a normative claim, an idea of how society as a relationship of ethical life should be constituted, is violated.

Nevertheless, the critique of this deficiency of bourgeois civil society is not for this reason a normativistic one.[52] The critique of bourgeois civil society is an immanent critique, one from the standpoint of divided ethical life. Viewed from the perspective introduced here, this is a phenomenon of normative failure insofar as the tendencies toward division and disintegration generated by the principle of bourgeois civil society cannot even be described independently of the (ethical-)normative claim raised by this social formation. Only insofar as this formation claims to and makes it its task to take care of its members ("to take the place of the family")—moreover in conformity with the principle of bourgeois civil society that one's livelihood is mediated by work and performance—can the problem outlined by Hegel be described as a crisis or a problem of disintegration at all. In order to be able to speak of disintegration in this sense, therefore, we must have a conception of how the unity, the nexus of society, is and should be constituted. That it is not enough to say, "Well, here it is just asserted that it is (morally) wrong to allow individuals to fall below the subsistence level," is clear insofar as Hegel describes quite clearly the dysfunctionality to which this form of social organization is susceptible. At the same time, however, this form of social organization is not simply de facto dysfunctional, because the dysfunctionality in question is inseparable from its normative content. The actual disintegration of society is triggered because individuals feel unfairly treated. The rabble is not only hungry; it is outraged.[53]

4.5 Second Order Problems

The foregoing explanation of the thesis that forms of life are problem-solving entities with reference to the Hegelian theory of the family and the crisis of the work-oriented society was intended to highlight the very ambitious underlying conception of problems. Firstly, it was shown what it can mean to find oneself always already in a situation structured by claims and solutions, rather than assuming "naked" needs or uninterpreted problems. Problems are not unmediated occurrences; they first have to be posed as problems, and they are posed in situations that are determined by normative claims and by ethically shaped interpretations of situations and descriptions of problems. The problem solved by the bourgeois family is just not the problem of the organization of kinship relations and the socialization of the next generation that concerns the species as a whole. Likewise, social labor does not merely solve the problem of subsistence that always arises under all conditions. As becomes apparent against the Hegelian background, posing the problem in this way would not be wrong, but vacuous. Insofar as the problem of reproduction, like all the other problems that can arise in and with forms of life, is not posed in a pure, unmediated form, the problem itself (not only its solution in the form of specific familial or work relationships) is already culturally determined and normatively demanding. Forms of life are answers to normatively predefined challenges that are shaped by history and culture. The fact that forms of life, when they fail, fail *normatively* follows from this.

Now we can also see, secondly, what it can mean that the problems in question are always problems that for their part *arise from solutions to problems* and can give rise to further solutions. If forms of life are not only historically situated but are also situated in narratives of conflict, and if the contractual model and the romantic conception of marriage are one-sided responses to the problem that traditional family structures disregard the individuality and self-sufficiency of individual members and Hegel's model of the family is a reaction to the resulting problems—then this model of the family, once it is established, can give rise in turn to new problem constellations. One could assert that, insofar as the "free" labor market of bourgeois civil society responds to problems generated by the unfree organization of (for example, feudal) work, then every solution to a problem can in principle give rise to new problems (and probably will do so).[54]

If this already reveals the extremely complex nature of the problems that, according to my thesis, forms of life attempt to solve and with reference to which they can be criticized, then, thirdly, behind this conception is concealed another aspect: when forms of life succumb to crises, they do not fail, according to the description I have offered so far, primarily because of external obstacles but also because of self-induced and self-imposed problems. Or, in other words, they fail to measure up to a level of aspiration that they have established themselves and that makes them what they are. For the normative claims that a form of life fails to satisfy are not external claims but claims *proper to* the form of life in question that are raised by its specific manifestation. That the claims in question are the form of life's own claims should be understood in the broader sense that they are not just a matter of explicit value statements, much less of lip service, but of points of reference that, on the one hand, are already contained in social practices mediated through participation in such practices but, on the other, are not in fact actualized in the full sense or cannot even be redeemed without contradiction in a given situation. Thus, problems arise out of a specific constellation of the form of life in question—indeed, out of the contradictions specific to it.[55] It is then a particular kind of problem and crisis—or better, a particular way in which we are confronted with problems when engaging in the practices that constitute a form of life—that can be at stake in criticism of forms of life. Thus, solutions to problems, as an overarching standard for the success or failure of forms of life, are normatively predefined, historically situated, and "homemade."

However, although this represents the first step in answering a further question, it is not the complete answer. Assuming that problems are never "pure" but are always higher-order problems: Where do they come from? How do they arise? What triggers a crisis dynamic, or what makes a given crisis dynamic into a crisis of a form of life as a form of life? To rephrase the question: What distinguishes problems in which forms of life can become embroiled from problems of these forms of life themselves?

A Brief Typology of Problems

In order to grasp the specific shape of the problems I understand as *form-of-life problems,* it makes sense to distinguish between different ways in which one can be confronted with problems, between different causes of problems, and between different ways of processing problems.

(1) Imagine an agrarian form of life that is in a serious predicament because no rain has fallen for a year and the drought has made the known ways of providing food impossible. Here the cause of the problem is *external,* assuming that it is a contingent natural occurrence and not the shape or dynamic of the (reproductive) practices and institutions of the corresponding form of life itself that has caused the present shortage. But according to the perspective I have adopted, this is precisely why such a crisis is not a crisis of a form of life *as* a form of life. The problems with which it is confronted are problems *for it,* but not problems *with it.*

(2) This changes as soon as we vary the description of the problem. We can conceive of a second case in which although a crisis—let us imagine once again a drought followed by a catastrophic famine—does indeed have an external cause, this external cause gives rise to the problem or crisis only because it encounters *internal shortcomings* of the constitutive practices and institutions of the form of life itself. As before, it is not within the power of those affected to produce rain; however, it is advisable for an affected community, especially if it is more than likely that such periods of drought will occur periodically, to protect itself against the consequences of the next disaster by building storehouses. If a community fails to do this, then in such a case (or such an analysis of the case[56]) one can say that the resulting emergency, although induced by a contingent natural event, came about only as a result of the inadequate *reaction* of the corresponding social institutions to what was initially an externally induced crisis. It may also transpire that the repertoire of practices and interpretations available to the community is not suitable for coping with such crises; hence, that the social form of life affected as a form of life does not have the necessary resources to deal with such an exigency. So it could be that the measures that suggest themselves for preventing a famine following a period of drought are not taken for reasons immanent to the form of life, because it lacks practices of storing food. The failure to develop such practices may in turn be a result

of systematic misinterpretations—for example, if the drought is not interpreted as a periodic natural occurrence but instead as divine punishment. A crisis that manifests itself (and is understood) in this way can indeed be understood as a genuine form-of-life crisis, specifically when it can be traced back to the absence or failure of the learning process required to prevent such situations. Thus, although the problem also has external causes in this case—after all, it would not have occurred, or not in this form, if the rain had not failed to materialize—it becomes a problem immanent to the form of life. Such problems, one might say, are located at the *interface* between one's form of life and contingent environmental conditions. In this way, insofar as the problems caused by the confrontation with external conditions bring to light an internal incapacity, they become genuine form-of-life problems—hence, not only problems *for* but also problems *with* the corresponding form of life.[57]

Such crisis constellations are frequent occurrences. The (ultimate) failure of the Vikings to colonize Greenland, which in his book *Collapse* Jared Diamond develops into such an impressive account of the decline of a culture and a form of life, must also be traced back in the first instance to an external problem that had nothing to do with shortcomings of the Vikings' form of life.[58] The climatic conditions for the survival of a population accustomed to a certain form of reproduction—that of an agrarian economy—were unfavorable in Greenland and became progressively even more unfavorable. Here the Vikings did not *do anything wrong;* they had *bad luck* with their decision to found a settlement. However, this newly arrived population's inflexibility and inability to adapt so grippingly described by Diamond—which is shown, among other things, by the fact that the Vikings who had immigrated from Norway refused to eat fish and as a result failed to benefit from the experience of the indigenous Inuit in coping with the climatically and ecologically difficult conditions of life in Greenland—were more than bad luck.[59] The multifaceted and intricate reasons for clinging to a way of life and form of economy that were difficult to implement under these climatic and geographical conditions are ways of responding whose causes must be sought in a blockage to learning resulting from the Vikings' form of life itself.

For the sake of clarity, I have illustrated this confrontation in terms of confrontations with *first* nature. But the same mechanism whereby externally caused problems become immanent ones can be transferred to the confrontation with other forms of life—hence, with other instances of *second* nature. For example, a traditionalist, patriarchal family formation can be plunged into crisis by a sudden confrontation with other ways of life so that well-established role models, patterns of familial division of labor, or restrictions on autonomy come under pressure. Such cases (if we assume counterfactually that the forms of life that encounter each other here initially developed separately and are genuinely alien to each other) can also be plausibly interpreted as instances of initially externally induced problems turning out to be crises immanent to a form of life in which the confrontation with practices of a different kind renders internal deficits virulent.[60]

(3) This discussion brings us to the cases of real or genuine immanence that must be distinguished from the other two classes. The cases discussed in detail above with reference to Hegel's theory of the family and the crisis of the work-oriented society can be described as genuinely immanent problems. These are not cases of initially externally caused problems becoming immanent; rather, the problems arise already out of the (as one can say here) contradictions and the immanent fields of conflict implicit in the structure of the practices that constitute the form of life. The crisis of bourgeois civil society as a work-oriented society outlined above is an immanent crisis in this sense. This is because the problem of structural unemployment that arises in bourgeois civil society is already a result of the *design* of the central economic and social structures of the society in question; hence, it is "homemade" or has an immanent cause, and the difficulties in solving it are a result of the claim raised by bourgeois civil society itself that its members should and can attain dignity and existence through participation in this society as a nexus of work.[61] Here the "crises" of forms of life become what can be called, following Hegel, "contradictions."

In this brief typology, I have now sketched three kinds of problems. There are problems with external causes that remain external, that is, ones to which there is no corresponding shortcoming on the side of the form of life. According to my definition, the problems in question are not genuine form-of-life problems. By contrast, I will refer to the other two cases—when a problem with an outside cause renders the internal lack of problem-solving resources of a form of life virulent and when the genesis of the problem is strictly immanent—as form-of-life problems. Such problems concern a form of life *as* a form of life. Hence, they are problems that not only exist *for it,* but are also problems posed *with it*—and which it also has *with itself* in a sense to be elucidated.[62]

I will return to the dialectical conception of problems as contradictions alluded to here in Chapter 9, where I will argue that, for all the difficulties associated with Hegel's conception of contradictions, this best captures the specific character of form-of-life problems.

Internal Problems as Second Order Problems

In what follows, I will approach the interface between internal and external problems once again from a different angle by introducing a further analytical category for the question of "external" or "material" moments of problems. Larry Laudan's distinction between empirical and conceptual problems (which has become influential in the philosophy of science) is instructive in this regard. According to this distinction, *empirical problems* are problems with the world, that is, problems that come from the world: "Anything about the natural world which strikes us as odd, or otherwise in need of explanation, constitutes an empirical problem." Insofar as these problems raise questions about "the objects which constitute the domain of any given science," Laudan also refers to them as *first order problems*.[63]

Conceptual problems, by contrast, are *higher order problems*. They do not arise with regard to the world itself but to theories about the world—theories for solving empirical problems—which are either self-contradictory or can come into conflict with other theories. Or as Laudan writes, "Conceptual problems are higher order questions about the well-foundedness of the conceptual structures (e.g., theories) which have been devised to answer the first order questions."[64] From Laudan's perspective, this distinction between empirical problems originating in the world and problems that arise in relation to our theoretical reflection on the world can be maintained even if we are aware that we always regard reality only through a lens of existing categories and concepts, and that problems become recognizable as problems only within a given (theoretical) context.

But even if one wants (against Laudan) to defend a stronger version of the thesis that the world is conceptually structured, Laudan's distinction can nevertheless serve as a contrasting foil for our problem.[65] Translated into the terms of his distinction, my thesis states that with regard to what may be relevant for a critique of forms of life, there are no empirical problems, only conceptual, second order problems. In other words, first order problems can be perceived as problems regarding forms of life only as mediated by second order problems.

The analogy to the distinction between "world" and "theory" (between a problem with the world and a problem with the theory) can be applied to forms of life as follows: a sudden period of drought or an unmanageable change in climate is an (empirical) problem that stems from the world; for forms of life it creates a *problem with the world*. But when, as explained above, such a problem arises as a form-of-life problem, that is, as a shortcoming of the cultural mechanisms for dealing with such problems, then it is a *conceptual problem,* even though in this case the conceptual aspect need not be conceived according to the pattern of pure theories but instead as the network of practices and their interpretation that form the interpretive framework of a form of life.

The point can be put as follows: problems that are immanent in forms of life (as in cases 2 and 3 above) are conceptual problems; external problems (as in case 1) are empirical problems. The period of drought comes from the world without our involvement. The fact that no storehouses were built—hence, that appropriate measures were not undertaken in response to a recurring experience—by contrast, does not concern "the world" itself but our cultural mechanisms for coping with the problems arising in the world and the interpretations of the world associated with these mechanisms. Calling these problems conceptual second order problems emphasizes that it is the systematic blockages or deficiencies in the interpretive nexus of a form of life that arise *as problems* and not the factual or material deficiency (famine, unemployment, or family dispute) itself.[66] Furthermore, it draws attention to the fact that what proves to be inappropriate or deficient in such cases is a complex theoretical and practical network. The capacity to build storehouses in response to a single occurrence of an external empirical problem depends on well-established practices, which in turn are influenced by what we know about the world—for example, by our assessment that the problem of drought can occur again and again. But the very possibility of such knowledge rests on a whole complex of further knowledge and further practical attitudes—for example, on a certain concept of time and a certain practical experience of time. Furthermore, it depends not only on our understanding of the world but also on the self-understanding of the community in question and what (intellectual and material) resources and possibilities this presents. Therefore, the knowledge related to a specific situation and, connected with this, the possibility of developing appropriate practices are shaped by more comprehensive interpretations of the world and can also be blocked by such interpretations. (If the period of drought is interpreted as divine punishment, then the conceptual basis for building storehouses becomes obsolete.)

Form-of-life problems are thus *conceptual* second order problems insofar as they concern problems of inserting a practice into the interpretive framework of a form of life, that is, insofar as they appear as incongruities in the practical-normative interpretive framework of a form of life and hence can be understood as a crisis of this frame of reference (corresponding to what Laudan calls "theory"). Empirical problems play out in a domain that is not relevant for the question that interests me, because forms of life *as* forms of life are not even confronted with first order problems; problems and their solutions are always conceptually mediated. If it is conceived as divine punishment, the period of drought not only calls for a *different solution* (for example, some kind of propitiatory measure instead of building storehouses); it is in crucial respects even already a *different problem*.[67] (In an analogous way, the very character of the problem of unemployment varies depending on how the underlying economic causes are interpreted and how society is construed.)

It now also becomes apparent that solving such form-of-life problems will be more demanding than solving first order problems. This is because any such solution must fit into a given context; it must constitute the conceptually adequate solution to a conceptually posited problem and must be able to fit into the normative problem horizon and problem status of a given form of life.

Material Moment and Corrective

If problems are neither given nor made in the sense of the thesis that we formulated above drawing on Dewey—hence, if they are neither given in the sense of raw facts nor entirely constructed as though they were invented, then we must ask: What role does the external and in case of doubt also material moment play for the problem? One could say that it plays the role of a material or factual corrective (in a broad sense). In the case of a crisis, it is difficult to dispute, on this understanding of problems, that in some situations a problem even exists, that ways of life or actions are disrupted or turn out to be different than expected or hoped, even if it is not yet a question of the determinate (conceptual) problem of a form of life. The material or, in general, external moment that comes into play as a result—and this is not unimportant for my further discussion in Chapter 9—permits diagnoses based on the intrusion of first order problems (in our examples, the undeniable fact of the famine and the inescapable fact of familial discord) such as that a form of life has a second order problem that hinders an adequate perception of the first order problems. Thus, even if, on the one hand, (first order) empirical problems are not relevant when it comes to criticism of forms of life, the assumption that the problem has a source that is initially independent may nevertheless be effective or informative, at least in this weak sense. Thus, whereas the emphasis on the conceptual character of form-of-life problems could lead one to the (constructivist-relativist) conclusion that problems arise only when they are made (which in epistemic terms entails the impossibility of thematizing the frame of reference itself), the immanent nexus of a form of life is breached when such a material element is introduced.

Then the significance for the considerations developed here of the concept of a problem and the assumption that forms of life unfold in ways prone to crisis is that these considerations introduce a moderate materialistic moment into the conceptualization of forms of life. The otherwise common conception of forms of life as closed comprehensive systems of interpretation and reference is refracted, as it were, by the fact that they can confront problems and can succumb to crises. Therefore, in line with the assertion made above following Dewey that in the long run problems can neither be conjured up nor explained away, the concept of a problem stands, on the one hand, for a realistic “stumbling block,” but, on the other, it is not committed to any form of naturalism of preinterpreted or presocial facts.

Summary

My thesis was that forms of life are (in each case different) strategies for solving problems confronting humanity—as a species, but in different, historically, and culturally specific ways. With reference to problems, forms of life are either in line with other forms of life in their attempts to solve problems, or they differ in how they solve problems. This is what makes it possible to compare forms of life and evaluate them differentially. Then the disagreements between them are disagreements over the best solution to the problem, and forms of life must be judged by their ability to solve the problems they face.

Forms of life find embodiment in social practices and deal with problems of coping with life. Even though the talk of values by no means directly contradicts my conception, the latter has a different emphasis from the discussion of values—namely, that values are motivated, that they have causes and consequences and are anchored in the material life process. In this way, attention is directed also to the *reactive moment* of forms of life, and hence to the confrontation with tasks that come from the world; this is precisely what is supposed to render forms of life intelligible as something open to discussion and criticism. Thus, their standard of evaluation is to be found in the substance of the problem. But what does the fact that forms of life can face problems and succumb to crisis mean for the possibility of criticizing them? This question will be the focus of the next part of this study.

III

FORMS OF CRITICISM

All dialectic permits what is allegedly valid to reveal itself as if it were so, permits its inner destruction to develop immanently.

—G. W. F. HEGEL

We do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles.

—KARL MARX

Criticism of forms of life, as the last two chapters have shown, is possible insofar as forms of life are not just as they are, but can succeed or fail.[1] Assuming that the criteria for the success of a form of life refer to the claim to solve the problems posed with and through the respective forms of life, then forms of life, when they fail to solve problems, succumb to *normative crises* specific to them. As a result, there are not only self-defined standards for criticizing forms of life, but there is also a reason for criticizing them. Criticism can then be conceived as the subjective side of such crises. And insofar as crises and problems not only exist objectively but are produced by subjects, criticism is at the same time a component of the crisis—and as such is part of what constitutes the dynamics of forms of life.

To the specific character of the form of normativity elaborated here, therefore, there corresponds something on the side of critical behavior. If forms of life become criticizable based on norms that they themselves posit and that are to a certain extent embedded in their constitutive practical performances, then this normative structure (or the normative social ontology of forms of life) suggests that such a critique will exhibit a specific *mode*. The mode in question is that of *immanent* criticism, where "immanent" is understood in a strong sense that refers to the crisis to which the forms of life have succumbed by failing to measure up to the problems that were posed or have arisen with them. The following chapters will deal this *form* of criticism, which I would like to develop against the backdrop of other models of criticism.

But how does such a criticism proceed? What standpoint informs its judgments, and why is it even necessary if forms of life succumb to crises of their own accord? Immanent criticism, to reduce it to a brief formula, takes as its starting point the claims and conditions posited together with a form of life; it responds to the problems and crises that arise in this context, and it derives from this in particular the transformative potential that goes beyond the practices in question and seeks to transform them.

My contention is that the approach of immanent criticism is the only one that can solve the problem of establishing a critical standard in a certain way—namely, in a way that refers back *neither* to a contextualist variant of criticism in which it becomes purely a matter of self-clarification within a framework that itself cannot be placed in question, *nor* to external standards that would not measure up to the task of criticizing forms of life as forms of life. The following assessment provides the starting point for my discussion: criticism of forms of life must do without a meta-language game, without a neutral "Archimedean point" removed from all particular forms of life; at the same time, however, criticism must not remain purely internal if it is to thematize forms of life as such. This dilemma can be resolved by a strong version of what is called, following Hegel, "immanent criticism" because it transcends some of the customary dichotomies.[2] It is neither "strong" nor "weak" (in Onora O'Neill's sense), and it is neither "internal" nor "external" (in Michael Walzer's sense).[3] It assumes a certain (historically and socially situated) context and at the same time transcends it. Immanent criticism of forms of life attempts, to use Marx's formulation, to "find the new world through criticism of the old one." Therefore, on the one hand, it generates its standards "out of the thing (criticized) itself," but on the other hand, in contrast to the particularism and relativism of a form of criticism that remains internal, it is nevertheless strong enough to be able to criticize forms of life *as* forms of life; that is, it is also transformative.

In what follows, I will shed light on the concept of immanent criticism by first demarcating it from the (in my typology "weaker") forms of internal criticism with which it is often confused. In the process, I will accentuate the negativistic aspect of immanent criticism as critique of ideology.[4] In my (by no means complete) typology of critical procedures, therefore, internal and immanent criticism are comprehended as two variants of a form of criticism that, in contrast to external criticism, develops "standards based on the very situation it criticizes."[5] But whereas internal criticism is a matter of a form of life achieving a self-understanding and reinstating its governing ideals, immanent criticism takes its orientation from the crises to which social practices and ideals can succumb. It is the critical ferment of the self-transformation of a form of life. This at any rate is the understanding of immanent criticism on which I will elaborate in what follows and on which the project of criticism of forms of life can build.

In Chapter 5, I will analyze the procedure and structure of *internal* criticism, having first demarcated it from external criticism, before proceeding in Chapter 6 to shed light on the method of *immanent* criticism, though also on the problems of the model thus outlined. An overview of the models of criticism discussed here—external, internal, and immanent—is provided by the table at the end of Part 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

What Is Internal Criticism?

In this chapter, I will outline the approach of internal criticism first by contrasting it with external criticism (Section 5.1). I will then go on to examine more closely the procedure of internal criticism as regards its structure using some examples (Section 5.2), before concluding by presenting its advantages and limitations (Section 5.3).

5.1 External and Internal Criticism

How does an internal approach differ from external criticism? The most general explanation is that in these cases the standard of criticism is not located *outside* the state of affairs or object criticized but *within* the object itself. By contrast, external criticism proceeds by measuring an existing situation against claims that go beyond the principles inherent in it or by calling it into question as a whole. Thus, the different variants of external criticism apply criteria that are brought to bear on the norms and practices of a given social formation from the outside. The claims in terms of which an existing situation is judged go beyond the principles that hold within it, or they do not share those principles.

The positions of external criticism cover a wide field that I cannot explore in detail here. A case in which standards of criticism come from the outside is when a foreign observer judges a country in terms of the particularistic norms she brings with her. External standards are also brought to bear in universalistic varieties of external criticism that claim to refer to a "view from nowhere"[1] beyond all particularistic ties and hence claim to be unconnected with the normative structure of a particular community but to refer in general to all conceivable communities.[2] In this respect, anthropological foundations of criticism—that is, ones based on conceptions of what human beings are or require as such, what needs and abilities they have, and what characteristics a good human life should exhibit—are also external to particular communities and their historically and culturally specific institutions insofar as they appeal to something that is supposed to be valid for all human beings in virtue of their humanity, irrespective of their concrete sociocultural situation and history.

Quite apart from these diverse resources in terms of which the criticism can be justified, therefore, external criticism applies an external normative standard to an existing society. This standard is external in the sense that it is supposed to be valid regardless of whether it already holds within an existing community or an existing social institutional structure and of whether it is "contained" in a given state of affairs, and it judges the given situation according to whether it satisfies this standard. Criticism in this case aims to transform, supersede, or reorient what is given on the basis of norms that are brought to bear on it from the outside.

Correspondingly, for the social place of criticism or of the critic, this means that the external critic does *not* share the norms that apply in a given community and, in case of doubt, adopts a distanced stance on its habits of life. However, it is also conceivable that the critic does in fact share the habits of life—that is, that she does occupy the social place of certain normative practices—but, as an external critic, she sees the central task of criticism and its condition of possibility as being precisely to distance herself from this connection.[3] As it happens, not only are there different variants of what it can mean to approach the object criticized "from the outside." There are also widely divergent notions of what it can mean to say that the standards should be found *within* what is criticized; as a result, there are different notions of how these norms and what is criticized are constituted in such cases. In what follows, I want to demarcate internal criticism from immanent criticism in the narrower (or hermeneutic) sense. Internal criticism finds its standards "in what is criticized itself" in a different way from immanent criticism. Therefore, I will begin by examining what is actually meant in the case of internal criticism by saying that the standard resides in the thing itself.

5.2 The Strategy of Internal Criticism

What exactly is internal criticism (in the narrower sense just outlined), and how does it proceed? Internal criticism has been advocated by Michael Walzer, among other thinkers, but it is also a common everyday understanding of criticism.[4] It assumes that, although certain ideals and norms belong to the self-understanding of a particular community, they are not actually realized within it, so that the reality of certain practices and institutions is measured against these ideals, which are already contained, but not realized, in the community in question. I will now analyze this *internal* character of the critical standards in greater detail with reference to different cases of internal criticism in order to be able to define their structure more precisely and to reconstruct the features that ultimately demonstrate the limits of internal criticism.

Instances of Internal Criticism

In what follows, I present some simple examples of the procedure of internal criticism that are not necessarily taken from the domain of criticism of forms of life, since here I am primarily concerned with how a certain form of criticism proceeds.

A. A CEO publicly defends the view that promoting women is one of the most important tasks of modern business management but does not even consider female applicants when it actually comes to hiring. Someone who criticizes such a practice will point out the discrepancy between the position adopted publicly and the actual hiring practice. In doing so, she is criticizing the CEO in terms of standards that he himself has formulated.

B. Women asylum seekers who are looking for help suffer malicious discrimination in a community that believes itself to be committed to the ideals of Christian charity. These women (or their advocates) can point out that the actual practice within the community contradicts the ideals of charity advocated by this same community.

C. Muslim feminists and female Christian theologians argue internally when they criticize misogynist practices of Islam or Catholicism by pointing out that these are not in conformity with a correct understanding of the Bible or with correct interpretations of the teaching of the Quran. The standard to which this criticism appeals is also to be found in what is criticized itself, insofar as an existing practice or interpretation is criticized by means of a different (re)interpretation of the same sources to which the criticized position itself also refers.

D. According to its constitution, a certain society is a constitutional democracy, but in reality important basic rights and rights of participation are overridden by existing relations of power. In this case, critics will appeal to the constitution to criticize the de facto relations that have become established. Here, it is said, the constitutional *idea* is not in agreement with the constitutional *reality.*

E. One can criticize a novel as a novel if it fails to measure up to the claim associated with its conception as a novel. The critic will then say, for example, "The material would be interesting as a short story, but it is too thin for a novel and is not conceived on a sufficiently large scale." The conception of the work as a novel, therefore, contradicts its implementation or its content; the desired goal contradicts the author's ability or the potential of the material. Here the object is assessed in terms of the internal norms or principles of form laid down by a certain genre.

In these examples, the standard of criticism resides in different ways *in the matter itself.* It consists either in the content of the promises against which someone must expect to be judged because he has made them himself (as in example A), or in the religious beliefs that underlie a community's self-understanding (as in example B); it can also reside in the principles that follow logically from a description of action (as in E) or in a source accepted as authoritative by an individual or a community (as in C and D).

What is present in all of these cases is an inconsistency either between assertions and facts, between accepted norms and practices, between appearance and reality, or between claim and realization. Accordingly, a critique of such a situation proceeds by highlighting the corresponding norms, claims, ideals, or genre principles, demonstrating the discrepancy to be established between the latter and the existing reality, and criticizing this with reference to the contradiction, hence representing it as deficient and wrong. The reality to be assessed—the existing practices, the finished work—is thus measured against a standard accepted by what is criticized itself. The desired transformation of the corresponding practices or works is therefore one that can be said to have helped them "to realize themselves." "I do not recognize our congregation," says a Protestant minister whose congregation has been involved in massive xenophobic riots. "America has turned its back on the values it once stood for" is the message of many of Oliver Stone's films. Accordingly, this kind of critique does not aim to overthrow a particular order or to establish a new order but to recover or reestablish the norms that have been partially overridden by deviating practices. Thus, an internal critique seeks to reinstate the principles that make up the life of a community or to reactivate the real meaning of its ideals, even if this may entail drastic changes. The critic not only combats the misogynistic practices of the Catholic Church but also insists that they fail to measure up to the true meaning of Christian teaching.

The formula that internal criticism means criticizing the object in terms of a standard that lies in the object itself now becomes somewhat clearer. The object in the cases discussed so far is a community (as in B, C, and D), or an individual (as in A), or a specimen of an artistic genre (as in E). The distinguishing feature in all of these cases is that they involve norms that are accepted as valid and in the normal course of events should guide the respective practices but in fact do not do so for various reasons. The standard applied is therefore a norm N, which is recognized in principle by the corresponding community itself or by the individual himself, or it is accepted as valid with respect to the artistic genre. This standard is brought to bear on the actual practice. The criticism is internal because the norm N to which it appeals is accepted as valid by those who engage in the deviating practice. In contrast, external criticism, in criticizing an existing practice P (supported by the norm N), appeals to the norm N' and thus proposes replacing norm N with N'—a norm that either stems from a different community or claims universal validity beyond particular communities.[5]

The Structure of Internal Criticism

In order to be better able to depict its problems, and subsequently to demarcate it from immanent criticism, I will offer a more detailed schematic breakdown of the argumentative structure of internal criticism:

(a) First, we can identify *three preconditions* for the possibility of internal criticism:
  (1) A given situation is characterized by the fact that in it a *norm N is accepted* and simultaneously a *practice P is exercised;*
  (2) N is *applicable* to P or *concerns* P; and

  (3) there is *a contradiction* between N and P: N is not realized in P.

(b) If these preconditions are satisfied, the *procedure* of internal criticism consists in
  (4) pointing out the *connection* between N and P or making it explicit by showing that N is a norm that aims at P or that P is a practice that falls under N;
  (5) pointing out the *discrepancy* or contradiction between N and P by showing that N is not realized in P; and
  (6) requiring that P *be brought into conformity* with N.

Thus, with steps 4 to 6 (which will be more or less explicit and have different weights depending on the case), internal criticism draws the conclusions from the preconditions 1 to 3.

In the process, the critic faces the following situation: the criticism to be made by her is *possible* only if the preconditions 1 to 3 are fulfilled; the activity of criticism becomes *necessary* because none of the steps 4 to 6 is self-evident, even if the critic does nothing except draw the direct inference from these preconditions. Here the critic functions primarily as an interpreter who through her interpretation renders connections recognizable that are not self-evident. Thus, in case of doubt she must first point out that a certain practice falls under a norm—as required in step 4—and that norm and practice contradict each other. Only if we understand the military operations in Afghanistan as a war do we know that the Geneva Convention should apply there; only if we regard the distribution of food vouchers (instead of cash) to asylum seekers as patronizing discrimination can we claim that a community is practicing discrimination in contravention of its own ideals and hence that there is a discrepancy between its norms and its practices.

Internal criticism is thus not least *a procedure of pointing out connections*. The active part of internal criticism consists in demonstrating contradictions between norms and practices against the background of such connections and demanding that they be remedied. In this, the norms that serve as reference points are presupposed and do not first have to be established or questioned as such. Therefore, the task of the critic is not to provide a (new) justification of norms or to transform them, but *to bring them to bear*. This is why such procedures are sometimes described as "weak normative" procedures.

5.3 Advantages and Limits of Internal Criticism

The advantages of the approach of internal criticism thus characterized are easy to recognize. Internal criticism has *practical and pragmatic advantages* above all when it comes to the tasks of social criticism. If I criticize someone by holding him to his own claims, he has good reason to follow the criticism. The motives for changing a situation—that is, adapting reality to ideals, the real practices to the norm—are to a certain extent intrinsic. No one, we assume, can wish to remain in an internal contradiction; everyone must have an interest in overcoming it. Here the rhetoric of returning to the roots of one's own identity or the identity of a community, of reviving the true meaning of social institutions (which most revolutionary movements make use of at least initially), or of realizing a shared dream (like the American dream) exerts its effects. This effectiveness is also one of the reasons that lead Michael Walzer in his reflections on the possibility of social criticism to embrace the figure of the "connected critic" who is involved in the community. In Walzer's picture, the normative internal position of the critic also corresponds to his social place.[6] The local critic is able to motivate; people listen to him. Insofar as he is connected, his criticism, where interpreting criticism always has to deal with questions of detail, does not remain abstract; it is concrete and related to the specificity of problematic situations.

Here Walzer seems to imply from the outset that the internal critic is a recognized member of the community who, even when his criticism must inevitably involve a partial detachment from existing customs, also commands trust because this distancing is only partial. As a result, the purity of the critic's motives also remains beyond doubt for his local community. His goal is the constructive improvement of something with which he feels connected. Because of his radicalism, the external critic, by contrast, is open to the suspicion of being insufficiently connected with existing contexts and hence of becoming insensitive to and latently violent toward the existing institutions.[7]

More important than such pragmatic reasons, however, are the *systematic* advantages of the procedure of internal criticism: the problem of justifying the standard of criticism does not arise because the validity of this standard is actually already recognized. There is no need or obligation to justify the standard of criticism in the context of the existing community.

Since internal criticism does not provide an abstract, utopian blueprint of a desirable social order, it can refer to something that already *exists* in social reality and in addition already *applies* normatively in it. The question that is frequently asked about the epistemic standpoint of criticism—From what standpoint is the critic supposed to be able to judge what is criticized if he himself always necessarily adopts a particular standpoint?—also becomes superfluous. This standpoint is one that all members of an (evaluating) community already share, one to which all have access, even if this fact may be partially or temporarily concealed.

But in what sense is internal criticism actually *critical,* given that it derives its standards from the existing order? And in what sense is it normative? Is it not the case that "is" and "ought" collapse into each other in internal criticism so that it remains unclear how a critical objection against the status quo could spring from standards borrowed from reality itself? To be sure, the status quo is measured by its own claims, but what if the latter don't go very far? Thus, the above model, together with the conditions of possibility of internal criticism, also reveals its problematic and limited character. On the other hand, the advantage of being involved and of appealing to norms that are already shared seems to have the disadvantage of too little distance and a low potential for transformation. In what follows, I will address three problem complexes that arise for internal criticism as a result. The first concerns the fact that the standards to which internal criticism appeals are in need of interpretation, the second concerns the conventionalism of internal criticism. But, thirdly, we must ask whether the separation between the internal and external perspectives is even tenable with regard to social conditions. Doesn't the program of internal criticism almost inevitably lead to an illusory, homogeneous conception of those social formations that are supposed to serve as the basis of internal criticism?

Interpretation and Conflict

The contradiction between norms and (social) practice to which internal criticism refers is in need of interpretation in several respects. As we saw above, even the fact that a certain norm can and should be applied to a particular practice is not self-evident. The fact that there is a contradiction between norm and practice may also first have to be made apparent through interpretation—and may therefore be a matter of dispute. Only rarely will a contradiction be as obvious as in the case of the CEO (in example A), who only needs to be taken at his word for the contradiction between his words and his behavior to become apparent. By contrast, the insight that there is a contradiction between the commandment to love one's neighbor and the behavior of a community toward asylum seekers (as suggested in example B) is the result of a particular interpretation and application of this commandment. In many situations that call for internal criticism, even the *norms* themselves are given only more or less explicitly, and thus first have to be articulated and actualized by the critic; or they are ambiguous and first have to be applied by her to a particular case. However, not only the norms but also the *practices* that turn out to be an inadequate realization of the norms from a critical perspective are in need of interpretation. (What does the distribution of food vouchers imply, and in what sense must it be regarded as discriminatory? How do the operation of certain cliques and the existence of certain relations of social power suspend constitutional rights?)

But this dependence on interpretation and the potential ambiguity of practices and norms have far-reaching implications for the viability of internal criticism. Even if one would like to assume counterfactually the unity of a community, it is apparent that the contradictions between the norms and practices of a community demonstrated by the critic persist as rival interpretations even where these interpretations share a common reference point.[8] Evidently, very different institutions and practices can be justified with reference to the Bible or the Quran; at any rate, it seems that the associated disputes cannot simply be settled by appealing to an authoritative founding text. And the opponents of quotas for women as an active measure for promoting gender equality do not generally invoke the right of the stronger against this but instead appeal to a different interpretation of the same normative principle of equal treatment for all.

In addition, complex social situations are marked by a variety of overlapping norms. Thus, there will be several (possibly mutually conflicting) ideals in every community; the question of which among these ideals constitutes the community, and can therefore be legitimately subjected to criticism—and possibly trump another ideal—is not something that can be decided in advance. In the so-called asylum debate, for example, the proponents of a more restrictive right of asylum naturally do not present in this as a revocation of general human solidarity, but as a measure designed to protect their own community.

But there is still another problem. Let us suppose that there was a (recognized) contradiction between the norms that apply in a community and a social practice: Is it really so obvious that in such cases the practice should be brought into line with the norm rather than vice versa, that the norm should be adapted to the existing practice? Of course, it sounds cynical to propose inferring from the de facto spread of discriminatory practices toward strangers that one would be better off abandoning the idea of charity or the principle of human dignity. However, one need only think, for example, of the fate of Christian sexual morality in modern Western societies to realize that we are indeed familiar with cases in which the spread of a divergent practice led society to conclude that norms and moral conceptions had become outmoded and to abandon them—along with their legal codification.[9]

But where there is room for interpretation, there is also conflict over interpretations. At this point, the consensual picture of the critic who helps the community to realize itself, hence to live in accordance with its own principles, becomes implausible. In view of this, however, precisely the question that the internal approach thought it had rendered superfluous crops up again. The problem of demonstrating and deriving standards of criticism now returns in the guise of the problem of the "correct" interpretation of norms and practices and of the question of the basis of their authority.

Conventionalism and Conservatism of Internal Criticism

The aforementioned problems draw our attention to the enduring conflictuality resulting from the internal critical approach. However, the more general objection against this method refers to the more fundamental problem of its limited scope—in other words, to the "weakness" of its normativity, that is, its *normative conventionalism.* Insofar as internal criticism lives off a contradiction in the status quo, it can become effective only where a norm that contradicts the practice can be found in the first place. Thus, if the CEO (in example A) does not advocate any ideals that deviate from his hiring practice, it will not be possible to convince him using the means of internal criticism of the correctness of a policy of gender equality; where a community that discriminates against asylum seekers (example B) does not profess Christian charity (or other morally inclusive ideals), no arguments based on internal criticism can be brought against its discriminatory practice; and only where a constitution already exists as a (possibly counterfactual) codification of norms (example D) can one appeal to the constitutional ideal as a basis for criticizing the constitutional reality. Internal criticism would lack any foothold in a society without ideals or in a society that had abandoned itself entirely to cynicism.[10] And also a society that had adjusted its system of norms consistently and in conformity with its practice of cruelty and malice could not be criticized internally for this practice.[11] Therefore, internal criticism can criticize a bad practice only where this comes into contradiction with norms that already exist. As a result, internal criticism expressly contents itself with a *conventionalist* conception of norms according to which norms are valid because they apply as a matter of fact, whether as a matter of convention or of tradition.

The counterpart of this normative conventionalism is a *structural conservatism*. Insofar as internal criticism refers to internal contradictions within an existing social order, its aim is to (re)establish an agreement, hence to restore a previous state. As a result, internal criticism is by its very nature conservative (in the structural sense, not necessarily in a political sense).[12] In other words, it is *not dynamic* and *not transformative*. It does not seek to transform the status quo, but to help it realize itself. Fundamental innovations and changes in a society or a normative frame of reference can be integrated only with difficulty into its perspective. Where social criticism makes use of internal critique, therefore, the latter not only assumes a (contestable) *uniform* picture of society; it also sketches the ideal shape of the object to be criticized as a formation that tends to be immobile and lacking in dynamism. With its orientation to the model of the restoration, restitution, and reinstatement of a previous state, it cannot grasp the idea that social formations may need to undergo innovative change and transformation. (And there is always the question of whether internal criticism can even keep pace with the de facto dynamic of the social formation it criticizes.)

Thus, if the question put to internal criticism was the extent to which it is even critical, then the answer is this: Although internal criticism is undoubtedly a common and often a successful approach, and although many confrontations that arise in practice typically at least begin in the mode of internal criticism, it remains a limited model.[13] It can promote the critical supersession of existing conditions (which are judged to be negative) only to a limited extent. It is quite evident that internal criticism of the kind described remains weakly normative and particularistic.

Doubts about the Separation between the Internal and External Perspectives

This brings us to a further point. In certain respects, even the separation between internal and external and the assertion that a purely internal perspective is possible are problematic. The distinction between an internal and an external point of view in relation to criticism of the societies in which we live is difficult to draw *as a practical matter.* For, if one assumes a pluralistic society, what is supposed to count here as the perspective from the inside and what as the perspective from the outside? With reference to which argumentative framework are normative standards internal or external? Is the attack by Christian fundamentalists—for example, by the Moral Majority in the United States in the 1980s—on the way of life of a gay subculture a case of internal or a case of external criticism?

It is perfectly clear, therefore, that the model of internal criticism can do justice neither to the fact that inside and outside influence each other, nor to the fact that communities undergo change. It is schooled in the idea of self-sufficient, homogeneous, and static social units—a notion that is false already on sociological grounds. Beyond the practical problems that this situation poses for social criticism, however, this also alerts us to a systematic problem: the boundary between internal and external, between a standard derived from the status quo and one brought in from outside, always depends on how wide one spans the frame of reference of a form of life and to what one refers the decisive commonalities. (It makes a difference whether in doing so one starts from common practices that are in fact shared—which also still connect Christian fundamentalists with the queer community—or from explicit and publicly advocated value orientations).

Summary

By now it should be clear why an internal approach to criticism is not the appropriate mode of criticism of forms of life as I conceive of it here. If it starts where a social formation does not correspond to its own self-understanding, then it is part of the internal discourses of self-understanding discussed in the Introduction, that is, the "purification" of individual and collective identities oriented to internal coherence and integrity. But internal criticism is confined to specific contexts because it does not raise any validity claims that go beyond its own frame of reference.[14] Such criticism can draw attention to the fact that our self-understanding does not correspond to our practices, but it cannot question this self-understanding—or better, the conglomeration of practices and norms that constitutes a form of life—as to its cogency, and it cannot open up the form of life as such itself to debate.

With its tendency toward relativism and particularism when evaluating forms of life, however, internal criticism is not only normatively too weak (in the sense of Onora O'Neill's distinction) to be able to represent a transformative criticism. Almost more important for my argument is that the ideas about the relationship between norms and practices at work here are insufficiently complex compared to the ideas developed above, and that internal criticism is not even able to comprehend possible systematic causes for violations of certain norms. Whether norms are habitable or livable (in the sense developed above), therefore, and to what extent certain forms of life are systematically deficient (and hence are not suitable for solving the problems posed with them) cannot be thematized with such an internal perspective.

In the next chapter, I will examine in greater detail the procedure that I have demarcated from internal criticism and would like to contrast with it under the heading of "immanent criticism" by juxtaposing it with the structure of internal criticism analyzed here. As we shall see, immanent criticism operates with a different—and, in certain respects, stronger—kind of validity claim, one which overcomes some of the problems with internal criticism I have identified and can build on the more subtle understanding of practices and norms that I developed in Part 2. On the other hand, however, it is freighted with certain presuppositions that in turn present difficulties for the concept of immanent criticism.

CHAPTER SIX

“To Find the New World through Criticism of the Old One”

Immanent Criticism

LIKE INTERNAL CRITICISM, immanent criticism criticizes its object based on standards that are already contained in this object itself. Immanent criticism, too, is not conducted from an imagined Archimedean point outside of the reality to be criticized—it even systematically assumes that a meaningful position for criticism cannot exist outside of what is criticized. Nevertheless, in what follows I will argue that it is normatively stronger than internal criticism. Immanent criticism does not conclude from its particular starting point of “always already being involved in something” and from the internal setting of its standard that it has only relative (or local) validity. Even though it adopts an internal approach, it raises context-transcending claims and has transformative effects.

In this regard, the procedure of immanent criticism can be described succinctly as follows: it starts from existing contexts and standards internal to its subject matter, but in so doing it is based on a different understanding of how norms exert effects in social practices from that of internal criticism—in other words, from an understanding of norms as value orientations and ideals. Immanent criticism locates the normativity of social practices in the performance conditions of these practices themselves. Moreover, immanent criticism assumes that the contexts from which it derives its standards are at the same time contradictory *in themselves*. It is not a contingent matter that these standards are not satisfied; rather, they are marked by a systematic problem. As a result, immanent criticism is oriented less to the *reconstruction* or redemption of normative potentials than to the *transformation* of existing conditions in ways that are facilitated by the immanent problems and contradictions of a particular social constellation. Thus, in making a connection with the norms inherent in the practices in question, it simultaneously criticizes these norms. Immanent criticism then, as Marx says, "does not confront reality with a prefabricated ideal." But it does not simply extract the ideal from reality either. Rather, it develops this ideal out of the contradictory patterns of movement exhibited by reality itself. Thus, immanent criticism combines the idea that the standard of criticism resides in the thing itself with the claim to provide a context-transcending critique. This makes it interesting for the project of a transcending form of criticism of forms of life.

In what follows, I will examine the procedure of immanent criticism by first situating it as criticism of a new type (Section 1). Then I will go on to explain the procedure, structure, and characteristic features of immanent criticism with reference to (prominent) examples (Section 2). Finally, I will discuss the difficulties and potentials of immanent criticism as they arise in the context of the foundation developed thus far for criticizing forms of life (Section 3).

6.1 Criticism of a New Type

Whereas internal criticism is a mundane procedure that is applied in one way or another in a variety of situations, immanent criticism is guided by theory.[1] I will present a brief outline of the type of theory in question below. In its most distinctive manifestations, immanent criticism is connected with the methodological premises of Hegelian theory and with the aspirations of the Left-Hegelian tradition following Hegel that lead via Marx to critical theory.[2] Nevertheless, this form of criticism is not the exclusive preserve of the Hegelian tradition. Independently of this line of influence, psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic treatment can also be said to involve an analogously immanent procedure.

Immanent criticism represents a new type of criticism not only because—in contrast to the claim to neutrality embodied in the metaphor of a court—it is internal and biased, so that criticism of this type qua criticism is always also a matter of self-clarification and self-criticism. Rather, four further moments are decisive for the transformation of the concept of criticism that begins with Hegel.

Firstly, immanent criticism is "objective criticism" (Arnold Ruge) insofar as it is suggested by the matter at hand and does not merely proceed from the critic's subjective critical intention.[3] It should be borne in mind that by "objective" here is meant not (only) that this kind of criticism claims to be true or valid, but (also) that here, to put it paradoxically, the things criticize themselves. Such criticism is objective, therefore, insofar as it takes the form of a critical reenactment of the tensions, moments of crisis, or deficits on the side of the objects (of the social conditions or relations criticized). It is the existence of conflicts and contradictions that are immanent in reality, and hence the connection between crisis and critique, that stimulates an awareness of such a form of criticism. Seyla Benhabib has captured this moment in a succinct formulation (taking her lead from Reinhart Koselleck): "'Critique' is the subjective evaluation or decision concerning a conflictual and controversial process—a crisis."[4] Criticism is thus in a sense simultaneously active and passive or simultaneously active and reactive. And criticism is possible only where what is criticized, the object of criticism, has succumbed to a crisis of itself. The critic's claim is to comprehend the deficiencies or even contradictions lying in the social formation itself. Thus, in this sense he does not proceed in a dogmatic (as Marx calls it) or normativistic way, since he does not simply posit his standards independently of these defects and contradictions or derive them from a condition conceived in ideal terms.

Secondly, the close connection between analysis and criticism, which is characteristic of the resulting understanding of criticism (and became programmatic in Marx), is also grounded in this attitude, insofar as the crisis qua crisis of the objects (as a problem lying in the social relations) must always be analyzed and uncovered in the first place at the theoretical level. Here the analysis is not merely an instrumental precondition for criticism but is also part of the critical process itself. It is *qua analysis* criticism (not a mere *description* of the existing order) and *qua criticism* analysis (not merely a *demand* addressed to the existing order). Among the "dogmatic errors" of which Marx accuses "vulgar" criticism is therefore also the procedure of merely identifying contradictions without bothering to inquire into the "genesis," "necessity," and "proper significance" of a contradiction thus diagnosed.[5]

Thirdly, immanent criticism is not purely destructive but is just as much an *affirmative* or productive enterprise. As a motor or catalyst of a process of development, it subsumes the position to be overcome in the Hegelian sense. Criticism in Hegel is already essentially an antidogmatic and anticonstructivistic process. Insofar as it adopts an immanent approach, therefore, it is not a matter of dogmatically positing a norm that stands in opposition to the existing order of things. In Marx this antidogmatism becomes the antiutopianism of a form of social criticism that does "not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle" but "only wants to find the new world through criticism of the old one"—and is able to do so.[6] In this way, the new arises as a transformation of the old, which at the same time incorporates it.[7] Or, as Adorno suggests, alluding to Spinoza, "The false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better."[8]

Fourthly, immanent criticism is performed *in the process of being carried out [im Vollzug].* In this form of criticism, a given object is not measured against a rigid, unchanging yardstick; rather, the yardstick of criticism itself has a dynamic character in the sense that it transforms itself in the exercise of criticism.[9] It has to justify itself in the process of criticism itself. Therefore, if there is no such thing as a dogmatic, presuppositionless beginning but only a starting point within an already existing constellation, then these presuppositions must be redeemed in the actual process of engaging in criticism. Thus, the standard of criticism is not only not laid down dogmatically, but it is not possible to construct it prior to the exercise or outside the process of criticism either. Criticism is in this sense a self-grounding process.

The Methodological Program of the Phenomenology of Spirit

The moments of a form of criticism that adopts an immanent approach which I have assembled here can be found programmatically for the first time in the methodology of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* as outlined in its introduction and put into practice in the course of the phenomenological self-examination of consciousness. Thus, the path of phenomenology presents itself as a critique of the forms of self-deception, one-sidedness, and false objectification *[Vergegenständlichung]* to which consciousness succumbs in its attempt to situate itself in relation to its object. Criticism is immanent according to this concept insofar as the "examination of the reality of cognition" is undertaken "by consciousness itself" without the need for a standard that lies outside of consciousness.[10] It is its own claims against which consciousness measures itself, and it is its own presuppositions that it identifies and recovers through its critical insight into their deficient actualization. This critical examination accompanies a process of education and development whose progress based on "determinate negation" is a process of enrichment and differentiation involving reworking and adaptation—qua experience which consciousness has with itself and the object (to paraphrase Hegel). Terry Pinkard describes this process of the critical self-examination of consciousness in the mode of a dialectical progression as follows:

> A reflective form of life takes such and such to be authoritative reasons for belief and action; those types of reasoning then generate within their own terms skeptical objections against themselves (as Hegel puts it, they generate their own "negation"); that form of reflective life, however, turns out to be unable to reassure itself about what it has taken as authoritative for itself; the new form of reflective life that replaces it and claims to complete it, however, takes *its* account of what *for it* have come to be authoritative reasons to be that which was necessary to successfully resolve the issues that were self-undermining for the older form of life; but this new reflective form of life in turn generates self-undermining skepticism about its own accounts, and the progression continues.[11]

Viewed in Hegelian terms, the question raised above about the normative standpoint of the critic—external or internal-involved?—undergoes an unexpected turn. The basic thesis of Hegel's dispute with Kant's critique of knowledge—which can be applied to our question—is that the question of the standard as such is already wrongly posed. The underlying error of the Kantian critique of knowledge, according to Hegel, is to believe that there could be an external point of view. Here that essentially means a standard for criticizing knowledge *prior to* cognition itself.[12] In Hegel's pithy formulation, "It is like wanting to swim before going into the water."[13] But if critique (of knowledge) is worthless (that is, not meaningful) as a "dry run," this does not mean that it would be impossible to criticize—in the sense of giving oneself an account of one's action and cognition. However, it must be understood as a process in which one is always already involved in what one is doing, so that criticizing is part of a *practical performance* that does not unfold prior to or outside of this occurrence. The fact that the procedure in question cannot be conducted *in advance,* therefore, also has consequences for the issue of the locus of the standard of criticism: when it comes to performing the critical self-examination of consciousness, it no longer even makes sense to ask what is inside or outside. On the one hand, insofar as the standard is derived from the claims of consciousness itself, it is always already inside; on the other hand, insofar as it makes the inadequacy of an existing position apparent, it becomes to a certain extent the outside of the position criticized, only to immediately become a new inside in the course of the further dialectical development. Therefore, immanent criticism in the sense of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* cannot help but start from the inside; however, insofar as it aims at superseding through criticism, it also cannot help but transcend this position. The specificity thus described (in very abstract terms) of the normative position of criticism that is immanent in the strong (Hegelian) sense is something I want to explore further—albeit not so much in a way internal to Hegel as with reference to the cases in which this ideal of immanent criticism has actually exerted effects in history and in the history of theory.

6.2 The Strategy of Immanent Criticism

In what follows, I will use some such classical paradigmatic cases as examples to present the claim and the model of the immanent procedure and to work out the systematic moments of immanent criticism in an ideal-typical matter. Finally, I will explain the structure of this form of criticism by comparing it with internal criticism.

Cases of Immanent Criticism

A'. The first case takes up an example from Chapter 4. Hegel's account of bourgeois or civil society, which I discussed above in outlining a specific operation of normativity, operates as immanent criticism. The deficiency of bourgeois civil society as a form of ethical life diagnosed by Hegel—its internal dissension and its tendencies toward destruction and disintegration—is not measured against a yardstick that is external to this social formation. Hegel detects an internal contradiction in bourgeois civil society already at the level of its self-understanding—that is, at the level of its own conception of itself and of the claims it formulates. This manifests itself, in a nutshell, as a contradiction between the atomistic self-understanding and the real interdependence of the individuals who are brought together in civil society. Although individuals in bourgeois civil society, insofar as they are legally and economically independent, are left to fend for themselves, their independence from direct (concrete, personal) ties and status positions goes hand-in-hand with an increased level of dependence on anonymous agencies of socialization, for example, the market. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the real interdependence among the individuals who pursue their private interests and the deficient realization of this social bond or its deficient ethical-institutional appropriation *[sittliche Aneignung],* which is nevertheless still there—behind the backs of individuals. (Following ideas later developed by Marx, one could speak of a "connection of unconnectedness" or of a "relation of unrelatedness" *[Zusammenhang der Zusammenhanglosigkeit].*) This discrepancy manifests itself in practice, as described in Chapter 4 with reference to the social question of unemployment, as a contradiction between the claims of bourgeois civil society to integrate its members and the factual refusal to redeem these claims—leading to disastrous social disintegration, as Hegel describes. Thus, bourgeois civil society is accused by its immanent critic Hegel of both laboring under a *misunderstanding* concerning the relationship between dependence and independence and exhibiting a practical *discrepancy* between these two moments.

B'. Some of the motifs of Marx's critique of capitalism, if not the whole project, can also be understood as immanent criticism.[14] For example, Marx shows with reference to the norms of general freedom and equality within the capitalist labor market that the norms anchored in the self-understanding of bourgeois society and implicit in its social structure are annulled by the social practices that likewise exist in this society. Not only the self-understanding but also the essential institutions of bourgeois society—the free market, free wage labor, and employment contracts concluded between free and legally equal persons—rest on (and generate) these norms. At the same time, freedom and equality are systematically undermined by the institutions of bourgeois-capitalist society, so they are not, or are only incompletely, actualized in this society. As a participant in the labor market, the worker is "only formally" free and equal, but in reality he is unfree and unequal. As "free in [a] double sense" (as Marx puts it pointedly), he is free from the fetters of feudal dependence but is also free to starve.[15] Here immanent criticism is the court of appeals that establishes a systematic connection between two findings, namely, formal equality and social inequality. It asserts not only the potential conflictuality of such a social formation but also its immanent contradictoriness.

C'. Finally, the psychoanalytic conversation can be understood as a version of immanent criticism.[16] The analyst is also an immanent critic provided that her diagnosis is not applied to the analysand from the outside but, like a ferment, is supposed to help the conflict that manifests itself in the symptom to find expression, and ultimately help to transform it. The characteristic features of Hegel's method in *Phenomenology of Spirit*—namely, the understanding of criticism as (self-)examination of consciousness, the at once active and passive activity of the examining observer and the dissolution of self-delusions driven by the experience of failure—can be found in psychoanalysis as the reciprocal relationship between the interpretation of the analyst and the self-interpretation of the patient. What corresponds to the dialectical process here is the psychoanalytic process of working through. Here, too, the standard of criticism or of the diagnosis is ultimately immanent.

The Procedure of Immanent Criticism

How then does immanent criticism proceed? If we compare the cases outlined here with those of internal criticism discussed above, then the first thing that strikes us is that both the talk of "connection" as well as that of "contradiction" seem to have a theoretically more demanding meaning than in the case of internal criticism. Whereas the connection pointed out by internal criticism could in each case be described in a quite unspectacular way as a required connection between actions and beliefs, and the resulting contradictions could be explained accordingly as an inconsistency between what one says and what one does, things are more complicated in the case of immanent criticism. Here connections are not so much something *found* as something *produced* using theoretically demanding means. If, in the case of the Hegelian dialectic of bourgeois civil society, immanent criticism makes a connection between two moments—the *independence* of the individual who pursues his particular interests and the *dependence* of someone who is reliant on the general bond of social institutions like the market in order to realize these interests—then in doing so it affirms a *systematic* relationship in which each term is conditioned by the other. It shows that the individual's independence from concrete ties is first made possible by dependence on the overarching institutions. As a result, the absolutization of the one moment—independence—is unmasked as *one-sidedness* and as a source of instability.[17] If, therefore, bourgeois civil society is, in Hegelian terms, a formation of ethical life in a condition of division *[Sittlichkeit im Zustand ihrer Entzweiung]*, then the task of the immanent critic is to show that there is a connection here at all, and in so doing to distinguish the two ("separated") moments as part of this connection, which as a result is marked by a contradiction. This contradiction is not a straightforward inconsistency, but it is not a logical incompatibility either; rather, it refers to a *tension within a formation that will drive it beyond itself*.[18] Something similar can be said of how Marx establishes a connection between civil and social liberty rights; and the psychoanalyst also first has to establish connections and contradictions, but thereby reveals constellations that are not arbitrary.

Furthermore, what is striking is that the contradictions to be worked out here are not contingent but systematic. This Hegelian crisis diagnosis becomes recognizable as immanent criticism insofar as the claim posited with it not only is not fulfilled by bourgeois civil society but cannot be fulfilled in it for structural reasons.[19] This is because the independence of the individuals who, as participants in the relations of work and the market constitutive of bourgeois civil society, have to fend for themselves is both the basis of the dynamic economic constitution of this society and the source of its problems. What is involved here, therefore, is not merely a claim that is not fulfilled by bourgeois civil society but a conflict that is implicit in its practices and institutions themselves and constitutes this conflict as a tension that cannot be easily resolved.

In the second example (B'), the crucial difference from internal criticism also resides in the fact that Marx does not merely demonstrate an incidental contradiction between the (normative) self-understanding and the reality of bourgeois society, but a contradiction in the normative self-understanding and the reality of this society itself that does not function in accordance with the model of mere lip service. What is involved is a tension implicit in bourgeois society itself that is systematically anchored in how its institutions function; indeed, the tension enables them to function in the first place.

The same applies in the case of psychoanalysis. Here, too, the demonstrable contradictions are not incidental or contingent but are firmly anchored as meaningful elements in the mental processes in question and hence are constitutive of the personality of the patient and the nature of the illness and the course it takes.

Seven Features of Immanent Criticism

Let us now take a closer look at how immanent criticism operates and what distinguishes it from internal criticism as described above. There are seven features that I would like to take up here.

(1) The normativity of the actual [des Wirklichen]. Like internal criticism, immanent criticism assumes norms that are inherent in an existing (social) situation. However, these norms are not merely values that we or "we as a community" have. Whereas internal criticism looks for its critical standard in norms (values or ideals) that it understands as shared, more or less explicit basic beliefs of a community, immanent criticism starts from a different understanding of norms and their relation to reality. Specifically, it assumes that *social reality is always normatively constituted,* and it renders these norms inherent in reality explicit, even where they are not articulated. In case of doubt, therefore, it points out that a social institution is sustained by certain normative principles, even when the institution in question itself (or those who participate in it) is unaware of these principles. Here norms are sought out in the social interactions, practices, or institutions themselves, not only in the articulated self-understanding of a community or an individual (in example B, in charity; in example A, in commitment to the advancement of women; in example C, in adherence to Holy Scripture). To connect this aspect with my reflections developed above, the reference point of immanent criticism is thus not so much a set of values shared by all as the *implicit normativity of social practices.* In other words, it is not just a matter of something that we *believe* but of something that we—in a certain sense whether we want to or not—already *do* when we participate in certain social practices or are involved in social institutions.[20] So immanent criticism takes as its starting point the normatively charged functional conditions of a practice (as described above) that first make it into what it is.

(2) The (functional-)constitutive character of norms. The norms to which immanent criticism refers are therefore not contingent in several respects. They correspond to a certain reality and are in a certain sense systematically necessary for the practices and institutions that constitute this reality. This is because the norms *constitute* (social) reality. Thus, it is not only that in a given social context certain normative principles are (more or less contingently) represented that then remain unfulfilled in the same context; rather, the corresponding social practices and institutions are themselves constituted by those norms to which they at the same time do not correspond. Whereas in the internal criticism of example A it is contingent that the personnel manager, in addition to his misogynistic practice, also defends feminist beliefs that contradict his practice, for Marx (in example B') the norms of civil liberty and equality are constitutive for both the self-understanding and the functioning of bourgeois society. They circumscribe to a large extent what constitutes a bourgeois-capitalist society in contrast to other social formations. They are constitutive for how the society thus described functions, *and* they are decisive for the self-understanding of those who participate in this formation. The capitalist labor market, for example, cannot get by without contracts between free and equal persons; the capitalist mode of production could not function under conditions of feudal serfdom. At the same time, it belongs to the self-understanding of the social formation—of bourgeois society—in which the capitalist labor market typically arises that here individuals are regarded as free and equal, and this constitutes in no small part its claim to legitimacy.[21]

Translated into the vocabulary developed in Chapters 3 and 4 above, this means that the social formations criticized here not only do not realize a conviction of their own, as is the case in the examples of internal criticism that I examined; rather, the issue here that they "do not correspond" to "their concept"—and hence do not measure up to their task as described in normative and functional terms.

(3) The inverted effectiveness of norms. One can now see how immanent criticism does *not* conform to the typical pattern of argumentation of internal criticism according to which a community has lost touch with its ideals. Immanent criticism, by contrast, does not argue that the relationship between norms and reality in the situation criticized has been dissolved or weakened, but that it is inverted or *wrong in itself*. This means that the norms *are* effective (as in the case cited above of the values of freedom and equality, which are constitutive for bourgeois society, or that of subsistence mediated by labor)—but, *as effective,* they have become contradictory and deficient. They are realized, just as freedom and equality are indisputably realized in the capitalist employment contract (labor under the conditions of a capitalist employment contract is, after all, not the same as under conditions of feudal serfdom). But *insofar as* they are realized, these norms give rise to effects that are directed against the content of the norms themselves.

In contrast to internal criticism, therefore, immanent criticism does not only take aim at a contradiction between norm and reality—namely, the fact that norms are not realized in reality; rather, it is directed at the *internal contradictoriness* of reality and its constitutive norms. Accordingly, the institutional reality of a society can be inherently contradictory insofar as it constitutively embodies mutually opposing claims and norms that cannot be realized without contradiction or that, in being realized, turn against their original intentions. In our example, this applied to the norms of freedom and equality. At present, it can be observed in social processes in which, for example, responsibility is simultaneously ascribed and undermined, creativity demanded but conformity generated, and so forth.[22] Immanent criticism asserts further that the contradictions it demonstrates are constitutive for the existence of the corresponding practices. In my example, it is the reality of capitalist commodity exchange itself that, on the one hand, relies on the norms of freedom and equality but, on the other, must undermine them. The condition of bourgeois society itself is such that dependence and independence cannot be related in a noncontradictory way. Not only the norms but also the contradiction from which immanent criticism starts is deeper than in the case of internal criticism; it lies *in* the social practices and institutions of this society itself. In contrast to merely demonstrating a contradiction between reality and norms, therefore, immanent criticism must be interested in demonstrating the *constitutive* function of the contradiction, that is, in demonstrating the systematic reasons for this discrepancy. (This holds as much for psychoanalysis as it does for the problem that is decisive for Marx and Hegel.)

(4) The orientation to crisis of immanent criticism. An important implication of the nature of immanent criticism thus outlined is that it takes as its starting point the *crisis-proneness* of a particular social arrangement.

Characteristic of the kind of contradictoriness of a social practice or institution at which immanent criticism takes aim is the associated instability and deficiency. Such a condition is marked by practical impediments and dysfunctionalities. Whereas a contradiction could be demonstrated between norms and their realization in the examples of internal criticism discussed above, it did not follow that the practice that deviated from the ideal could not endure as such. From the perspective of immanent criticism, by contrast, the contradictions diagnosed do not only pose a problem of consistency, and they are not a purely normative problem, but involve *practical distortions* and *crises*. Thus, in Hegel bourgeois civil society already exhibits both a functional and a normative lack of integration. Capitalism according to Marx succumbs to systemic crises of different kinds. And even in psychoanalysis the symptom to be analyzed inhibits action and freedom, and the inhibitions and the crisis-induced psychological distress provide the motivation for the painful process of analysis. Thus, whereas in the context of *external criticism* it may turn out to be normatively questionable that a firm lacks female employees or that a neighborhood is xenophobic, and in the case of *internal* criticism such a situation may turn out to be an identity-threatening incongruence, *immanent* criticism starts from the moments of crisis triggered by such contradictoriness.[23] What is more, it seems that the way in which internal criticism takes up the problems ultimately depends on the goodwill of the subjects or on the collective goodwill of the communities in question to overcome the identified contradiction. The personnel manager *could* just as well keep his word; the Christian-oriented community *could* have a change of heart about charity toward asylum seekers. The problems and crisis tendencies demonstrated by immanent criticism, by contrast, point to structural issues that place the constellation described itself in question (or at any rate are systematically inherent in it) and that therefore cannot be resolved within this constellation.

(5) Parallel contradictoriness of reality and norms. The transformation that becomes necessary in this way refers, crucially, to both the deficient reality and the norms themselves. The norms are not unaffected by the fact that they were not realized, or even could not be realized, in a given situation; from the perspective of immanent criticism, they cannot simply be and remain right, so that one would merely have to criticize their implementation as deficient in the manner of internal criticism. Immanent criticism not only measures reality against the norm, therefore, but also *the norm against reality*—although by this is not meant that norms would be adapted to what is feasible in reality in the manner of realpolitik. Immanent criticism is as much criticism of a practice in terms of norms to which this practice does not conform as it is criticism of the norms themselves. The standard of criticism changes accordingly in the process of criticism. But then the contradiction on which immanent criticism turns cannot be eliminated, as in the case of internal criticism, by merely adjusting reality to the norm, but only through a change that affects both sides.[24] For example, insofar as the contradictions between the natural law norms of equality and freedom, on the one hand, and the social reality, on the other, can be resolved only by a new principle of economic and social organization, as in example B′, the concepts of freedom and equality are transformed in the process into a more comprehensive understanding of freedom as "positive freedom" or into a more comprehensive—that is, "material"—conception of equality.

Thus, not only is the restorative reference to the "no longer" of normative validity blocked as a result. In addition, the simple interpretation that criticism should operate in the name of norms that are "not yet implemented" but as such already anticipate a better reality is not quite right. The point is that norms are not an anticipation of truth unsullied by their reality but are instead a ferment and dynamic moment of development of social formations that first have to attain the right (the right norm and the right reality).

(6) The transformative character of immanent criticism. This brings us to the most striking difference between immanent and internal criticism: Immanent criticism is not *reconstructive,* like internal criticism, but *transformative*.[25] It aims not so much to restore an existing order or to reinstate valid norms and ideals as to transform them. Thus, it does not restore a prior harmony between norm and reality that was lost, but instead seeks to transform a contradictory and crisis-riven situation into something new.

Therefore, overcoming one-sidedness, eliminating the deficits revealed by immanent criticism, leads to a transformation at whose conclusion both sides, reality and its concept, the "object" and its "yardstick," have undergone change (as described in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Insofar as the critique of the atomistic self-misunderstanding of bourgeois civil society (example

A') demonstrates the hidebound character of this understanding, this critique seeks to initiate a process of transformation in which the starting point (the assumption of independence) is transformed into an insight into the dialectic of dependence and independence, so that independence comes to be seen as a result of an appropriating working through of dependence *[aneignende Durcharbeitung der Abhängigkeit]*.[26] And the goal of psychoanalysis is also not only to (help) uncover connections and contradictions but also to bring about transformations through this activity of disclosure.

(7) Immanent criticism as an experiential process and a learning process. Whereas internal criticism has a *static* or conservative character, immanent criticism is *dynamic* in a very exacting sense. It is the medium (or better, the catalyst) of an *experiential and learning process* that becomes richer and more differentiated as a result of criticism. Firstly, the reality criticized is compelled by the experiences of a failure or a deficiency to embark on this process of change. In this regard, secondly, the process of failing and overcoming failure takes the form of a movement of differentiating enrichment and progress—hence, of a learning process. The development leading from a deficient practice to a new one (and a new self-understanding) becomes a progressively richer and more differentiated experiential process precisely because it does not involve the one-sided destruction and supersession of a wrong position but achieves a new position through the experience of failure. This is what Hegel calls "determinate negation."[27] The development initiated by immanent criticism can therefore be understood as a kind of problem-solving process whose truth or plausibility resides in the fact that it contains within itself the processing of the inadequacy of the previous position.

Therefore, if in the case of bourgeois civil society material and positive liberty and equality follow from the deficiency of freedom and equality as described by natural law, then this sociohistorical formation has learned from the deficiencies of civil liberty; however, this result is unthinkable without the prior history of the supersession of the previous position. Likewise, in psychoanalysis the subject who has been "cured" achieves her freedom by confronting and working through the inhibiting symptoms. When viewed against the background of a psychological theory for which, like the Freudian, there is in a certain sense no such thing as health but only pathological and less pathological ways of dealing with conflicts, which as such are not only unavoidable but are also constitutive for the development of personality, every psychological disposition is the result of a history of conflict. In other words, it is the result of a process of balancing out of conflicts that do not simply disappear as such but remain constitutive for the outcome.[28] The process of personality development as understood by psychoanalysis, as well as the psychoanalytical therapeutic process, could then be described as an experiential and learning process whose principle of movement is not unlike that of determinate negation.[29]

The Structure of Immanent Criticism

Let us make a summarizing comparison between the structure of immanent criticism and that of internal criticism based on the structural model developed above.

(a) We can already discern differences with regard to the three *preconditions* of internal versus immanent criticism:
    (1) The starting point of internal criticism was that a given situation is characterized by the fact that a *norm N is accepted* and simultaneously a *practice P is exercised* in it.
    (1') Immanent criticism adds that neither the norm nor the practice is contingent; rather, they stand in a necessary relation.
    (2) Internal criticism asserts that a norm N is *applicable* to or *concerns* a practice P.
    (2') Immanent criticism formulates the connection in more demanding terms: N is *constitutive* for P and also *actually* constitutes P (albeit in a contradictory manner).
    (3) Internal criticism states that there is a *contradiction* between the norm and the practice, or N is not *realized* in P.
    (3') Immanent criticism asserts that if N is realized in P in a deficient way, this is shown by the *inner contradictoriness* or *deficiency* of N *and* P, and thus by the contradictory character of the practice constituted by N.
(b) Assuming that these preconditions are satisfied, then the differences between the *procedures* of internal and immanent criticism can be stated as follows:

(4) Internal criticism exhibits a connection between N and P and makes it explicit. Thus, it establishes that N is a norm that aims at practice P, or that P is a practice that falls under N.

(4') Immanent criticism, by contrast, reveals how N exerts effects in P and P is dependent on N. Thus, the connection in question involves a stronger form of mutual dependence and, in addition, one that must be produced by means of analysis.

(5) Internal criticism points out the discrepancy between N and P.

(5') Immanent criticism analyzes the inner contradictoriness of the practice P constituted by N.

(6) Internal criticism demands that P be brought into conformity with N.

(6') Immanent criticism functions as the "ferment" of the practical transformation of N and P.

A Procedure of Producing Connections

How then does immanent criticism proceed in contrast to internal criticism? Like internal criticism, with the steps 4' to 6', immanent criticism draws the conclusion from the preconditions 1' to 3'. Immanent criticism, too, is *possible* only if these preconditions are satisfied, and at the same time it is *necessary* because the consequences do not follow automatically from the preconditions. But the task and activity of the immanent critic are nevertheless different from those of the internal critic.

On the one hand, the presuppositions are different in the two cases: the immanent critic assumes a contradictory situation that is at least latently crisis-prone and not merely inconsistent. But her task is also different: she must demonstrate the constitutive character of N for P (4'); she must show that N is effective in P. And she must prove that P is dependent on N. Finally, the contradiction not only has to be demonstrated but must also be affirmed as inescapable. The requirement to bring P into conformity with N is, as we have seen, ultimately replaced by the transformation of N and P themselves. When we say here that criticism acts as a "ferment" or catalyst of this transformation, this means that criticism (in its unity with analysis, that is, with the demonstration of the relationships described above) itself acquires a practical-transformative character. The analogue of this in psychoanalysis is what Alfred Lorenzer calls the "the duality of the psychoanalytical approach as a critical-hermeneutic *and* a practical-transformative procedure."[30]

Both tasks—that of producing a connection between the mutually contradictory elements as such and that of localizing a contradiction here—present themselves as a theoretically demanding undertaking. In contrast to Michael Walzer's thesis that criticism is not a (social) theory but merely calls for "courage, compassion and a good eye," immanent criticism rests on analysis and hence is theory-dependent. The theoretical effort is part of the practice of critique. To put it very simply, with a "good eye" we might be able to see when people are suffering, but we need a theory to decipher this suffering as something caused by exploitation or alienation in Marx's sense.[31] One will also be in the best position to understand the tension between the patient's assertion "I am an uncommonly peaceable human being" and his report "I always dream of monsters, whose heads I bite off" when one has a theoretically informed hypothesis about the interplay between conscious and unconscious. Thus, this is precisely why immanent criticism, contrary to what Walzer says about local internal criticism, needs a "good theory." Only analysis can uncover the normative foundation of a community and the violation of this foundation; the good eye of the critic alone is not enough.

Whereas I characterized internal criticism above as a process of uncovering connections, immanent criticism is a procedure *not only of exhibiting but also of producing* connections. What sets the method and object domain of immanent criticism apart is that such connections are not obvious. Immanent criticism analyzes a given social situation in a way that establishes a connection that would not be visible without the analytical procedure of the critic. Only against this background does something appear as a contradiction.[32] This is also true, for example, of Hegel's description of bourgeois civil society as a connection or context *[Zusammenhang]:* only because this form of society can be understood as a context of ethical life does the unsolved problem of poverty and the emergence of the rabble become recognizable as a contradiction that represents a normative threat for this context.[33] Thus, here the concept of connection (and the procedure of producing such a connection) becomes transformed from an unassuming into a theoretically demanding concept. Accordingly, to speak of bourgeois civil society in a Marxian spirit as the "connection of unconnectedness" is to identify a decisive systematic point of departure for criticizing it. Here the "contradiction"—which for internal criticism is synonymous with "inconsistency"—becomes a "dialectical contradiction" in which the two contradictory components of a connection are at the same time constitutively dependent on each other, so that what appears to be unconnected is shown to be connected.

To summarize, therefore, the method of immanent criticism must be conceived as follows: starting from necessary (systematic) contradictions, immanent criticism is the *ferment of a transformation process* that overcomes the deficiencies of the situation marked by these contradictions. The interdependence of analysis and criticism also means that here connections become visible which, together with the perception of reality, also transform the possible reactions to it. In this respect, immanent criticism also involves a moment of disclosure that renders aspects of this reality visible in new ways. It is precisely in this sense that critical behavior, on the one hand, is (passively) dependent on the crisis-prone state of what is criticized and, on the other, is the (active) ferment of transformation.

In the following section, we shall see that the features outlined here conceal both the strength and the problems of immanent criticism.

6.3 Potentials and Difficulties

In what sense is immanent criticism *immanent,* and in what sense is it *critical?* And to what extent does it manage to be both at once?[34] Answering this question leads us to both the potentials and the problems of the position outlined here.

Transformative Immanence

As we have seen, immanent criticism (in the "strong" variant that I defend here) finds its standards "in what is criticized itself" in a very different sense from internal criticism. It does not adopt a positive stance on the potentials it finds in what exists. The norm to be realized is not already present in reality as an ideal; hence, its realization is not something that can be called for in a correspondingly straightforward way. Rather, this form of criticism is immanent in the sense that it addresses, in a negativistic way, the internal contradictions and moments of crisis that constitute a particular constellation. Here immanence is conceived in transformative terms. But at the same time, the transformation that proceeds from such criticism has an immanent character: it springs in an immanent way from the higher-order problems posed with a social formation. Then immanent criticism connects up with what is given in a constellation to the extent that the means for solving the problem or the crisis are located *in* this situation itself. Thus, the transformation process is suggested by the situation itself to a certain extent; it is prefigured in the situation, even if it exceeds the latter. Immanent criticism construes the crisis-prone contradiction that confronts it and confronts us not only as necessary but also—in contrast to the procedure of internal criticism—as productive. The deficiency of a particular position can be shown only by its failure; however, the possibility of resolving it follows from criticism of the deficient state itself. Adorno hints at this negativistic and productive element of criticism in a tentative way when he says that "the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better."[35]

Such a constructive element of criticism is understood somewhat more robustly when the process of crisis and criticism is comprehended as one of enrichment and differentiation in the sense alluded to above. A procedure can then be described as transformative immanence in which the new—the practice that goes well by comparison with the old—and the transformed, enriched norm can be achieved only by confronting and overcoming the old, not by disregarding it. The new state would then in each case be "truer" than the old insofar as it solves the problem—that is, insofar as it sublates the deficiency or the one-sidedness that plunged the old condition into crisis or posed a problem for it.

Therefore, the advantage of immanent criticism (in contrast to the advantage of internal criticism discussed above) does not reside in the fact that the existing social practices and institutions already contain the norms and values that one would only have to appeal to and reconstruct and realize in a conservative way. Nevertheless, the immanent critic is also involved in what is criticized. He, too, does not judge in an abstract way from an external point of view; instead, he takes his orientation from the concrete deficits and the actually existing potential for overcoming those deficits. So both forms of criticism, for all their differences, share the view that the existing order is not purely negative. The existing order—including its contradictory character—contains the potential that must provide a starting point for criticism, though only as part of a process of transformation. That the "better" is to be sought in the existing order of things where it already exists in incipient form, therefore, is also one of the convictions of the immanent critic. Thus, the attractiveness—and indeed the promise—of the program of immanent criticism consists in the fact that it (as Michael Theunissen observed with reference to Adorno's negativistic-immanent method) "holds fast to the *possibility* of something other than the prevailing state of things and . . . also ascribes a certain *actuality* to this other possibility," without adopting a conserving-affirmative stance toward the latter.[36]

Thus, if immanent criticism is at once critical and immanent and is more strongly normative by comparison with internal criticism in the sense that it can project the "better" beyond existing norms, then this also brings to light the problems of this type of criticism.

Difficulties with Immanent Criticism

The claim to validity of immanent criticism involves a wealth of presuppositions. We said of *internal criticism* that it merely calls for conformity with the particular and contingent norms of a community, without being able to justify the latter further. Thus, it can only adduce *that* these norms apply within a particular community but cannot justify *why* they should apply. If, on the contrary, external criticism bases its normative, critical force on the fact that it affirms a standard independent of all particular forms of life, the contrasting model of immanent criticism that I have introduced as an alternative and as a mediating position raises a claim to truth and validity that appeals to the rational potential of the norms embodied in social practices still in their negative and crisis-prone form. Therefore, the rational character of these norms consists neither exclusively in their de facto validity nor in a criterion that transcends the corresponding norms and practices. Rather, as I argued, it can be established in terms of the criterion of successfully overcoming the problems, crises, and contradictions that resides in the conditions to be criticized—and ultimately in terms of the very rational, enriching, and differentiating character of the process of development toward the better initiated by immanent criticism.

But how can such a development, and thus the transformation process mediated by immanent criticism, be characterized as supersession leading to the better without assuming a final telos of history or of the respective process? And can "crises" be understood as a motor of development at all, especially when an examination of historical developments suggests that crises (and their resolution) are not objectively given but themselves depend on interpretations, processes of self-understanding, and the practical connections and concatenations of actions inspired by the latter? With this, therefore, the problem of the normative point of reference of immanent criticism merely seems to shift. As we have seen, even the question of what actually constitutes a practical contradiction or a crisis, and what constitutes its resolution, is far from self-evident (see Chapters 4 and 9). In what sense does material inequality contradict legal equality? To what extent does the fact that, in Hegel's formulation, "despite an *excess of wealth,* civil society is *not wealthy enough*" to solve the urgent problem of poverty and exclusion constitute a crisis of this same social formation? And again, what does not function here, where some things nevertheless function?

Reconstructing Immanent Criticism

The description of the normativity of forms of life that I developed in the previous chapters already provides some pointers for how to solve these problems—and some tasks for the following chapters.

Firstly, the question of how to decide what constitutes "functioning" and a "problem" points to an ambiguity in the talk of the "inherent norms." These can be norms in the *functional* norms or they can be *ethical* norms. The reflections on the normativity of the forms of life that I presented in Chapter 3, however, undermine such a distinction. The norms under consideration here are simultaneously norms of functioning and norms of goodness. "Functioning" with a view to the observed social processes means something more than a smooth process, namely *good* functioning in a sense that is at once functional and ethical. A "practical contradiction," as my concept of normative failure is intended to express, is distinguished by the fact that impediments or crises arise in a social process that are problematic in two respects: *something does not function well, and how it functions is not good.* This peculiar interweaving of ethical and functional perspectives, whose interplay I have subsumed under the concept of the ethical-functional justification of norms, takes into account that there is no such thing as functioning independent of good functioning in the social realm, and there are no crises that do not have both objective and subjective sides. For the question of the criteria for problems and their solution it follows that, if problems are always also normative problems, but normative problems, conversely, are always also problems of dysfunctionality, then their localization must start from both sides simultaneously.

Secondly, if immanent criticism is a procedure of producing connections, then in the light of my reflections one can give this practice of establishing connections a kind of *constructivist-performative turn.* Based on my description of problems (and, correspondingly, of crises), the connections as well as the contradictions that constitute the principle of movement of this criticism are simultaneously given and made. This means that immanent-critical analysis neither simply discovers nor freely invents the contradictory connections of social reality. Even if the contradictions in question here do not have the compelling force sometimes attributed to them in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, they are nevertheless the result of practical problems that, even though not independent of interpretation, nonetheless somehow, like the symptom, announce themselves—that is, they bring forth practical consequences and distortions. Thus, immanent criticism cannot base its analysis and evaluation on conclusive ultimate reasons nor on an interpretation of social reality that is definitive and independent of the actors. So it will always simultaneously analyze and bring forth problems and contradictions. However, if (social) reality is understood as something that presents us with a certain resistance, even if it is not “given,” this does not leave us bereft of criteria.

Thirdly, immanent criticism must anticipate the *multiplication of contradictions*. Today criticism can no longer be a matter of exposing one of or the central contradiction of capitalist society, but of exposing diverse, multiplying, and partially conflicting contradictions. (Indeed, my concept of forms of life is in this sense an open concept that is not tied to a central perspective.) Among other things, this implies that we will be confronted with the persistence of such conflicts and contradictions or of collisions leading to contradictions. Thus, immanent criticism is not tied to a romantic-harmonistic ideal of consistency, that is, something like the idea of overcoming conflicts once and for all. But in contrast to positions that perpetuate contradictoriness as such, it regards the latter as a mobile element that demands to be overcome, however *provisionally.*

Fourthly, as my reconstruction of immanent criticism has shown, the possibility of establishing a critical standard for evaluating forms of life depends

Table 1. Models of Criticism

	Starting point	Basis of criticism	Character	Normative validity	Role of theory
External criticism	External (constructive-universal or external-particular)	Contradiction between external standard and existing practices	Constructive	Universal (in the case of constructive criticism)	Normative theory as "judge"
Internal criticism	Internal: shared values/norms and beliefs	Contradiction in the sense of inconsistency between internal ideals and reality	Reconstructive	Internal and particular	None
Immanent criticism	Internal: norms embedded in social practices	"Dialectical" contradiction within the constellation, crisis	Transformative	Rational norms—demonstrated in the mode of immanent justification	Necessity of analysis to demonstrate contradiction in crisis

on being able to describe something like a *rational learning process*. Accordingly, the validity claim of immanent criticism resides in the rational character of the transformation process that it makes use of. It is founded on the notion that the results of immanent criticism—the transformation that it has initiated—represent in each case the *correct* (and *unavoidable*) solution to a problem or a crisis to which a particular situation (a social practice or institution) has succumbed. The norms and practices raise a validity claim with reference to which they then either fail or are transformed. The ground of the validity of immanent criticism would then be marked by something akin to a "historical index." If one takes seriously my thesis that forms of life are problem-solving competences, it consists in the rationality of an experiential or learning process that can be understood as the history of solutions to problems or as the history of overcoming shortcomings or crises.

Internal and immanent criticism differ as regards their normative power not so much in their respective starting points; the norms and practices to which immanent criticism refers are also in the first instance factually given.

What is valid is encountered in a particular historical and social constellation. The difference resides in the fact that subsequently this starting point is justified in the process of criticism. Normative rightness (like epistemic truth) is not something "out there" but is the result of engagement in the process of criticism. Thus, the plausibility and applicability of the model of immanent criticism depend on the possibility of demonstrating that such a process is *rational*.

IV

THE DYNAMICS OF CRISIS AND THE RATIONALITY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Political revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense . . . that existing
institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed
by an environment that they have in part created.

—THOMAS KUHN

It will become evident that it is not a question of drawing a great mental
dividing line between past and future, but of *realising* the thoughts of the
past. Lastly, it will become evident that mankind is not beginning a
new work, but is consciously carrying into effect its old work.

—KARL MARX

Forms of life, I have claimed, are problem-solving entities. The problems under discussion here, however, do not arise once and for all and always in the same way. They are historically situated and normatively predefined, and they are the result of past solutions to problems that lead to new problems, which are in turn historically situated and normatively constituted. Thus, solutions to problems (and, correspondingly, forms of life) that have been achieved are, if you will, intermediate stages in problem-solving processes. But if solutions can be appropriate or inappropriate, they are so against the background of the dynamic of contradictions and crises that the respective forms of life have undergone as problem-solving entities; their success or failure has a historical and contextual index. According to my thesis, therefore, forms of life are a result of a conflict-driven process of social transformation whose rationality can be understood and judged as a history of problem-solving only against the backdrop of the history of this process.

These reflections place my initial question concerning the criticizability of forms of life in a new perspective. It is no longer the individual solution to a problem that can prove to be appropriate or inappropriate, rational or irrational, good or bad, but the historical dynamic of the transformation process that it sets in motion. The rationality of the sequence of solutions to problems itself—as something that can be described in the best case as a learning process—thereby becomes the criterion for the success of forms of life. Such a transformation is rational not by virtue of a normative reference point "out there" but, following the account of the ground of validity of immanent criticism in Chapter 6, because and insofar as it describes an intelligible experiential or learning process that can be understood as a history of superseding deficiencies or crises. Not every dynamic is productive, however, not every way of processing an experience can be deemed satisfactory or adequate, and quelling a crisis is not necessarily the same thing as resolving it. There are also "regressive reaction formations" and problematic ways of shutting one's eyes to the reality of conflicts. In short, there are successful problem-solving processes but also deficient ones. Thus, a very schematic answer to the question of when a form of life can be deemed successful could be formulated as follows: a successful form of life is something that can be understood as the result of a successful dynamic of transformation. Conversely, forms of life are bad, irrational, or inappropriate insofar as they are marked by systemic blockages or disruptions with regard to the perception and solution of problems and correspondingly are the result of failed or deficient transformation processes.

Transition to the Question of "How"

In light of the foregoing, what is at issue is no longer only the *result,* that is, the appropriateness, success, or rationality of the solution itself that is posited with a form of life. We must instead examine the *character of the process* that led to a particular solution. Thus, the question "How can good forms of life be distinguished from bad, irrational, or inappropriate ones?" becomes the meta-question: "How can successful social transformation processes be distinguished from unsuccessful (or irrational) ones?" In this way, the substantive question about the *content* of successful forms of life is replaced by the (in some respects) more formal question concerning how forms of life unfold and the dynamics of their development.

A proposal by Ernst Tugendhat can help explain this "formalization." Tugendhat's proposal is to reinterpret the question of the good life in such a way that it is no longer a matter of *what* is ethically required for a good life but instead of *how* this life is lived.[1] If we accept this distinction, then the decisive question for evaluating forms of life would no longer be *what* must be realized in them—that is, what specific substantive contents, what practices and institutions, they must contain—so that forms of life can count as going well. Instead, we must examine *how* these practices arose, how they are established and maintained, and whether the solutions to problems that they embody can be regarded as more appropriate reactions to the problems in question. Then the point of convergence of such reflections is not so much that they set certain forms of life apart from others in a detailed and ethically distinct way; rather, it is more a matter of qualifying developmental and transformation processes as successful social learning processes in contrast to regressive dynamics. Criticism of forms of life thereby becomes a kind of metacriticism of historical social processes.

If, as we saw at the end of Part 2, there are notorious interpretive disputes over the distinguishing features of problems, and even more so over what can count as solutions, then the present answer strategy suggests a way out of the dilemma. However, a substantive explication of this answer involves a wealth of presuppositions.

Progress as a Successful Learning Process

In order to provide such an explication, the final part of this study will have to examine in greater detail the *internal dynamics* of forms of life. For, insofar as forms of life appear to be crisis-prone problem-solving processes or occurrences *[Problemlösungsgeschehen],* this clearly implies a developmental logic. If the standards of rationality of a form of life are constituted through the chain of experiences of their failures and the responses to these failures, then the standards in question denote a historically achieved level at which new crises must be understood and mastered. To put it loosely, rendering such a dynamic of enrichment and differentiation plausible brings something like the idea of social *progress* into play. But what enables us to say that, in a sequence of changing social practices and forms of life, something not only *changes* but also *becomes better?* In terms of which criteria, therefore, can such processes be qualified as progress?

My proposal for developing such criteria is that the dynamic in question should be conceived as a *learning process.* In other words, the quality of the dynamic should be judged by whether it is a genuine learning process. Such learning processes are triggered by experiences of the failure and the inadequacy of a form of life as measured by the requirements imposed on it or posed with it. So something is in fact *learned* only where problems that arise can be mastered reflexively at a certain normative level in the mode of a process of enrichment and differentiation. Thus, whether forms of life are the result of such a learning process that is successful in this sense and whether they facilitate or impede further such learning processes becomes the criterion for their success and rationality. Such a learning process is not just a matter of overcoming problems as such. As we have seen, an important feature of forms of life is that engaging in them involves reflection, hence that a (collective) self-understanding and pattern of interpretation becomes established in relation to them. Thus, whether a form of life succeeds as a learning process is also a question of whether this process is accessible to reflection—or, more generally, of how those who are involved in a form of life can conduct themselves toward it or relate to it. Hence, this is also a matter (again loosely adapting Tugendhat's motif) of the collective accessibility or inaccessibility of experiences.

The shift in perspective proposed here from the question of the possibility of criticism of forms of life to their internal learning dynamic represents, on the one hand, an easing of the requirement to provide substantive answers to ethical questions. At the same time, however, it takes on new baggage insofar as it seems to involve a shift from ethics to assumptions concerning progress inspired by a philosophy of history.[2] The assumption that a progressive development is induced by crisis-riven transformations is by no means an unproblematic implication of the account I have developed so far. And the claim to be able to demonstrate meaningful criteria of rationality for the dynamics of social change involves a considerable burden of argument. At the same time, however, the proposal to understand such a dynamic as involving learning processes triggered by problems and crises and to examine deficiencies as deficiencies with regard to learning should go some way toward mitigating this burden. "Progress," according to my proposal, should not take its bearings from an externally posited, predetermined goal "out there" nor should it be oriented to a "truth of history" as an "Archimedean point" located outside of the process itself. Rather, it should be judged in terms of criteria that are inherently directed to the process of transformation itself. Furthermore, if these transformation processes are interpreted as learning processes, then what is meant is not an automatic and compelling developmental process. And not only does such a learning process not have any fixed a priori goal, or so I will argue; it is also not clear how the dynamic of problems and crises posited here could arrive at an end that can be determined from the outset.[3] Finally, the motif of learning processes in relation to forms of life does not assume that humankind as a whole is progressing. Rather, it refers to processes of different magnitudes that stand in different relationships to each other but without having to claim to constitute on aggregate a uniform progressive development. Then there is not just one, central crisis, but diverse and possibly mutually interfering sources of disturbance, though they can also be systematically interconnected. What I envisage is a reformulation of a strong position in the philosophy of history that specifically rejects the latter's teleological orientation—that is, the assumption that social development involves an unavoidable and necessary sequence of stages—but instead in a way "pragmatically deflates" it and, in addition, can be related to diverse (also small-scale) transformations, without prejudging their interplay within a greater whole.[4] (Of course, independently of this, a variety of interdependencies and interactions can be analyzed in the sense of a "modular" concept of forms of life.)

Another deflationary aspect follows from the *methodological status* of the assumptions presented here: The operative conception of learning processes is a *normative* one—that is, I am not suggesting that history as we know it actually assumed or will assume the form of such a learning process. Thus, it is not a matter of *reconstructing an actual progressive development* or of predicting its occurrence. Nevertheless, the conception of problem-solving learning processes defended here is not external to the dynamic of forms of life or to the associated transformations of the actual development. It does not merely bring external normative criteria to bear on this dynamic. The normative developmental logic in question is implicit in the way problems unfold within forms of life and is suggested by them. The task, therefore, is to reconstruct a dynamic of learning processes that may be required in a certain sense by actually existing historical-social problem constellations, without necessarily already being realized.[5] Neither do these learning processes always already exist, therefore, nor is it merely that they *should* exist only from the perspective of an external critical observer. My point is that rejecting or missing out on such learning processes has costs, which can be described (as in Chapter 4) as ethical-functional crises or normative failure and, with reference to the idea of progress, as regression.

Approach and Structure of Part 4

This is not the place to develop a comprehensive and material theory of social change. Here I will first examine the structural implications of the assumption of "rational learning processes." Thus, in the context of this study, it will only be possible to present a conceptual analysis of the course taken by and the presuppositions of such processes, understood in ideal-typical terms. My aim will be to provide an explication of the conceptual presuppositions of a certain understanding of social learning processes. What form can problems or crises assume, and what role do they play in how the processes of change to be examined unfold? How should we imagine the course taken by a problem-solving process or a process of overcoming a crisis, and when can a social development be understood as a learning process at all? Finally, what conclusions can we draw from this as regards the possible obstructions and shortcomings of such learning processes?

Since I have already drawn extensively on Hegel's theory of ethical life in the preceding argument, it seems advisable to follow his conception of a dialectical dynamic of the successive historical-social formations here as well. As the problem of immanent criticism has also shown, however, conceptualizing the learning dynamic that I am seeking calls for a pragmatist reinterpretation of these motifs founded on a theory of practice. I would now like to derive the conceptual resources for such a reinterpretation from a discussion of two other authors—namely, John Dewey and Alasdair MacIntyre. Central to this fourth part of the study will be a comparative examination of the fundamentally different basic conceptual orientations they provide for understanding crisis-prone social dynamics, in the hope that this will shed more light on the structure of such dynamics and how they unfold and enable us to elaborate a systematic model of successful social learning processes of forms of life.

To this end, Chapter 7 will present a systematic outline of the problem. Here I will provide a preliminary conceptual-phenomenological explanation of how the motif of learning, but also that of successful or failed learning processes, can be understood and what presuppositions they involve. The subsequent chapters examine in greater detail the possibility of a philosophical conceptualization of social learning processes through an examination of Dewey, MacIntyre, and Hegel. Chapter 8 offers an introductory presentation of the approaches of the three philosophers as theories of social learning processes induced by crises. Chapter 9 asks what form social problems, crises, or contradictions assume from the perspective of these authors and discusses the appropriateness of different conceptions for thematizing form-of-life problems. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses their respective conceptions of the dynamics of problem-solving processes and proposes an understanding of "dialectical-pragmatic" learning processes that is intended to do justice to both the specific character of problems and the open-endedness of problem-solving processes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Successful and Failed Learning Processes

WHAT IS IMPLIED by the idea of successful or failing social learning process in relation to forms of life? In an attempt to clarify this question, in the first section of this chapter I will explain the concepts of “change,” “development,” “learning,” and “progress” and demarcate them from each other. In the second section I will ask how the structure of individual learning processes can be transferred to the supraindividual nexus of a form of life. In the third section I will use examples to illustrate what could be meant by successful and deficient learning or experiential processes and what the evaluation of their quality as learning processes entails. Finally, in the fourth section I will work out the presuppositions implied by a conception of learning processes as processes that exhibit a problem development that becomes progressively richer and more differentiated.

7.1 Change, Development, Learning, Progress

The competences that a child acquires in the course of her development can be described unproblematically as progress attributable to certain learning and maturing processes and the processing of experiences. The development in question involves an increase in capabilities with reference to the goal of growing up, mastering life situations, and acquiring the requisite competences to lead a self-sufficient life in society. The description of development as progress is relatively uncontroversial in the case of a developing child because here it is evident that the child undergoes changes *as such* (from crawling to running or from laboriously deciphering first words to reading), furthermore that these changes exhibit a direction (from not being able to do certain things to being able to do them), and, finally, that this direction is a progressive one in which each successive level of development is relatively irreversible (once a child has learned to walk or to read, it is very unlikely that she will completely forget how to do so again). Moreover, the goal of this development—growing up, living a self-sufficient life—is relatively uncontroversial and is generally viewed in a positive light, aside from certain differences in how this goal is formulated and the shape it assumes. Yet the moments in question are nevertheless not trivial—and they are even less so the further removed the application of the criteria mentioned becomes from such familiar areas of application. Each of the motifs outlined here is in need of explanation.

(1) If someone undergoes a *change,* then she will be different after the change from what she was before. But not every change is a learning process. If I wake up one morning with the ability to walk on the ceiling, then I have indeed undergone a rather unexpected change. But nobody will claim that I had *learned* to walk on the ceiling. Similarly, a child who upon returning from vacation is able to reach the sink for the first time without help has not *learned* how to reach the sink; she is now simply able to do this.

(2) In contrast to my sudden ability to walk on the ceiling, however, the change in the child is easily explained: she has grown, that is, she has developed. *Development* means (at least in the context of child development) a movement directed to something. According to a common understanding, the developing capabilities are already laid out in it (or in the child's genetic program) as a kind of germ cell. The developmental process in question involves potentials that emerge almost spontaneously, of necessity and without decisive action on the part of the subjects concerned. Educational theory makes a corresponding distinction between *maturation* and *learning,* even though it may be unclear under which heading certain phenomena should be classified.[1] The active participation of the subject may therefore serve as a criterion for distinguishing *learning processes* from other kinds of change. Learning, in contrast to maturation and development, would then be a process that would not occur *anyway*—that is, even without the involvement of the subject.

(3) What, then, is *learning,* and how does it function? If we want to avoid reductionist behaviorist models of behavioral conditioning, then learning means the acquisition of competences, an increase in knowledge that marks a permanent change in the behavior of the learner and ideally the cognitive penetration and appropriation of what has been learned.[2] Learning is an active process of enrichment and differentiation. Thus, it not only involves an increase in knowledge; the increased knowledge in turn ensures that learning as a process becomes more multilayered and complex. The fact that you have learned something does not mean that from now on you respond differently to certain stimuli or situations as a result of a kind of training process, but that you know something more and *different* from before and can make sophisticated use of this knowledge.[3]

Here a moment of *reflexivity* plays a decisive role. If, having previously done something wrongly—for example, failing to open the little screw on the bicycle valve before beginning to inflate the tires—I suddenly start doing it correctly, this does not necessarily mean that I have *learned* how to operate the valve.[4] It could be a coincidence that I got it right this time—and the next time, I do it wrongly again. For the learning effect to be stable, I need to *know what I am doing* to a certain extent. This reflexive knowledge may be more or less demanding and need not be fully explicit. In the case of the bicycle valve, I will have learned how to deal with it when I know that in the past I always did something wrong (I never opened the little screw before attaching the pump, so the air always escaped) and now I know how to do it correctly (I unscrew it first). The reflexivity involved would be more demanding if, when operating the valve, I had even understood how it works. But as long as no further problems arise, this is not necessary in order to understand the process as one of learning.[5] The reflexive knowledge thus described can also fade into the background in the course of a process of habituation, and what is known must be repeatedly put into practice in order to qualify as learning. (Accordingly, knowing how it works but still repeatedly operating the valve incorrectly means that the learning process is still incomplete. This becomes particularly apparent in the case of processes such as learning a piece of music.) Learning, thus conceived, rests on a combination of practical exercise and knowledge, of reflexive and habitual aspects and of understanding and ability. It is by virtue of these two moments that the next demands on the individual can be processed against a background that has been transformed by the past learning process. For precisely this reason, "learning" does not mean merely quantitative accumulation, but involves an active appropriation of experience that becomes progressively richer and more differentiated. It involves a qualitative increase in knowledge that changes the knower herself and the kind of knowledge she possesses and also reorganizes her competences.

(4) One of the crucial problems when it comes to the faculty of learning is that of the transition from not knowing to knowing and from the old to the new.[6] Can this transition be reconstructed or even anticipated? Or is it discontinuous and unpredictable so that there is no foreseeable and controllable transition from one state to the other? For example, should one speak of learning processes at all only where there is a regulated (explicable, controllable, and intended) transition from ignorance to knowledge and from not being able to being able to do something? Evidently, learning is not always an explicitly intentional process. We learn certain things implicitly and notice that we have learned something—behind our backs, as it were—only when we apply it in a particular case, even if here one can make what is implicit explicit and, in case of doubt, one must be able to make it explicit. Children learn basic skills simply by being confronted with a particular environment. For example, they acquire linguistic skills by picking up on how adults deal with language, and they learn spatial orientation by being in complex buildings. Thus, there is such a thing as implicit learning. And within regulated and controlled learning processes, there are uncontrollable leaps (which cannot be forced). For example, the moment when sequences of strokes on a page appear to a child as letters and words can be prepared, and the ability to recognize words and sequences of letters can be trained; however, the qualitative transition point that such preparation and training tries to induce is difficult to anticipate.

(5) If learning has an active connotation, having *experiences* seems by contrast to refer to a passive and receptive dimension of processes of change. But in fact these are merely differences in emphasis. "Having had an experience" in an emphatic sense means that you have appropriated something that happened to you. The ability to have experiences is based in turn on a certain receptivity that first makes it possible to absorb what was experienced and on the ability to process it and connect it with other experiences. Experiences in the emphatic sense transform and modify our relationship

to the world and to ourselves. Thus, they transform us and, as a result, how we see the world. Experiences are accordingly something that happens to us, although we are at the same time actively involved in their acquisition. The ability to learn, thus understood, is closely bound up with the ability to have experiences and in this way to interact with one's environment.

(6) Learning processes mark *progress* within a process of change: something not only *changes* but becomes *better.* But even if one assumes an unspectacular concept of progress, thus small, particular achievements as opposed to grand and comprehensive concepts of social and historical progress, the concept of progress still involves a wealth of presuppositions. According to Georg Henrik von Wright:

> Progress is change for the better; regress change for the worse. The definitions split the concept [of progress] in two components: the notion of change and the notion of goodness.[7]

Progress is correspondingly a descriptive-evaluative concept, and this is at the root of the difficulty it poses.[8] Whether a certain individual or social condition is undergoing a change can still be answered descriptively by pointing to certain changes and describing how a prior state differs from the one that follows it, but whether this change is a change for the better is a matter for evaluation. Gereon Wolters presents this point clearly in his formal characterization of the idea of progress:

> Phenomena are never progressive as such, but always with respect to at least one property that for some reason appears to be "positive," "desirable," or "better" for someone. "Progress" means that this property or these properties increase in quantity or quality.[9]

But even if the criterion of progress cannot be separated from such evaluations, we must ask whether these norms can really only be applied to the empirically observable change from the outside or whether they cannot be inscribed in the dynamic of the change itself, so that it is not so easy to separate the descriptive and the evaluative components of the description of a phenomenon as "progress."

(7) A final problem is that of the goal and possible end of a learning process. Even if defining something as progress depends on the evaluation of a direction of development, it does not follow that the development in question is necessarily toward a *goal* that is already known.[10] In contrast

to the implications of the concept of development, in the case of learning processes one does not have to assume a fixed goal that is already known or that is even already implicit in the developing conditions or individuals themselves. I speak of a *learning process* and not of a *development process* in relation to forms of life in order to accentuate this circumstance and to suggest the possible openness of this process.

By now it should have become clearer what I am getting at with the assumption of (societal) *learning processes:* unlike changes per se, learning processes are progressive developments that become richer and more differentiated—that is, developments toward the better. In contrast to developmental processes conceived as maturation, however, the processes in question are reflexive ones that are not unavoidable and do not occur of their own accord. Rather, they are shaped by actors and as such can be thought of as open and never-ending processes.

7.2 Are Forms of Life Capable of Learning?

It is an undisputed fact that forms of life undergo *changes* and that practices undergo modification and transformation over the course of time. But who is supposed to be the author, the initiator, or the bearer of such changes and how does such a change take place in the mode of learning? With respect to forms of life, these are complex social-theoretical and socio-ontological questions. Here I will only offer an outline of how these issues can be understood in the light of the reflections on the internal structure of forms of life presented above (in particular, Chapters 2 and 3).

So in what sense are forms of life capable of learning? How can the possibility of learning be transferred from individual to supraindividual experiential processes, to learning processes whose subject is supposed to be a form of life? *Who* has learned or, conversely, not learned something here? Who has fallen back behind a level already reached? Who has spurned experiences or is prevented from having experiences? The merely aggregative notion that collective processes are composed exclusively of individual stances and actions—and that collective learning processes are correspondingly only a matter of connecting the learning of individuals—remains as unsatisfactory in relation to these phenomena as the assumption of a collective macrosubject that would be structured in a similar way to a single subject.[11]

I would like to touch on the questions that arise here at least briefly. If we compare the idea of social learning processes with the competing model of evolutionary developments—that is, the mechanism of variation and selection—we see that nothing is actually *learned* in evolutionary processes. In evolutionary selection, some of the countless possibilities prevail. If something develops for the better, then this is not a directed, intentionally guided process but the result of a successful variant imposing itself. According to this model, the losers disappear from the scene altogether, whereas those who (by chance) have done things right survive and prevail without themselves exhibiting any gain in experience. If the supraindividual figuration has in the end changed, then neither have the individuals learned anything properly speaking in the process, nor can one meaningfully speak of learning by the formation as such.[12] In order to count as a learning process, the bearer of this process must have undergone a change itself. Therefore, the talk of social learning processes must assume such an *identity in difference*. The corresponding form of life must be simultaneously the same and different following a learning-induced transformation. If an experience is supposed to have been gained through learning, then the subject of this experience must still be recognizable in its identity, and at the same time it must have changed. Learning implies continuity in discontinuity. Furthermore, it must be assumed that the new forms of life and practical performances have not prevailed simply behind the backs of the individuals involved. If a learning process occurs, then existing practices are transformed through the collective and (to a certain extent) reflexive transformation brought about by those participating in the ensemble of practices in question.

However, these assumptions involve a wealth of presuppositions and at first sight seem to be at odds with a quasi-evolutionary moment regarding the dynamics of change of forms of life: rarely, and then only in individual aspects, are the changes in social practices and forms of life as a whole intended, consciously directed, desired, and made in an awareness of their consequences—not to mention in a way transparent for all involved. This is a result of the complex concatenation of individual actions and attitudes at work here, which fit together to form ensembles of social practices, and of the existence of the unintended results of actions. But how could the capacity to learn nevertheless be transferred to forms of life?

Forms of Life as a Learning Environment

To begin with, let us recall that forms of life are supraindividual ensembles of practices that structure individual actions, just as, conversely, they are created by the latter (see Part 1). Forms of life, as we have seen, are not invented by individuals; nor do they exist without the involvement of those who participate in them. They are phenomena of a second nature whose component practices are mastered through practice. One is socialized into them, but one also assimilates them and thereby helps to shape them through participation. But what holds for the emergence and the conditions of *existence* of forms of life also holds for their conditions of *transformation.* Forms of life change neither solely as a result of the direct intentional action of individuals nor without this; they involve a mélange of active and passive, intentional and nonintentional, processes. It is indeed individual actors who react to problems by changing existing practices, establishing new ones or appropriating old ones in new ways.[13] But since these acting individuals simultaneously rely on prior existing practices for their practical options and in order to articulate their position, it follows that the transformation of forms of life also involves a reciprocal relationship between an enabling-structuring form of life and those who fulfill and constitute it. The *bearers* of the change described are neither a macrosubject nor the individual subjects alone; an ensemble of practices, which is simultaneously the result and the condition of individual action, undergoes a change through the mediation of the subjects. Then individuals (or collectives) change social practices, whose transformation in turn exerts effects back on individual possibilities of experiencing and learning.

But to what extent should these changes be understood as *learning?* Forms of life can encounter problems or succumb to crises—and individuals have experiences in the context of forms of life. When a crisis occurs, the (problem-solving) resources of the corresponding forms of life prove to be inadequate; the problems that arise cannot be solved with the established practices or the latter give rise to the problematic situation in the first place. The supersession of such a situation now leads to modification or transformation, or even to the establishment of new practices, which in turn transform the structure of the ensemble of practices in terms of which the individuals understand themselves. In order to understand this transformation as a learning process, it must be possible (according to what was said above about learning) to find a moment of reflection and in addition a medium in which the experiences that led to the transformation, and the means for coping with the crisis, can be transmitted. On the one hand, it is individuals who learn by gaining experience with the old and the new practices and reflecting upon them. In this way, the learning experience becomes sedimented in the transformed practices. But the framework of these practical processes—that is, the form of life itself—can also “learn” in the mode of reflection insofar as it not only changes because of the experience sedimented in it, but in the process also modifies its interpretive framework.

These complex relationships can be explained using an analogy that refers to Dewey’s concept of the “educative environment.”[14] If an educative environment is a “an environment in which [human beings] act, think and feel,”[15] an interactive practical nexus in which experiences are made and dispositions are formed through learning, then a form of life would be a learning environment that, because learning occurs within it, itself at the same time learns. It functions as an educative environment insofar as it facilitates and structures learning and, in Dewey’s sense, represents both the enabling and inhibiting conditions of one’s actions. If one can say of such an educative environment that it itself learns because and insofar as learning occurs within it, then this is because the experiences thus made “accumulate” within it—that is, in the practices that constitute it—as practice-guiding interpretations. Learning, in the case of forms of life—if we transfer the motifs of implicit and habitual learning to the changes that forms of life undergo—depends on feedback between actions and the results of the action and on the reciprocal relationship between individual and supraindividual interpretive processes. Blockages to learning exist, by contrast, where such a process is disrupted, which always means that the form of life in question does not function as a context of reflection, that is, that it does not have (or no longer has) any successful mechanisms of self-understanding, of self-transformation, and of reflection on past experiences.

Thus, if forms of life are able to learn, then as supraindividual formations they can possess a form of rationality that goes beyond individual rationality; conversely, collective (structural) blockages to learning impede the ability of individuals to learn, without this always being traceable to an individual learning disability.[16]

7.3 Deficient Learning Processes

But how can one explain (and what does it mean to say) that, as I have claimed, not only the outcome of a learning process but also the learning process itself can be regarded as successful or deficient? What arguments can be adduced for the rationality or irrationality, the success or failure, of learning processes *with reference to how they unfold?*

A case of a failed learning process is, trivially speaking, one marked by stagnation rather than transformation, one in which problems are not recognized or a specific problem is not addressed. Here change as such is blocked. However, failing or deficient learning processes also exist in which, although change occurs, the nature of the reaction nevertheless makes it appear doubtful that something has in fact been learned.[17] For my question, it is important to work out in what sense, when learning processes fail, the *process* itself and not only its *result* can be understood as deficient. I will first illustrate this using a specific example of deficient learning processes or of blockages to learning.

Privatism Motivated by Resignation

How such learning processes unfold can be illustrated using an everyday example that has often been described in this or a similar form: A German family man in the late 1950s justifies his resigned, apolitical, and privatistic stance on world affairs on the grounds that, as someone who had been conscripted as a teenager in the final year of the war, "big politics" had only brought him misfortune. This experience taught him that one should keep out of anything that goes beyond private affairs, caring for one's family and being a decent family man. The father insists doggedly on the validity of this experience and claims that it represents a learning process.[18] Pointing out that it was not politics in general or being involved in world affairs that led to the lamented outcome, but the totalitarian mode of politicization and social mobilization and the false objectives of Nazi policy, does not challenge his interpretation of what he experienced and the conclusions he draws from this. However, his rebellious, politically active children consider this attitude to be wrong and rebel against it. They object that, specifically against the background of the experience of National Socialism, it is important and necessary to become politically involved and to try to influence political affairs. But as the debates become increasingly more heated, they also question their father's claim to what he insists was indisputably something learned through experience. Thus, they not only reject the conclusion the father has reached, the consequences he has drawn, as false; they also believe that the experiential process that he claims to have undergone and that has led to this result is itself inherently deficient. When the children engaging in polemics against their father assert that it was precisely these "good family men" who made National Socialism possible, they are already challenging his interpretation of the starting point. And when they stress how inappropriate it is to regard primarily one's own botched youth and the hardships of reconstruction following defeat in the war as a "misfortune," their point is that the bitter experience cited by the father reflects a strangely distorted interpretation and is based on a peculiarly displaced perception. In other words, they are contesting the authenticity of his experience.

A fruitful interpretative hypothesis for our purposes is that this concentration on one's own misfortune is a mechanism of repression or displacement that is not only immoral but, as Hannah Arendt remarked during her first visit to Germany after the war, is the effect of a dramatic loss of reality.[19] What I find interesting about this case is that this amounts to evaluating the reaction described itself as a withdrawal marked by resignation, as a refusal to acknowledge the reality of what happened. This genesis already makes the father's position appear false.[20] It is crucial for the question I am addressing that the falsehood of the contested position is traced back to this genesis, and hence that the privatistic reaction is criticized as inadequate on account of this deficient genesis—and not only because the result can be evaluated as false on external grounds. Here, therefore, transformation processes as such are being qualified.

Regardless of the view one takes on the content of the positions under discussion, the conflict described illustrates that not every conclusion drawn from a past experience can or must be accepted as an equally valid learning process. Learning processes can also fail, so that nothing is learned, problems are not acknowledged or are interpreted incorrectly, and false and misguided conclusions are drawn from experiences. Then one can identify resistances to experience and a refusal to acknowledge conflicting information—that is, mechanisms that lead to regressive reaction formations. When such distorting mechanisms are at work, the appeal to experience is misplaced because a practical inference is being made on the basis of questionable alternatives that must themselves be problematized. The alternative to totalitarian political mobilization, for example, need not be privatistic "sitting on the fence"; it can also be democratic participation—this, at any rate, is how the children argue against their father.

Both motifs—that of regression, which I will interpret as (deficient) problem-solving through retreat that does not measure up to the level of the problem, and that of shutting one's eyes to conflicting experiences—can now be applied not only to individual blockages to learning but also to the description of collective blockages to learning.

If we remain within the thematic field already alluded to, then we can find cases of supraindividual blockages to learning and their interpretation that are not so different from my interpretation of the family drama cited here. For example, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer consider the development of German society toward National Socialism, to condense it into a slogan, as the regression of an entire society, as a regressive reaction to unprocessed or unprocessable conflicts pervading the Enlightenment and modernity. But regression is the prototype of a deficient learning process or a blockage to learning. Helmuth Plessner's notion of the "belated nation" and Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's *The Inability to Mourn* also analyze the collective rejection of learning experiences in relation to the German past.[21] And Martin Riesebrodt's analysis of the advance of Christian fundamentalism in the United States interprets this phenomenon in a mirror image sense to Islamic fundamentalism as an inadequate reaction to modernization processes, and hence as a distorted way of processing social transformations and crisis experiences.[22]

Result and Process

It may not seem surprising at first sight that the incorrect result and the failed process are connected in such cases. But this diagnosis is less trivial than it looks in that there can also be solutions that are at first sight correct but are nevertheless the result of distorted learning processes. Let us imagine that the family man introduced above, instead of opting for privatistic retreat, had chosen democratic involvement. Even if we assume that this is in itself a right and commendable stance, it could still be the case that he was led to this conclusion by a distorted way of processing his experiences. Thus, to remain with the example, throwing himself unreflectively into the politics of democratic reconstruction could also be an expression of a complex, concealed "inability to mourn," and hence could again impede an appropriate processing of what happened, albeit in a completely different way. For instance, it could be a strategy of repression in accordance with the motto "Now that we are immediately doing everything better, there is no need for extended mourning over what occurred." But, in such a case, even though the outcome is in line with what we might expect the result of a successful learning process to be, the learning process would also clearly be intrinsically deficient. Following my thesis, it should now be possible to show that distorted learning processes give rise to resulting costs and impediments to action, so that even the "correct" result of a deficient learning process is untenable in the long run and will turn out to be unproductive. If caring for one's family is the result of a process of repression and denial, then this can also end up by destroying this private idyll because the children find the atmosphere of silence and unquestioning acceptance oppressive, and democratic involvement undertaken for reasons of repression may fail when confronted with further challenges. It can be surmised, therefore, that deficient learning processes are invariably unmasked in the long run as dysfunctionalities of the ensemble of practices concerned and hence as failed solutions to problems.

7.4 Why Does History Matter?

If we follow my proposal, adequate solutions to problems are solutions that can be understood as the results of successful *[gelingend]* (real) experiential and learning processes. But why is it that what counts in the case of social learning processes is the process, the history of a solution, and not only the *success [Erfolg]* of a proposed solution, regardless of where it comes from and whether it is rational or not? Why should the *history* of the solution to the problem contribute anything to its rationality? Why should its *genesis* say anything about its *validity?* As we have already seen, underlying this thesis are several assumptions about the nature of problems and how learning processes unfold.

The first assumption on which the thesis of the historicity of problem-solving rationality rests is that the problems forms of life face are always *second order problems*. They are not only de facto impediments to action but also disruptions within a framework of action and interpretation. Let us recall the categorization of different conceptions of problems in Chapter 4. When a period of drought leads to a famine, this is indeed a problem, but the famine as such is not a problem of the form of life of the group affected. In other words, it is a problem *for* the corresponding form of life but not for that reason one *with* it. The aspect of the problem bearing on the form of life only becomes virulent when one takes into account how the community in question responds to the drought and the competences the community possesses for making provisions for or coping with such natural occurrences.

At this second level of problems, it now becomes important that, with regard to forms of life, the perception of the problem is by its very character already normatively imbued and shaped by comprehensive interpretations of the world. Problems become recognizable *as* problems only against the backdrop of a cultural horizon of interpretation and of a normative horizon of expectation. Conversely, however, the occurrence of problems can lead to this horizon itself also becoming thematized as problematic, when it becomes apparent that it cannot incorporate certain challenges and requirements—requirements that a form of life makes *on itself.* Such problems are *reflexive.* They are not only problems *for* but also problems *with* a form of life, and as such they are always also problems that this form of life has *with itself.*[23] In this sense, forms of life are analogous to the self-interpreting character of persons.[24] As "self-interpreting entities," human beings not only do and embody something, but in their doing they understand themselves as something. They develop concepts of themselves and formulate these concepts as a claim to the right (practical) relationship to self and the world—and one to which they can fail to measure up.

A third assumption that builds on this moment of reflection now becomes crucial for the relevance of the historical dimension. Because the basis of validity and the normative self-understanding of a given form of life are always also at stake in how problems are perceived and resolved, expectations and interpretations that give rise to problems do not come out of nowhere. They arise instead in a historical succession of crises (problems), ways of coping with them (solutions to problems), and the resulting development of new problems that spring from the deficiency of the solutions arrived at. This establishes a certain level of expectations, of requirements for coping with the corresponding crises, below which the solution to such a (newly emerging) problem must not fall.

Establishing such problem-solving levels and the concomitant determinateness of the problem now restricts the scope of possible solutions, so that, as a fourth assumption, only *specific* solutions are possible in the case of historically situated, second order reflexive problems. For they must satisfy those normative expectations that are already responsible for certain phenomena being conceivable as a problem or as a symptom of a crisis in the first place. To put it very schematically, structural unemployment develops into a crisis of the form of life of bourgeois society only within the historically evolved horizon of expectation that this society should ensure that its members are able to participate in the world of work and only on the analytical assumption that this problem has a social cause. The solutions to the problems thus described must take into account the established understanding of the problem, therefore, because this very understanding of the problem is responsible for the fact that the problem arises as such in the first place. The solution must be situated at the level on which the problems are formulated if it is to be even conceivable as an answer to these problems (in their specific, determinate character). To refer to the examples introduced above, neither praying to St. Christopher for rain as a response to recurrent periods of drought nor returning to feudal working relationships in an attempt to combat unemployment would be commensurate with the established ways in which the respective problems are posed. For these solutions would not match the level of complexity of the problems and precisely in this sense represent *regressive* solutions.[25] If the open labor market characteristic of work in bourgeois society solves the problems of feudal work (as they arose, according to some views, at both the normative and functional levels[26]), then the solution to the problems or crises resulting from "wage labor that is free in a double sense" must begin at a level that has learned from these previous attempts at solutions—that is, from the present situation.[27] The result is the complex level of requirements of a nested structure of intermeshing problems that becomes progressively richer and more differentiated.

A fifth and final assumption is that typically the respective solutions are *not simply false* but one-sided or incomplete, or that they absolutize a moment that cannot stand on its own. There is always something to be said for them—as is evident in the case of the replacement of unfree labor by an “open labor market.” Only through the establishment of the latter does it become possible to pose and solve the problem in a new way. The picture of problem-solving processes to which this gives rise is thus not static, but dynamic in a complex way; it is not simply that the same problem is not solved, or is not solved optimally, and a new solution is sought over and over again,[28] but that the problem itself undergoes a historical transformation. Solutions must be able to respond to this historically contextualized problem at the level at which the problem is posed. Thus, introducing a form of labor service that corresponded to the reintroduction of Dickensian workhouses, even if it somehow worked, would not be an appropriate solution to the specific problem confronting bourgeois society. So too, the “national community” cannot offer a rational, but only a regressive, solution to the social tensions that arise with industrial modernity.

It is precisely for this reason that the history of a problem is relevant for solving it. Only *those* solutions are rational that represent an appropriate response to a described problem, that is implicit in the given conditions. Therefore, the short answer to the question of why the history of a problem-solving process plays a role in the appropriateness of the solution to a problem is because this history already plays a decisive role in how the problem is posed and described as far as social formations and practices are concerned. Expressed in the vocabulary of the model of posing problems, therefore, the model of a dynamic of forms of life is reformulated as a *process that becomes progressively richer and more differentiated*. The next chapter will address the content of precisely this moment of enrichment and differentiation through a discussion of Hegel, Dewey, and MacIntyre.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Crisis-Induced Transformations

Dewey, MacIntyre, Hegel

If I draw on Dewey, MacIntyre, and Hegel in what follows in order to gain an understanding of social transformation as a progressive learning process, then it is because these authors, in spite of their differences, share the assumption, which also informs my reflections, that forms of life have a crisis-prone, dynamic character. An examination of their work enables us to determine whether criteria for successfully addressing problems or crises can be derived from the dynamic itself.

If we follow these approaches, the dynamic of social change and historical transformation is invoked by the confrontation of existing social practices and arrangements with problems and crises that the corresponding forms of life cannot solve with the means at their disposal. This makes it necessary to change, extend, transform, or overcome practices and interpretations of the world. Then social change (in accordance with what can be described in pragmatist terms as "learning") does not assume the form of an arbitrary increase in experience and competences or random variation, but of a more or less successful response to crises and problems, to the erosion or obsolescence of existing social formations. We are now in a position to examine this very reaction formation to determine in what sense it represents a rational learning process or, alternatively, the absence of such a process. At any rate, this is the thesis that I will defend through an examination of the authors mentioned.

It seems to me that it is precisely a combination of individual aspects of their respective conceptions that is fruitful for criticism of forms of life. Whereas MacIntyre and Dewey take account of the open and experimental character of social transformation processes, Hegel provides more viable resources for assessing the rationality of the development in terms of immanent criteria; this is because a dialectical conception of learning processes is able to relate the dynamics of development to the normative justification of such changes. With Hegel, however, we encounter the problem of the possible overdetermination of this developmental dynamic: it is predetermined by the fact that all relevant factors already exist and only need to be "unfolded"—a problem that can be "remedied" through the integration of pragmatist elements. It will turn out that we can best grasp the rationality of the transformation of forms of life through such a dialectical-pragmatic learning process, which includes the specific transformative effect of our reflexive relation to this process.

I would like to present the positions to be discussed here briefly in an introductory way.

8.1 Social Change as Experimental Problem-Solving

American pragmatist John Dewey did not develop a full-scale philosophical theory of social change, nor did he have a systematically worked-out conception of collective learning as a mode of social development.[1] Nevertheless, he relates the pragmatist model of learning that he advocates not only to questions of education and to the conceptualization of processes of scientific inquiry and investigation, but also to the dynamics of modern societies. Societies are formations that are regularly confronted with changes and thus face problems to which they must constantly readapt. Thus, societies also need to learn; this insight is the hidden leitmotif of Dewey's theory of democracy. If learning is a mode of successful social change, then, conversely, blockages to learning are reasons why learning fails to take place or assumes a pathological form.

Practices of democratic self-determination facilitate learning processes and hence, in Hilary Putnam's formulation, are "the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems," the best and most rational method of coping with social changes and conflicts.[2] This "epistemological justification of democracy" (Hilary Putnam) is supplemented by a social-theoretical justification. Like Hegel and Durkheim before him, Dewey starts from the seeming paradox that in modern societies individualization, the *liberation* of individuals from premodern communal bonds, goes hand in hand with an *intensification of interdependencies.* Dewey draws the conclusion that far more domains must become objects of "public interest" in modern societies than may have been the case in traditional societies; there needs to be communication about the requirements of social cooperation under conditions of increasing complexity.[3] Democracy is then not only a form of government but, as Dewey puts it, a *way of life,* a way of shaping living together in society that arises directly from the increased need for reflection in modern societies.[4] The orientation to democratic principles is therefore not a freestanding normative requirement but "corresponds to" the sociostructural conditions of the time; it is "the idea of associated life itself,"[5] as Dewey puts it in an expression reminiscent of Marx's dictum that democracy is "the resolved mystery of all constitutions."[6]

The collective communication about the shared conditions of life and attempts to improve them is in this regard structurally analogous to the experimental problem-solving and learning processes explored by Dewey in his *Logic.* There is only a gradual difference between mundane problem-solving behavior—that is, coping with all matters of life—and processes of scientific inquiry.[7] The specifically pragmatist conceptualization of how such learning processes unfold now yields important insights into the internal structure of social change that I am interested in here and into possible connections to my problem.

Learning for Dewey is per se *problem-solving action;* learning processes are prompted by problems that arise in coping with situations. We are confronted in our at-first unproblematic practical activities with impediments to action, with practical disruptions or crises, which we strive to overcome. To Dewey's "pragmatist spirit" corresponds in this regard the fact that we understand hypotheses only by reference to their practical consequences, but also that processes of inquiry or learning are first triggered and impelled by practical problems. It is only when a functioning interaction, an unproblematic performance of an action, or a given interpretation of the world comes to a standstill, when they become incoherent or questionable, that we perceive a problem and the process of addressing the problem begins. Thus, learning is a practical process, even when it is a question of an increase in theoretical knowledge.[8] When applied to the dynamic of social developments, this means that collective learning processes begin where the conditions of social cooperation and the shape it assumes are confronted with problems or succumb to a *crisis*—thus, where the shape of our life together must include self-reflection.

(2) In Dewey, these problem-solving processes are *experimental,* although this experimental character does not only refer to a mode of testing hypothetical solutions. It implies above all that solutions can neither be derived directly nor ascertained in advance, but rely instead on innovative testing—on trying things out in the mode of trial and error. A corollary is that problem-solving processes can never be completed, that they must always be understood as *open-ended* processes whose outcome must be questioned as to whether they are a help or a hindrance when confronting other problems.

(3) In this regard, the absence of blockages to learning serves as a negative criterion, and enabling further experiences and the openness to newly emerging problems and requirements serves as a positive criterion for the success and rationality of a problem-solving process. Progressive processes can thus be identified in a free-floating way: better solutions to problems can be distinguished from worse counterparts without any need to justify progress in metaphysical terms or to situate the goal of the development in a fixed point outside of the process itself.[9] With this, Dewey shifts the focus (very much in line with my question) away from substantive questions about the possible content of the good life and toward the *internal constitution* of those processes in which we can exchange views on such questions and solve problems.

8.2 The Dynamics of Traditions

Alasdair MacIntyre—one of the most dazzling figures in Anglo-American analytic philosophy—is generally read in Germany, based on the reception of his book *After Virtue,* exclusively as a proponent of virtue ethics and as a communitarian critic of modernity. However, a much more complex picture emerges once we examine the relationship between the three central works on which his social-philosophical diagnosis of contemporary society is based.[10] MacIntyre does not merely argue (like many others) that the "liberal culture" of modernity is riven by an incurable internal dissension. Rather, his main criticism—and this makes his approach interesting for my topic—is that modernity also suffers from a characteristic *blockage to learning.*[11] In this sense, he conceives of "our" liberal, modern, capitalist societies as a tradition that has succumbed to crisis, one whose destructive dynamic is also shown by the fact that it has immunized itself into a metatradition—a tradition outside of traditions—that can no longer be criticized and as a result has simultaneously destroyed the means by which the crisis could be overcome. Thus, MacIntyre's specific critique of these societies is the second order critique that they are constitutively incapable of facilitating a reasonable debate about their design.[12]

MacIntyre's work is also based on the conviction that, in view of internal and external conflicts, the dynamic of societies, forms of life, or traditions (as he calls them) appears as a dynamic sequence of problems, crises, and their resolution. And although he is convinced that in such conflicts "rationality" cannot represent a neutral reference point located outside the lines of conflict marked by traditions, because the criteria for what counts as rational are a matter of dispute, he nevertheless assumes that one system of ethical beliefs and social practices can be superior to another. What makes MacIntyre relevant for my considerations is that he thereby derives criteria for the rationality and normative superiority of one tradition over another from the more or less rational dynamic of the development and succession of traditions.[13]

In order to understand the program thus hinted at, we need to examine MacIntyre's understanding of tradition. For MacIntyre, "traditions" are not only what is handed down in the narrower sense, but the ensemble of historically transmitted social practices and interpretations that, as a comprehensive system of reference, first enables individuals to understand themselves and others and to locate themselves in social space.[14] What is decisive here is the *dynamic* character of traditions: they maintain themselves not so much through inertia as by continuously renewing—or better, re-creating and retelling—themselves, that is, through "an argumentative retelling" that assumes the form of a conflictual progressive narrative.[15]

Such a process of renewal does not mark the breakdown but is instead the normal case of a living tradition. *Contentious debate over its own identity* is constitutive of its mode of existence:

> For what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a tradition susceptible of conflicting interpretations. If I am a Jew, I have to recognise that the tradition of Judaism is partly constituted by a continuous argument over what it means to be a Jew.[16]

Thus, even though traditions as transmission processes rest on an authoritative point of reference and crystallization, this is always only a starting point that must be processed through interpretation and argumentation and changes as the controversies unfold.[17] Then traditions are successful or vital as long as new experiences can be woven into their fabric and they can confront new requirements. Now this very procedure of renewing preservation and constant appropriation and reappropriation of a tradition is what can be conceived, in the sense of my initial question, as a social transformation process, and it can be examined as to its qualities as a collective learning process.[18]

Several aspects of MacIntyre's concept of a specific rationality of traditions are interesting for my project.

(1) Forms of life or traditions are *not monadic* but instead are open to each other, influence each other, relate to each other, and establish a (possibly competitive) relationship to each other. Here MacIntyre not only orients himself to a historical succession of forms of life but also to the historical fact of pluralism, of a multiplicity of competing traditions existing side by side. In this way, he brings into play the possibility of reciprocal influence, but also of blockages to communication, between different traditions.

(2) Conflicts between forms of life or traditions can be conceived accordingly as controversies marked by *rivalry.* This means that traditions understand themselves in some way as competing over the same thing—namely, the correct interpretation of reality and right action in reality. Therefore, traditions are not simply "as they are" but embody *claims to truth or validity,* claims to interpret the world correctly and to deal practically with the world in appropriate ways. As such, the conflicts into which they are drawn put "the resources of competing traditions to the test."[19]

(3) For relativistic and historicist conceptions, radical incompatibilities and mutually incommensurable worldviews and conceptions of the good make it impossible to develop criteria for evaluating the rationality of traditions. By contrast, MacIntyre has an interesting, historically situated, and contextualized conception of a kind of *narratively constituted historical rationality.* His proposal is that the legitimacy of the validity claims raised by a tradition is measured by its power of interpretation, by its ability not only to solve problems and overcome crises but also to relate in a reflexive way to this solution qua integrating narrative. This concept, too, takes its orientation from how the crisis-prone development itself unfolds; although

there is no absolute and transcending foundation, no external or contextless-universal point of view that could serve as a basis for evaluating different forms of life, we can nevertheless distinguish between different dynamics of overcoming crises as better and worse, as more and less appropriate.

With this outline of rational dynamics of change, which can be understood in certain respects as a moderate progressive process, MacIntyre offers both a connection with and an alternative approach to that of Hegel's thought, which he criticizes as ideological and finalistic.[20]

8.3 History as a Dialectical Learning Process

As *the* thinker of history, Hegel is also the philosopher who accorded central importance to the fact that existing social institutions and practices are the products of a dynamic of change unfolding in history. Not only is reflection on historical developments a major part of his philosophy; he conceives of the rationality of formations of ethical life also as something that evolved historically, as a product of their history. Here rationality itself, speaking very generally, is historicized. The "possession of self-conscious reason," as Hegel states in relation to the history of philosophy, is "an inheritance . . . the *result* of labour, the labour of all past generations of men," which must in each case be appropriated through reflection.[21] Hegel comprehends history in turn as a dynamic practical process that can be understood as the realization of a form of rationality thus mediated by history. If rationality is historically constituted, therefore, then conversely history is (in certain respects) rational, and it is precisely this aspect that separates Hegel from both ahistorical universalism and relativistic historicism, a position for which every historical form of life possesses its own right beyond the reach of ethical evaluation. The Hegelian model of *dialectical development* in the mode of "determinate negation" develops an especially ambitious model of a transformation process, which, on my interpretation, bears its criteria of rationality within itself.

Thus, how an experiential process that becomes progressively richer and more differentiated unfolds can be studied in a paradigmatic way in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* the "science of the experience of consciousness." In this process, consciousness, by reflecting on its shortcomings, moves from an incomplete stage that is trapped in self-deception to the next stage, a path that eventually culminates in the "spirit chapter" in a "philosophically interpreted world history"[22] in which the shapes of consciousness become "shapes of a world."[23] But the progress of social change outlined in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* also follows—sometimes more, sometimes less—such a course of development, or so it can be maintained. Here the development and decline of historical civilizations, from the Asian high cultures through the Greek world up to Hegel's time, appear as different stages of a process that can be conceived as the development of social formations following and developing out of each other in which the "consciousness of freedom" is realized.[24]

The transformation processes described by Hegel are also mediated by *crises*. In both the *Philosophy of History* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* it is the untenability and the contradictory character of an existing position that drives this beyond itself. If the resulting process is conceived in my sense as a problem-induced history of reflection, then it is a procedure of (self-)experience mediated by reflection on its own bases of validity. This procedure becomes progressively richer and more differentiated insofar as the new problem descriptions (to use my terminology) can be identified only after the previous stage has been shown to be deficient and to follow from the deficits or one-sidedness that are now becoming apparent.

Thus, Hegel shares with Dewey the notion of a learning process that unfolds in practical activities and with MacIntyre the insight that such a process goes hand in hand with reflection on those activities and the validity claims raised with them. However, Hegel's conception of historical rationality, as we shall see, is more robust than MacIntyre's narrative concept insofar as the successive positions do not merely *succeed* each other and are then retroactively integrated through narrative, but *develop* in a very specific way *out of* each other. But for this very reason, as we shall also see, it must face the question of how this conception of rationality can do justice to the openness of social learning processes but also to the plurality of forms of life existing alongside each other.

An oft-repeated accusation against Hegel sees a problematic teleological conception of the dynamics of change at work here, which, as a movement toward a preconceived goal—or, as Dewey puts it, as "gradual making explicit and outward of what is . . . wrapped up"—would be incompatible with the concept of open process rationality that I am seeking.[25] In contrast, the decisive point—or so I will claim—is that even with Hegel this process can be understood as rational (or not rational) *as such* precisely to the extent that the causes of change, which he conceives as problems and crises or contradictions, develop out of one another.[26] This would be to outline a genuine process of enrichment and differentiation and a freestanding conception of progress in which the rationality of the *result* is inseparable from the rationality of the *course* taken by the development.

Summary

This brief overview of the positions to be discussed in what follows provides us with initial criteria for successful or failing dynamics of social change. Whereas in Dewey the absence of blockages to learning becomes the criterion for the rationality of problem-solving processes, MacIntyre develops a more ambitious picture of narrative integration for the successful transformation dynamic, which Hegel's conception of dialectical transformation processes even surpasses in terms of robustness. These different conceptions of what a successful transformation involves, and the correspondingly different ways of identifying relevant sources of disruption, will be discussed in the following chapters. The differences that are informative for my project between the positions, which I have comprehended as different conceptualizations of problem-solving processes, will first be made apparent by their different ways *of understanding problems* (Chapter 9). This gives rise, as we shall see, to differences with regard to the *dynamics of solutions* (Chapter 10), which lead to different conceptions of the rationality of social learning processes.

CHAPTER NINE

Problem or Contradiction?

Everything is broken, but somehow it works.

—Rainald Goetz

Problems are the starting point for problem-solving processes. Depending on conceptions of what constitutes *a problem as such* and of the internal structure of problems, the dynamics of their solution will be different. If one wanted to condense the main feature of Hegel's conception (in contrast to Dewey's and MacIntyre's conceptions) into a brief formula, then it would be that in Hegel, *problems* assume the form of *contradictions*. They do not arise contingently in a given social and historical situation or as external disruptions, but instead as the realization or actualization of tensions that already exist in the situation itself. The problem (as a contradiction) is something that already constitutes the particular constellation itself, not something that happens to it or that it gets caught up in. If Hegel's conception of problems thus aims at strictly immanent and systematic conflicts, Dewey and MacIntyre conceptualize problems as contingent confrontations with obstacles that may be the result of problematic external factors. Lurking behind the alternative between problem and contradiction to be discussed in what follows, therefore, are several fundamental questions concerning forms of life: the localization of problems and their status regarding the "objectivity" of how problems are posed, whether they are contingent or systematically necessary occurrences, and how they function as disruptions of a framework of practices and interpretations.

In the first three sections of this chapter, I will begin by examining the conceptions of Dewey, MacIntyre, and Hegel, paying particular attention to the characteristics mentioned and the differences that emerge. In the fourth section, I will attempt to mediate between the positions, with the aim of presenting a systematic proposal for a conception of problems that is adequate to the question concerning forms of life.

9.1 Problems as Indeterminateness

Problems present themselves within the framework of Dewey's reflections as impediments to action, as distortions of practical activities and processes of understanding that befall the activities and processes in question (from the outside). In order to understand the structure of these problems in detail, it is worth taking another look at Dewey's most general definition of what constitutes inquiry (see Chapter 4):

> Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.[1]

Therefore, the problematic situation that triggers the process of inquiry (or the need for learning)—the crisis—is one of *indeterminateness*. Its solution involves (re)establishing certainty, understood as achieving coherence and what Dewey calls "qualitative wholeness." Accordingly, a problem first arises as an impediment to action. However, the impediment in question affects a whole situation, which as a result falls into a condition of indeterminateness. Thus problems, even when they have an external cause, are never raw and isolated facts; they are always problems within and for a context.

But what is indeterminateness? And why is the condition of indeterminateness a problem? Dewey's characterization of indeterminateness encompasses a whole variety of states: a problematic situation is uncertain, unclear, and questionable; it is "disturbed, troubled, ambiguous, confused, full of conflicting tendencies, obscure, etc."[2] It certainly makes a difference whether a situation is ambiguous or contradictory, obscure or troubled. But the moment that comprehends all of these motifs is that such an (indeterminate) situation is "open in the sense that its constituents do not hang together."[3] Something that is contradictory does not fit together, but ambiguous and obscure elements of a situation are also difficult to relate to each other because the possible points of connection are unstable. Inconsistency, confusion, ambiguity, and so forth would then amount to different instances of incoherence or disjointedness. Hence, a situation is problematic and indeterminate precisely when the formation of a totality or a qualitative context is not (or no longer) possible—and this is precisely why indeterminateness manifests itself as a disturbance. The reason is that coherence, the possibility of forming a coherent connection, is a precondition of the constitution of meaning and agency, whereas the lack of connection or incoherence, by contrast, disrupts our nexus of action and understanding.

In order to comprehend why this is so, we need to understand what constitutes a situation. By "situation," Dewey understands a "contextual" or "qualitative whole."[4] Not unlike the Heideggerian concept of world,[5] what a situation describes "is not a single object or event or set of objects and events";[6] rather, it is the nexus of relations in which these objects or events stand and in which they refer to each other.[7] Moreover, this nexus is an *active* relationship, an interaction between a person and her environment. Correspondingly, the disturbance through which the situation becomes problematic is a disruption of this very interaction, the collapse of a practical interactive relationship with the surrounding world. For a moment, an entire structure collapses—the very structure that Dewey calls "situation" and Heidegger "world." "Crises" are therefore always crises of an entire reference system. Therefore, the solution to the problem requires a reintegration of this reference system—and every successful solution means such a reintegration.

A typical example of an everyday practical problem that Dewey uses in his *Logic* to illustrate how a situation becomes indeterminate, and the impediments to action that follow as a result, is the outbreak of a fire in a packed theater. Here the established interpretations and actions are suddenly interrupted. Whereas beforehand the situation was defined by the spectators' passive receptive attitude, they now have to reorient and resituate themselves. Is the smoke emission part of the play or not? What measures are now required? Not only is the situation (at least initially) unclear but also the problem-solving measures that now must be taken first have to be identified and adjusted.

The crisis of individualism diagnosed in *Individualism, Old and New,* which Dewey identifies in the spread of egoistic-instrumental market imperatives to the way of life of advanced capitalist societies, is also an example of a problem in this sense.[8] The social constellation described is crisis-riven insofar as the individuals who unashamedly pursue their self-interest cling to values stemming from a past era that are no longer commensurate with the existing living conditions and the interdependencies that actually exist. This leads to misinterpretations and practical aberrations, so that individuals no longer know how they should understand themselves and make sense of what they are doing. They are "confused and bewildered"[9]—and here this also means that they are unable to make connections and to situate themselves within them. A structure of interpretations and practices—a situation—is disrupted; the system of reference or guiding framework of social interpretations of the world and of oneself has become indeterminate.

Social Problems as Higher Level Problems

Dewey's conception of problems thus represents a complex understanding of problems. Problems involve a breakdown in continuity. Problems are disruptive hindrances of our system of reference, which, with the successful solution to the problem, achieves renewed coherence. Here problem-solving processes are thought of as adaptations to changing environmental conditions. In most cases, the requirements or events that affect us cannot be anticipated. In this way, the problem or crisis presents itself as an unavailable and contingent occasion for learning, as an external disturbance that disrupts the functioning of an established practical nexus—the situation—and thus calls its effectiveness (though not the nexus itself) into question.

Thus, Dewey's concept of a problem is advanced insofar as it conceives of problems as disturbances of a network of practices and enables us to comprehend the status of problems as simultaneously given and made. However, its limitations become apparent when it comes to conceptualizing the specificity of problems as they arise in relation to forms of life. For, if form-of-life problems (as explained in Sections 4.5 and 7.4) are reflexive second order problems, then it is misleading to think of them as external disturbances of a previously unproblematic course of action. It is not "reality" that confronts forms of life with problems, but forms of life *themselves* that pose problems for themselves—or, in other words, it is the forms of life themselves that (must) *make* problems *their own*.

If we follow this description, there is a difference with regard to the higher level character and the reflexive nature of the problems between the disruption of a simple performance of an action or the incompleteness of an adaptation process—which seem to represent the paradigmatic cases of all problems for Dewey—and the disruption of a complex ensemble of practices of ethical life. The kinds of problems that can arise in the social domain as form-of-life problems are structurally different from the linear *first order* problems posed by attempts to control nature. But then the uniform logic of processes of inquiry that Dewey takes as his starting point would already lose its plausibility when it comes to the logic of problems.

The fact that form-of-life problems, as second order problems, concern the very frame of reference posited with situations of action is something that a glance at MacIntyre's conception can help to explain, even though MacIntyre also assumes that crises are contingent occurrences.

9.2 Crisis as a Break in Continuity

In MacIntyre, too, the occurrence of a crisis is connected with a breakdown in continuity. Crises or problems are a result of the inability of a tradition to resolve the tasks it faces or to which it gives rise and to renew itself through reinterpretation around the solution to such problems; however, crises and problems can also be the result of the confrontation with other traditions (and of rivalry with them).

MacIntyre identifies two indicators of a problem or crisis situation: *incoherence* and *sterility.*[10] A theoretical tradition is incoherent when it contains assumptions that do not fit together. Applied to nonscientific or lifeworld traditions, the concept of incoherence describes a situation marked by beliefs and ways of acting that are incompatible or do not fit together. Here, not unlike Dewey's "indeterminate situation," elements are at work that cannot be brought into a meaningful relationship and about which it is no longer possible to relate a plausible narrative, to introduce one of the concepts that plays an important role in MacIntyre's account. The narrative "web of relationships" (to quote Hannah Arendt) ruptures, so that the corresponding tradition can no longer understand itself and becomes inaccessible to itself.

But what does it mean to say that a tradition has become sterile, and what kind of criticism of the tradition does this involve? If we take sterility literally, then it refers to a situation in which the dominant principles and practices are no longer fruitful and hence have ceased to flourish. They are no longer handed down in a living sense, but are only somehow supported and followed. A sterile tradition has lost its attractiveness and provides no impulses. Conversely, it is unresponsive to stimuli, so that it becomes apathetic and stagnates.

Crises can be triggered by the internal symptoms of fatigue of a tradition, but also by a new situation, by changed requirements, or by a conflict with another tradition. When MacIntyre says that crises can occur at any time, he is suggesting that they can occur completely abruptly without any forgoing prolonged or comprehensible development. Problems and crises, to return to the distinctions introduced above, are sometimes "homemade," but sometimes they also befall a form of life contingently. But wherever they come from, what makes them into a crisis is the collapse of the interpretive framework or the breaking of the thread of narrative continuity. Such problems are problems *for* and *with* a tradition—insofar as it lacks the resources to solve the problem that has arisen in an integrative way.

Two Kinds of Crises

MacIntyre recognizes two kinds of problems—or better, two kinds of crises—and of changes resulting from them. Firstly, he describes the everyday dynamics of development and renewal of traditions as an ongoing process of coping with (everyday) problems. In such a normal course of things, traditions are confronted with problems, where the self-renewable resources for solving these problems can be found within the traditions themselves. Changes can be integrated into the relations of continuity of the tradition, which is thereby transformed and at the same time remains itself.

Sometimes, however, this progressive process reaches its limits. Then problems arise within a traditional form of life that mark such a deep rift that they cannot be solved within the system of reference given with the corresponding form of life and force a break in continuity. The traditional resources dry up or become meaningless. The continuity of the problem-solving process and of the supporting interpretive framework is then abruptly interrupted.

> We have already noticed that central to a tradition-constituted enquiry at each stage in its development will be its current problematic, that agenda of unsolved problems and unresolved issues by reference to which its success or lack of it in making rational progress toward some future

> stage of development will be evaluated. At any point it may happen to any tradition-constituted enquiry that by its own standards of progress it ceases to make progress.[11]

Thus, whereas the normal case allows an interlocking of the problem and its solution, in the more radical case a second kind of problem and a more dramatic form of crisis comes to light whose dynamics have a different quality from those of other crises. Whereas in the normal course of things it is a question of problems and the conditions for solving them within a posited (and still intact) interpretive framework, it is precisely this interpretative framework—and thus the standard for a successful solution to a problem as such—that is placed in question in such a crisis. It is not only that at some point you don't know how to go on or only that you are facing a challenge; in addition, the meaning of what you are doing and how you understand what you are doing, hence the foundations of your practice, have become unclear. Then it is not only a single element but the whole framework that no longer fits. Such crises are, to speak with Thomas Kuhn, crises of a paradigm that explode the cognitive process of "normal science." MacIntyre referred to such a radical interruption and dramatic problematization of the foundations of a tradition in an early essay on Kuhn's theory of paradigm shift as an "epistemological crisis."[12] In such a situation, we not only no longer know how to go on; we no longer even know what we can know or what it means to make progress toward solving a certain problem at all—or not, as the case may be. Just as (on a Kuhnian conception) it is not new *facts* but new *ways of seeing* that constitute a scientific revolution, here, too, it is the disruption of interpretations and not just the factual disruption of a nexus of action that constitutes the crisis of a tradition. Such crises thereby become de facto crises in the self-interpretation and self-understanding of a tradition, even if the latter is not necessarily aware of this. Such a description seems to capture the second order character of form-of-life problems better than the impediments to action described by Dewey.

Immanence and Transcendence of Crises

The understanding of crises as crises of a paradigm developed here, however, also suggests a major difficulty: How is it possible, under the conditions of such a crisis, to identify something *as a crisis* at all if the very frame of reference within which problems usually emerge has been shaken? What epistemological status can the reference to problems still have? This question is so urgent because MacIntyre assumes that there are “no preconceptual or even pretheoretical data,” and hence neither are there any practical problems or their solutions that are given prior to interpretation or any that are meaningful without a disclosing conceptual framework.[13] But then what constitutes a problem or even its solution also depends on the interpretive context and, in case of doubt, will prove to be different for different traditions. This brings us into difficulties at moments of epistemological crisis and of rivalry between competing interpretations. If the (radical) crisis of a tradition suspends its internal standards, then this situation is made all the more dramatic by the fact that, according to MacIntyre, there also cannot be any tradition-transcending standards that could function as a neutral evaluative authority situated completely outside of a tradition. But in that case not only are there no neutral criteria for the rationality of a particular *solution to a problem;* there are not even criteria for the *existence* of a problem as such. “No set of examples of action, no matter how comprehensive,” MacIntyre emphasizes, could straightforwardly “provide a neutral court of appeal for decisions between rival theories”—no more, if one follows this line of thought, than there can be a set of examples of action that can function per se as a sign of a crisis.[14] But if a crisis cannot be identified either on the basis of external or internal criteria, how can we continue to speak in terms of problems or crises at all?

Apparently MacIntyre is trying to find a middle way between immanent and transcendent, realist and antirealist conceptions of problems. If a tradition, judged by its own criteria, succumbs to a radical crisis at the limit of its power of action and interpretation, a limit that it cannot overcome by its own efforts, this very “reaching its limits” seems to mark a transition from an inside to an outside. With this, it steps out of an immanent context of interpretation, a procedure triggered by the undeniable fact that something is not working and that the dynamics of a tradition are disrupted. Thus, at the moment of crisis, the tradition in question dissolves as a closed system of reference; it no longer “applies,” even if it resists this insight. The problems or crises by which a tradition is beset thereby show themselves, in their unresolvability, to be resistant to the internally available attempts at interpretation and resolution, but also to attempts to define them away.

In this way, the problems acquire to a certain extent an “objective” character, without it having to be assumed that they could be found somewhere “in the world” in a preconceptual and preinterpretive sense. With this, the occurrence of a problem (not unlike a psychological symptom) seems to point to something that, however unclearly, also exists beyond a specific paradigm or explodes it.

Fluctuating Objective Content

MacIntyre’s conception remains ambiguous in crucial respects. On the one hand, it seems to point to the existence of a reality that poses problems and against which all paradigms and interpretations have to prove themselves; on the other hand, it is unclear how this assumption is supposed to be compatible with the constructivist aspect of his program.[15] Here a residual functionalism, which is based on a more or less robust residual realism and which represents crises as simple dysfunctions, and a constructivist trait confront one another in an unmediated way. The one side sheds light on the fact that crises are always crises of a paradigm; the other side assumes that crises must involve real dysfunctions based on real misinterpretations and a lack of fit with the “world.” As we shall see below, this tension persists when it comes to the question of what can actually count as the *solution* to a problem.

Therefore, no matter how helpful MacIntyre’s conceptualization of crises of a tradition as a (call for a) paradigm shift may be, the question of the objectivity of crises nevertheless remains undecided and vague. Here the question itself would have to be posed differently in order to avoid the looming dilemma. Only then could we do justice to the fact that, as elaborated above, forms of life not only *confront problems* but *themselves pose problems* (for themselves). As we have seen, MacIntyre’s understanding includes the insight that crises always affect the interpretive framework of a form of life as well. Hence, MacIntyre’s traditions are also self-interpreting formations (see Section 7.4). What is disrupted when paradigm crises occur is not just our factual reference to the world and our ability to deal with the tasks (of material and symbolic reproduction) to be performed; what fails is above all the form of life as a self-reflexive formation—that is, it fails to satisfy this claim to self-reflexiveness and accordingly to realize its collective practical identity. In other words, if paradigm crises are foundational crises, they not only affect the foundations of our factual existence in the world, but also the foundations of our self-understanding. But with the introduction of this moment, MacIntyre only goes halfway, as it were.[16] This is because in MacIntyre—in contrast to what we will retrace below in Hegel—the frame of reference of a form of life is not called into question by the form of life itself but by events and confrontations that are in crucial respects *contingent* and external. Such a paradigm shift and the crisis-riven convulsion it involves is something that *happens* to the traditions rather than something that emanates from them. Therein, as we shall see, lies a correct moment (in contrast to Hegel). In so arguing, however, MacIntyre reproduces the dichotomy between problems arising from the world and our problematizations in a way that is not appropriate (at least) to the *social* world. The occurrence of problems remains crucially underdetermined. But it is precisely the assertion of *determinateness*—which means that the appearance of problems is not contingent but systematic and in a certain sense necessary—that is the distinguishing feature of Hegel's conception (with all of the resulting difficulties).

9.3 Crisis as Dialectical Contradiction

Hegel's descriptions of crises are at first sight similar to those of the two other authors. For Hegel, the salient indications that a situation is crisis-prone are also contradictoriness, dissension, and lack of vitality. The crisis of a historical formation is shown by its tensions and conflicts, by states of "division" that it cannot overcome through its own resources. Thus, as Hegel demonstrates in the "spirit chapter" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* the individual's membership of the family, on the one hand, and of the state, on the other, as formations of ethical life, becomes a quandary that in the Antigone tragedy culminates in a crisis.[17] The possible ways of acting in such a crisis are constituted in such a way that the individuals involved cannot act without becoming trapped in a conflict. Also, the conflict that arises with Socrates between the "principle of subjectivity" and the Athenian state, as portrayed in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History,* is a conflict that prefigures the impending division within Greek ethical life.[18] Finally, the circumstance described in the *Philosophy of Right* that civil society drifts apart into its extremes as a result of the problem of integration described above also harbors a potential for conflict that can threaten its stability (see Section 4.3).

The phenomena of division that come to light here lead, as loss of coherence (to put it in Deweyan terms), to the disaggregation of the moments of a situation, with the result that they no longer constitute a meaningful whole that can be lived in a practical sense. The "living spirit" is then, as Hegel puts it, "fragmented into many points."[19] In addition to the motifs of incoherence and division, this also brings the motif of lack of vitality into play in Hegel: as in MacIntyre, becoming frozen in a crisis situation goes hand in hand with the immobilization of the inherent transformative forces of a situation and hence with a condition of devitalization.[20] In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History,* Hegel describes the situation of peoples who have been left behind by world history as a condition of continued lifeless existence, an "existence without intellect or vitality" marked by "tedium": "the living substantial soul itself may be said to have ceased its activity."[21] A rigid and lifeless historical form of life no longer faces anything that it could master with the means at its disposal. If the peoples who exist in this way persist in this crisis-riven condition, then this lack of dynamism is a herald of their decline.[22]

But the diagnosis of lack of vitality refers exclusively neither to the subjective feelings of those involved in a formation of ethical life nor to the factual attractiveness of a situation. Just like the diagnosis of "division," it concerns not only the relationship of the individuals to a given order of ethical life but (also) the inherent impossibility of inhabiting this order itself. If, on the other hand, per se "in itself" sterile forms of life that are inherently divided or have lost their vitality are sometimes kept alive in almost fanatical ways, the pathological character of such persistence is shown by the immunization practices that are required to maintain such a form of life. "The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order" as well as the loss of connections are in this sense not only "heralds of approaching change"; they are also signs of a more profound problem.[23]

Immanent Character of Contradiction

Thus, behind the superficial similarity in the description of problems, the difference between Hegel's conception and those of Dewey and MacIntyre alluded to above in an introductory way becomes apparent. For both Dewey and MacIntyre, problems represent a contingent occasion for learning that cannot be anticipated, an impediment to action that has a (material) external origin or a disturbance that interrupts the functioning of a well-established nexus of practices. For Hegel, by contrast, the contradiction that leads to the crisis is not external to the constellation encountered in each case. Here it is not a matter of something that is actually (or was previously) stable becoming unstable, something coherent becoming incoherent, or something determinate becoming indeterminate; rather, the formation in question is itself characterized by the contradictions contained in it. Every historical and social constellation in question here is in a sense the provisional, necessarily unstable fixation of a problem or contradiction. Strictly speaking, therefore, the constellation does not succumb to a contradiction, but is *constituted as a contradiction*. The contradiction which is the driving force that leads to the crisis is constitutive for the corresponding formation itself.

Let us take a closer look at the distinguishing features of the conception of crises and problems in the mode of contradiction. In the first place, problems in Hegel are conflictual; they arise as *conflicts* between irreconcilable claims. This is in itself already a very specific conception of crises or problems which contrasts with the notion that a problem involves a simple form of ignorance or inability. Even more important, however, is that these conflicts are not conflicts between two unconnected opponents. The conflicts in question are not merely the result of two conflicting claims being raised simultaneously; rather, these claims are connected with each other—and precisely in this resides the *immanent character* and the *systematic nature* of the conflict. Thus, the victory of human law over divine law (the victory of the legally constituted polity over the law of family solidarity embodied by Antigone) "in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it" brings forth its own "internal enemy."[24] And the victorious principle must for this very reason learn "that its supreme right is a supreme wrong, that its victory is rather its own downfall."[25]

Hegel's remark that the spirit of a people does not die a natural death is also aimed at this immanent character of crises: "In its case natural death appears to imply destruction through its own agency."[26] In the case of ancient Greece, this was already true of military-political decline. The small Greek states and the associated political homogeneity of manageable polities were the condition for the emergence of Greek democracy and were at the same time responsible for their political and military weakness: "The Greek ethical life had made Greece unfit to form one common state; for the dissociation of small states from each other, and the concentration in cities, where the interest and the spiritual culture pervading the whole could be identical, was the necessary condition for that grade of freedom which the Greeks occupied."[27] The condition of size was thus the cause of the destruction of the Greek world. But the deeper meaning of the dissolution of Greek ethical life also had an immanent character. With reference to Socrates, it was *its own principle* that opposed it and led to its destruction. The Greek polis itself contributed to bringing about the very principle of individuality that, as embodied in Socrates, contradicts the ethical life of the polis: "In the principle of Greek freedom, inasmuch as it is freedom, is involved the self-emancipation of thought."[28] The intrusion of "thought"—that is, the critical examination of the existing customs and hence the intrusion of the moment of reflection into Greek ethical life—did not come from the outside. Rather, it was triggered and made possible by the very trait that, according to Hegel's description, set Greece apart from other (for example, oriental) states—namely, that in Greece, "principles" were established. But the establishment of principles and the "turns and windings which these ideas took" corresponding to Greek "diligence" already opened up the space for the reflection that ultimately corroded ethical life.[29] It challenged the individual to set these principles in relation to existing reality, which as a result became questionable.

As it happens, we find this pattern of conflict not only in Hegel's philosophy of history and not only in relation to conditions of premodern ethical life; Hegel also understood the conflictual character of civil society as an immanent problem. This society is confronted with the potentially disruptive problem of the emergence of the "rabble" because, as we saw above, this is systematically bound up with its constitutive basic principles—the organization of free labor based on the market and contracts—which are simultaneously constitutive of civil society and make it prone to crisis.

Problems in the form of (dialectical) contradictions are therefore problems with a systematic basis *in* a given social formation; they are *created* by this formation *itself* and cannot be solved within it.[30] Hence, Hegel's crisis diagnoses describe the destruction of certain formations of ethical life as, succinctly put, "homemade." The claim raised with the existence of a historical formation itself cannot be redeemed; the problem posed by this formation itself is insoluble, and the purpose laid down by the formation itself is undermined—by principles that are constitutive for its own existence. The historical constellations that Hegel diagnoses as crisis-prone do not simply fail; they fail for internal reasons.[31]

Reflexive Character of Contradiction

The immanent origin of problems described here would be unthinkable, however, without a further aspect: problems, as internal contradictions, are *reflexive.* Immanent contradictions exist only insofar as cultural forms of life are self-interpreting formations (as stated above following Charles Taylor). They fail for internal reasons, not only because they themselves have produced the contradictory facts (that is, the practices and institutions which have come into conflict with each other); they fail for internal reasons above all because, as MacIntyre also recognizes, they get into a contradiction with their own self-understanding, their own interpretation of the world and the associated validity claims. The fact that a form of life can end up in an immanent contradiction means that its own bases of validity, the meaning and the normative points of reference posited by and with it, have become questionable for it. This is the only explanation for how forms of life can to a certain extent erode from within or for the fact that such an erosion, which can be traced back to the internal insufficiency, is even the precondition of its actual failure. Greek ethical life did not break down simply because Socrates *existed,* because he appeared on the stage of world history. It broke down because it learned from him that it could not satisfy its own claims. And it is not the bare *fact* of poverty that causes bourgeois civil society to separate into its extreme, as Hegel puts it in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, but the fact that poverty cannot be reconciled with its understanding of itself as a society in which individuals can find honor and subsistence only in the mode of gainful employment.

Thus, it is not only the *factual* incompatibilities of the practices and institutions existing within and brought forth by a social constellation, but above all the incompatibilities bound up with such reflexive claims and specifications of purposes that can make something appear contradictory in the social domain. Here even the generation of problems is connected with the capacity for reflection, with the fact that forms of life not only have problems and (themselves) pose problems, but that they do so by reflecting back upon their own validity claims. (However, we must be careful here: these validity claims and the self-understanding are not only the "superstructure" of the practices in question, but are integral parts of them. If practices are understood as structures of interpretations and actions, then self-understandings become social facts.)

Constitutive-Productive Character of Contradiction

The internal structure of contradictoriness yields a further characteristic of the problems that forms of life can face, namely, the *constitutive and productive* nature of the crises described by Hegel. Contradiction and crisis are not only indicative of the decline of a particular historical or spiritual formation; where they unfold their dynamic, they are also mobile moments that lead out of this decline, and thus they are the hallmark of the vitality of such a formation. If every historical form of life is characterized by a typical relationship of tension, by a problem constellation that may develop into a crisis which cannot be resolved within this formation, then crises as crises are not purely destructive. In other words, the contradiction characteristic of a situation is not only a problem with negative consequences but is at the same time the force that drives the situation beyond itself: "The standpoint occupied by aesthetic spiritual unity . . . could no longer be the resting-place of spirit; and the element in which further advance *and* corruption originated, was that of subjectivity, of morality, self-reflection, and inwardness."[32] According to this conception, therefore, crises do not simply *occur* but are *latent* in the relevant relations as contradictions. However, these relations are not merely defective in virtue of their crisis-proneness; without their inherent and potentially endangering contradiction they would not be what they are and would not be able to play their associated (world-historical) role—namely, in overcoming one-sided and unproductive paradigms. In this way, the unfolding of contradictions becomes the hallmark of the developmental dynamics of the historical-social world and, more broadly, of what is vital in all of its manifestations.[33] In contrast to MacIntyre and Dewey, for whom the confrontation with crises and problems is only probable, Hegel understands this confrontation as a systematic constitutive and developmental element—and the always higher-level character of problems arises from this very role and this very immanence.

"Objective" Character of Contradictions

That contradictions should be conceived as constitutive and systematic points to a further feature: a contradiction is "objective" in the sense that it (also) lies on the side of the object and does not make itself felt (only) as a relationship between *us* and the corresponded institutions or practices.[34] In this sense, it is the very structure of institutions and practices that is *divided within itself,* that has become at variance with itself as a result of the existence of conflicting principles. Thus, also in the case of Antigone, the fateful collision resides in the fact that the "ethical essence has split itself into two laws."[35] And in the case of bourgeois civil society, it is not the existence of the "rabble" that constitutes the conflict, but instead it is the internal shortcomings of this society that give rise to the conflict in a practical way via the rabble. Contradictions are thus comprehended as features of social reality itself; they signify an internal relation of the corresponding shape of ethical life or form of life. This is also why it is not (only) the existence of an open social conflict that is captured by the theorem of social contradiction. What can become a problem for *us,* the relationship that we *contradict,* must already have become latently problematic on the side of the objects (on the side of reality)—or it must, in effect, be constitutively contradictory.

With this understanding of the objectivity of the crisis, a difference between surface and depth opens up that is important for the character of the Hegelian conception of crises.[36] Here the groundwork is being laid for an objective theory of crises that is not only aimed at conflicts that have already erupted but can also grasp problems in their latency. Then an inherently contradictory form of life is not only (and not always) an openly conflictual one marked by manifest social discord, conflicts, or opposing interests. Rather, the concept of inner contradiction points to a more profound structural dimension, which, according to the associated conception, first triggers, enables, or (here I remain deliberately vague) motivates manifest conflicts within a social nexus of practices.

Intermediate Reflection: Contradictions in Reality

Some (albeit provisional) reflections on what is actually implied by speaking of contradictions in social reality would be appropriate at this point. What does it mean to say that social reality is in itself "constitutively contradictory"?[37] Evidently, the motif of immanent contradiction is one of the most influential, but also most problematic, of Hegel's contributions to understanding and critique of social relations; one need only think of the career of this pattern of conflict in the Marxian theorem of the contradiction between forces and relations of production. Nevertheless, this does not make it any easier to provide a more detailed explanation of this presupposition-laden concept of contradiction. How do social practices come into contradiction with each other—if such a *practical* contradiction cannot simply be equated with the contradictions in which *assertions* can end up with each other?[38] And how is it possible to explain that a social formation can be constituted in such a way that it contains contradictory practices and nevertheless continues to exist? How do practices within sufficiently complex structures of practices end up in a contradiction with each other in such a way that, on the one hand, both practices exist alongside each other but, on the other hand, subvert or undermine each other in this coexistence?[39]

Prima facie there are several possibilities for demonstrating "practical contradictions."[40]

(1) A practice or institution contains different practice-constitutive norms that *cannot be realized together.* Then the respective norms or the practices constituted by them stand in a relation of contradiction insofar as they do not fit together and cannot coexist. The social imperative "Realize yourself!" does not fit with the imperative "Conform!" But insofar as modern working conditions often involve both imperatives, they can be described as contradictory in themselves. The simplest version of such a constellation is the classic double-bind situation in which there is an imperative that is simultaneously subverted in practice—for example, a case in which the working conditions are *in fact* repressive, while simultaneously a claim to creativity or self-realization is *postulated.*

(2) A stronger version of systematic internal contradictoriness (and the first that can really be called dialectical), by contrast, is distinguished by the fact that two sets of practices and norms are *effective* in a social nexus of action *and at the same time contradict each other.*[41] Such a practice does not simply postulate something that is not realized within it; rather, it is sustained by the observance of both imperatives in equal measure. This is precisely what could be claimed about working conditions in the so-called creative sector: they rest on the fact that the individuals concerned simul-

taneously accommodate themselves *and* realize themselves creatively; they demand an attitude in which the two things go hand in hand, and they also depend on both attitudes insofar as, on the one hand, they live off the mobilization of the resource creativity but, on the other, want to steer it into exploitable channels. Such a contradiction may also be involved in the case of wage labor that is free in a double sense discussed in Chapter 6, where the norms of freedom and equality are simultaneously realized and not realized (so that here freedom and unfreedom, equality and inequality, coexist).

The question now is this: How much sense does it make to actually call these conditions contradictory? Do the mutually contradictory norm-practice structures even concern a common basis in which a contradiction in the same respect could be identified? Can't one say, "Well, in one respect the creative workers are indeed independent, but in the other they have to accommodate themselves, just as free wage laborers are free in a legal sense but are unfree in a social sense"? Clearly the talk of the inner contradiction in the conditions—the "real contradiction" of these conditions—can be rendered plausible only if it can actually be shown that the practices in question genuinely depend on each other within the ensemble of practices and that they mutually condition or even give rise to each other but simultaneously undermine each other.

(3) A third sense in which one can speak of the occurrence of "practical contradictions" or of a contradictory reality is when the norms that are constitutive for the practices are systematically constituted in such a way that they can become *inverted* into *the opposite* of what is intended (the end being pursued) once they are realized. Thus, the inversion of the French Revolution into Jacobin terror can be understood as a process by which the original intention of this movement—liberty, equality, and fraternity—turned into its opposite. Insofar as a contradiction can be found here, it involves an inconsistency between the intentions bound up with certain actions and their actual effects and results. But just as in the case discussed above, here, too, it is not sufficient for the assertion of a systematic and immanent contradiction to state that there is a disagreement between the intention with which a project was begun and the result of this process actually initiated here. Since unintended side effects are as likely as they are a frequent occurrence in the social domain, such a conception would involve an inappropriate overextension of the concept of a contradiction.

What is decisive for the strong thesis that an inherent contradiction exists is instead that the process in question does not take this course by chance, but for "profound and unavoidable reasons" (as Holm Tetens summarizes the corresponding line of argument). If it is to count as a "real contradiction," therefore, something more must be involved than the regrettable fact that a good purpose has been translated into a disastrous outcome. The features that ensure that this purpose was not only not realized as a matter of fact but also cannot be realized must already be implicit in how the purpose is formulated, or at any rate must be connected with the available means for realizing it. (Thus, according to Hegel's analysis, the "terror" of the French Revolution was not a result of contingent side effects but was already implicit in a model of freedom conceived in absolute terms.) Again, it is not a question of an empirically contradictory constellation, but of a systematically contradictory one. In such a case, the "real dialectician" must be able to show, firstly, that there are such ineluctable and systematic reasons for the inversion of the purposes or that a particular purpose is unthinkable without its opposite;[42] in order to be able to uphold the contradictory character of the process outlined, however, one must also show, secondly, that the purpose itself is not yet completely disavowed by these profound contradictions. For if the French Revolution turned out to be the realization of an already inherently terroristic purpose that degenerated into terror, then it was not a case of immanent contradiction, because then there is no contradiction between the outcome and the purpose.

(4) Finally, the contradictory character of a form of life can be described in such a way that in it connections that belong together have been torn apart, so that its elements confront each other in a *dysfunctional one-sided way.* Here a form of life becomes contradictory because the practices at work in it have been torn out of their context or, more specifically, out of the unity with their counterparts. The paradigm of such a contradiction in the social domain would again be Hegel's interpretation of the figure of Antigone. While a functioning, noncontradictory ethical life unites state order with familial solidarity, in the conflict over Antigone the two sides have come into conflict with each other; the situation is contradictory because it is divided.

Here, too, the situation presents the theorist of contradiction with a difficult task. For such a situation to become recognizable as a contradiction, the theorist must be able to show that both sides, although separate, nevertheless belong together. On the Hegelian interpretation of Antigone, this "proof" is provided by the assertion that the two sides refer to each other in a negative way. They complement each other, but no longer in a positive way by cooperating with each other; instead, they do so negatively insofar as they derive their identity from the destruction of the opposing identity, while nevertheless at the same time remaining tied to it. On a psychoanalytical interpretation, this would be a case of "defense." The creation of the "internal enemy" by the ostensibly victorious ethical life of the state can be read as a moment of such a combination of elements:

> Since the community only gets an existence through its interference with the happiness of the Family, and by dissolving [individual] self-consciousness into the universal, it creates for itself *in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it* an internal enemy—womankind in general.[43]

This enemy is an "internal enemy" because it stands for the repressed of the victorious position itself, which in turn derives its (contradictory) stability from repressing this side of itself. As a result of a split and division, both sides are left one-sided; they cannot (any longer) realize and integrate their dependence on each other without tension. Here one part considers itself to be the whole, while at the same time it can be shown that this part cannot continue to exist (well) independently of the other—of what it excludes and demarcates from itself.

9.4 The Problem with Contradiction

With the notion of problems as contradictions and the thesis that the latter may be real contradictions that pervade reality itself, a conception inspired by Hegel assumes diverse burdens of proof and a multitude of implications. However, it is also an attractive conception for understanding social crises and transformation processes insofar as it systematically highlights what I discussed above under the heading of "normative failure" as an intermeshing of functional and normative deficiencies of a form of life. The crises in question are *functional* crises, as the Hegelian version shows quite clearly, insofar as such formations are unstable (and not only normatively bad); these crises are *normative* in that, as explained above, they cannot even be understood without the normative claims at work here.[44] Only this intermeshing can render the phenomenon of erosion, one-sidedness, or devitalization of forms of life intelligible as a condition for their failure or their crisis-proneness. And it points to the fact that the problems with which forms of life are confronted are not contingent but instead *systematic*—they occur for reasons that are constitutively bound up with their inner constitution. Thus, whereas Dewey and MacIntyre in certain respects fall below the level of the initial question that they also formulate when problems become something with which forms of life are confronted or to which they succumb, Hegel can defend a strong version of the thesis that forms of life are not so much *confronted* with problems as that they *pose* problems *for themselves*. Such problems that occur (as contradictions) are not only *impediments* to action but (as the discussion of real contradictions has shown) at the same time also conditions of possible action; they are not only dysfunctional but, in their dysfunctionality, they are at the same time *constitutive* for the way in which the inherently self-contradictory formation presents itself or functions. This also explains why Hegel is the thinker who enables us to identify the self-misunderstandings of a social formation as systematic distortions or ideologies.

Systematic or Contingent Problems and Blockages to Learning

One can form an idea of the conceptual differences between the positions discussed here by recalling a diagnosis that Dewey and Hegel substantially share: In a modern society based on the division of labor, individuals actually depend on each other but have not yet realized this dependence, and the corresponding increase in interdependencies, in their actions and their self-understanding. The resulting compensation mechanisms can be diagnosed (also following Dewey) as social pathologies and the associated deficiencies as blockages to learning. Unlike Hegel, however, Dewey clearly does not assume that there is an internal relationship between factual dependency and the (illusory) aspiration to independence. In Dewey's view, this involves an error about the character of the new situation on the part of those affected, an error that can and must be resolved; it involves practices that are erroneous (because they take their orientation from incorrect descriptions of problems) but whose existence is not systematically induced. Accordingly, solving the problem means for Dewey resolving an error and an impediment to action within a form of life by means of a new, more adequate interpretation and establishing the practices that correspond to the new interpretation. In the case described here, learning processes would have to be initiated that point to the "fact of cooperation" and take into account the fact that individuals are dependent on each other.

Hegel's perspective, on the other hand, suggests that such misjudgments should be understood as systematic self-misunderstandings and as systematically erroneous reflexive ensembles of practices. That such self-misunderstandings are not contingent occurrences can be seen from the fact that they contribute to the existence and stability of the ensemble of practices in question. Thus, it can be claimed that the institution of the modern capitalist market as an "incoherent connection" *[unzusammenhängender Zusammenhang]* is *systematically* constituted in such a way that its functioning depends on the suggestion of independence. But then the corresponding form of life is not only mistaken about a range of states of affairs with which it is confronted; it also lacks the basic conceptual means required to interpret the situation appropriately. This ultimately means that it is mistaken not only about these states of affairs, but above all also about itself and its role in producing them.

In Hegel's case, therefore, with the failure of the paradigm of a "reflexive form of life" (Pinkard), this paradigm itself is clearly at stake.[45] The crises or problems that occur and the blockages to learning that lead to the misperception of these problems cannot be separated. Conversely, problem-solving learning means dissolving the blockages to learning (through critique of ideology). To put it succinctly, in Dewey's case it is a question of *contingent,* in Hegel's of *necessary* false consciousness.

On the other hand, however, the Hegelian conception of problems as contradictions also involves difficulties. As interesting as the thesis that historical formations *pose their own* problems may be, it must be asked whether this notion does justice to the fact that historical constellations sometimes simply stumble into something that cannot be foreseen and whose conditions are not posited by this something itself. If we consider the diverse sources that can serve as causes of conflicts within forms of life, isn't it often external influences, confrontations with alien practices or forms of life, but also chance constellations and contingent occurrences, that lead a form of life to become problematic or lead to conflicts within it? A conception that confines itself to the internal dynamic of forms of life induced by internal contradictions and does not leave any room for the development of *new* contradictions and *contingent* problems would then be too internal and too narrow to do justice to these findings. As a result, it would not be able to do justice to what can be conceived as the material character of the concept of a problem and can be made fruitful as (in a moderate sense) "problem-generating reality."

The Realization of Contradiction as Conflict

Can the strengths of Hegel's conception of problems as contradictions be salvaged while at the same time overcoming its implausible moments? In what follows, I will outline two related proposals in an attempt to address the contingency problem just raised and the question of how to deal with the new.

(1) On the one hand, the alternative between external problems and immanent problems can be circumvented by conceiving of form-of-life problems in the way developed above as *second order* problems that are perceived through reflection. Then the decisive issue is not what *caused* the problem and whether this cause lies within a form of life or had an external origin—for example, a confrontation with other forms of life, with nature, or with other contingent events. What is decisive is the level at which the problem becomes a problem. That forms of life *pose* their problems *themselves* does not necessarily mean that they *make* or produce them themselves. That forms of life are not merely confronted with problems does not necessarily mean that all problems are already a function of the *internal constitution* of forms of life and hence are *internally generated*. It simply means that the problems in question can *become* problems for a form of life only by being appropriated, that is, as a result of forms of life *making them their own as* problems.

Then an external cause of conflict or impediment to action can also turn out to be a genuine form-of-life problem—as I discussed above using the example of a period of drought—if it becomes apparent that the corresponding form of life does not have the resources to cope with it. Let us assume that these resources (as in the case of the society that fails to build a storehouse even after repeated catastrophic droughts) are lacking because the drought is seen within the corresponding form of life and its interpretation of the world as ineluctable divine punishment. Then one can say that the initially contingent problem whose cause is external to the form of life (the drought) encounters the latent inability of a society to respond to a highly probable natural occurrence that it has also experienced repeatedly. Thus, the problem brings to light a systematic deficiency of its interpretation of the world and of its practical possibilities. Let us assume further that the society in question becomes aware of this deficiency of the corresponding form of life and that the latter is in fact impaired not only in asserting its claims to interpretive sovereignty (because the form of life is actually failing) but also in its perception of itself (because it no longer believes it itself). Then the drought ultimately places the system of reference of a form of life in question.[46]

But in that case the decisive moment for the conception of genuine form-of-life problems is not that crisis-triggering problems must come from within, but that, in contrast to disasters or mere dysfunctions, they exist only if the challenge that initially comes from external problems is accepted in some way by the corresponding form of life. In such cases, the contradiction, the contradictory constitution, would not always be there from the outset; rather, it first takes shape through the confrontation with the external challenges. In other words, the increasingly contradictory constellation should not be thought of as if all elements are always already present within it or as if it had to produce all of them out of itself.[47] It should be thought of instead as a formation that first "merges," as it were, to form the constellation of a contradiction. The emergence of something new, of crisis-triggering events, is then a matter of a contingent problem encountering a contradictory-problematic constellation that triggers these very contradictions. Problems (also those that assume the form of a contradiction) would then always be the result of a collision between inside and outside, whose relative weights may vary and that therefore prove to be contingent in varying degrees.[48]

(2) My second thesis follows directly from this: If we want to make the Hegelian understanding of problems as contradictions outlined here productive, we must rethink the relationship between *contradiction* and *conflict*. A contradiction, and therefore, if you will, the "objective side" of a crisis, also first has to be actualized in a conflict—that is, it must be *made* into the crisis. The metaphor of surface and depth invoked above may be misleading here, insofar as it suggests that contradictions develop of their own accord (that they emerge from the depths). A profound contradiction *may* break out, but it does not have to. As history (and the history of

theories of crises) shows, formations described as "contradictory" sometimes persist for a surprisingly long time. Therefore, the process in which a contradiction is *actualized* must be taken seriously. Thus, the contradiction, as the objective side of a crisis, itself has a subjective side. Precisely because the contradiction as such is constituted through reflection and is based on validity claims, these claims must also be *asserted*—they must be raised and turned into a conflict by social actors.[49] Anthony Giddens's juxtaposition of social conflict and contradiction is helpful here. If a contradiction, according to Giddens, is "an *opposition or disjunction of structural principles* of social systems, where those principles operate *in terms of each other* but at the same time *contravene one another,*"[50] then, on the other hand, the conflict is something that arises in the specific moments in which individuals or groups actively articulate their differences regarding their interests and actions. These two aspects are connected with each other inasmuch as contradictions represent potential lines of conflict. The conflict erupts along such lines of conflict as a concrete and specific clash only when actors embrace it. Conversely, resolving the conflict may call for changes at the structural level of contradiction. In that case, the social conflict would be *guided* by the internal contradiction but would not be *caused* by it in a deterministic sense; conversely, an *adequate* thematization and resolution of a conflict is distinguished by the fact that it reacts to that very structural dimension.[51]

That a crisis first has to be actualized does not mean, therefore, that it would be pointless to question and analyze social reality as regards its immanent contradictions. One completely fails to understand the conflicts and, in case of doubt, acts clumsily as soon as one loses sight of the perspective of systematic contradictions. One could even go further and develop a typology of erroneous or misguided social conflicts based on the criterion of fit with the structural lines of contradiction of a historical-social situation; just think of how social conflicts can regress into ethnic conflicts or of the phenomenon of voluntaristic revolts that lack the backing of the systemic foundations of social change.

This brings us closer to an answer to the problem of contingency raised above, which I will take up again in the following chapter when I discuss the dynamics of problem-solving processes. Social crises, insofar as they depend on the fact that they erupt and are realized in conflicts, do not arise of necessity, strictly speaking. They are not causally necessary consequences of a specific situation or of circumstances that admit of detailed description. Such crises are merely *probable,* if we follow Habermas's early reconstruction of the concept of crisis.[52] Nevertheless, if a conflictual escalation and thematization of contradictions, and hence moments of collective thematization of a form of life that has become problematic, fail to materialize, this may have *consequences*—namely, for the ability to learn and the learning development of the form of life in question, for its ability to reflect, its permeability, vitality, and self-accessibility. Thus, the nonactualization of latent crises, it can be claimed, leads to the formation of ideologies and blockages to learning—to specific forms of irrationality.

We can also draw a conclusion from these reflections for a question that arose in the context of my remarks on "real contradictions." If I spoke there of the role of the "theorist of contradiction," then this suggests that contradictions are always also effects of the dialectical construction itself. This establishes relationships that create the basis for regarding a constellation as a contradiction in the first place. But then "dialectical social contradictions" would not reside, strictly speaking, in reality itself but instead—according to the model of "interpretive dialectics" to which I will return later—in its interpretation. However, I want to assert that contradictions are at the same time suggested by reality. Thus (to return to the description offered above), they are as much objective as subjective in character insofar as they are not necessarily actualized as conflict. Hence, even though it does not always *have to* come to an explicit confrontation between subjects and institutionalized practices, contradictions nevertheless exercise effects as problems.

CHAPTER TEN

The Dynamics of Learning Processes

Contradiction is what moves the world.

—G. W. F. Hegel

THIS CHAPTER will examine the specific *dynamic* that arises when we conceive of social transformation processes as the unfolding of (social) contradictions or as a matter of coping with problems. There are substantial (and instructive) differences between the positions of Dewey, MacIntyre, and Hegel as presented here not only with regard to their respective conceptions of problems but also to the dynamics of problem-*solving*. These differences have decisive consequences for the possibility of describing a process of social change as progressive or regressive, as rational or irrational.

If one has a problem (or gets into a crisis), then in the first place one faces an impediment to action. You don't know what to do next. Something unproblematic becomes problematic, a familiar procedure comes to a standstill, you are stuck; well-oiled mechanisms of interpretation provide no help, the familiar system of reference has come unstuck. In such a situation, where are the resources to overcome the problem actually to be found? How does one get "from here to there," from the problem to its solution? And, correspondingly, how can a form of life that has succumbed to crisis overcome this crisis? The crucial difference between the approaches of Dewey, MacIntyre, and Hegel—between an in-the-widest-sense pragmatist approach to problem-solving and a dialectical understanding of processes of social transformation—can be understood as follows: Hegel's approach conceives of the dynamic of the erosion and failure of formations of ethical life, together with the resulting transformation processes, as a *continuum* in which the problem, conceived as a contradiction, already contains the resources required to solve it. What constitutes such a problem-solving dynamic is not discontinuity and innovative-eventful confrontation, but a certain kind of continuity between old and new—*continuity in discontinuity.*

Both Dewey and MacIntyre, on the other hand, assume that there are discontinuities between how problems are posed and their solutions and emphasize the innovative and disconnected moments of sudden, unforeseen problem solutions. The Hegelian model, according to which problem-solving involves the *unfolding of contradictions,* leads not only to a more continuous but also to a decidedly more determinate dynamic than that of *overcoming problems* as understood by Dewey and MacIntyre. If even the discontinuous upheavals, changes, and readjustments of a social formation represent moments of an overarching continuity, then in virtue of this very fact, the logic of this change can be understood as a process of enrichment and differentiation—or, if you will, as progress.

This chapter will examine more closely which of these approaches offers the more plausible account of the development dynamics of forms of life and which of them can provide a description of social and historical learning processes from which the criteria of their rationality *as* learning processes that I am seeking can be gleaned. Speaking of such an enrichment and differentiation process already involves several presuppositions. In order to be able to say of a form of life that it has *learned* something, it must have undergone change and at the same time remained the same; it must exhibit identity in difference. A result without any connection with the initial situation, that, as something new and unrelated, was *completely different* from what went before, would be so radically discontinuous that it could not easily be recognized as the result of a learning process. On the other hand, a transformation process that represented an entirely immanent development out of itself could not be understood as a learning process according to my model either, since it would not constitute a learning experience with oneself *and* the object, but merely an experience with oneself. Here there would not be anything that would compel the performance of a practice (and the subjects involved in it) to go beyond itself by learning something. Therefore, changes that should be conceived as learning processes are neither radically discontinuous nor purely immanent. If genuine learning stands opposed in one respect to mere change, then learning must also be differentiated from the idea of an automatic development. In this respect, we must ask what role the actors play, what role is played by active intervention in social transformation processes, that is, how the "passive" and "active" moments, the conditions for a change and their actual realization—or also, contradiction and conflict—are related to each other in this context. This difference between mere changes, development processes and learning processes on which the possibility of distinguishing rational learning processes ultimately depends, will constitute the point of convergence of the discussion in the following sections. As in the last chapter, I will begin by examining the conceptions of Dewey, MacIntyre, and Hegel in turn (Sections 10.1 to 10.3) and in conclusion propose a mediating position in the shape of a dialectical-pragmatist understanding of learning processes (Section 10.4).

10.1 Problem-Solving as an Experimental Learning Process

Dewey's conception provides us with an extremely detailed account of how problem-solving processes or processes of inquiry unfold as an interweaving of continuous and discontinuous-innovative moments. Learning, thus conceived, is not only triggered by practical impediments to action (as outlined in Chapter 8) but in addition can only be realized in a practical-experimental form—that is, only by confronting the resulting forms of resistance. This is because the success of problem solutions cannot be fully anticipated but can only be experienced on the basis of the practical effects of an attempted solution. Dewey analyzed the dynamics of such problem-solving processes in several places, but most succinctly in his *Logic*.[1] If we take a closer look at the stages of the process of inquiry (following the initial situation), then several steps can be identified.[2]

Identification of the Problem

The *first step* consists in the formulation or *identification of the problem*. As mentioned above, the identification of something *as* a problem is already part of the solution process. If the indeterminate situation marks the starting point, then "to see that a situation requires inquiry is the initial step in inquiry."[3] Assuming that this does not mean that one makes problems oneself or merely invents them, it can only mean that the problem is to a certain extent filtered out of a diffusely problematic situation and named. The formulation of a problem is thus the beginning of the process of (re)gaining determinateness: in complete accord with everyday usage, one *determines* a problem by singling it, and not some other one, out, thereby lending it a definable contour.[4]

In this way, the truism that "a problem well put is half-solved"[5] acquires a systematic meaning. In a process of inquiry, how the problem is posed and how it is solved appear as a continuum, as stages in a continuous process: "Just because a problem well stated is on its way to solution, the determining of a genuine problem is a *progressive* inquiry."[6] This has implications for how the problem-solving process should be understood. On the one hand, the same initial situation can clearly give rise to *different problems*. But this "constructive character" of how problems are posed does not imply that the latter is an arbitrary matter. On the contrary, even the identification of the problem can be more or less successful. The way in which problems are posed plays a role in determining which solutions are possible. That "a problem well put is half-solved" means, conversely, that a poor, diffuse, or ambiguous specification of a problem is an obstacle to solving it. And the continuity between how the problem is posed and its solution entails that the problem or its description can change in the course of the process of inquiry so that how the problem is posed has to be reformulated. ("Only now is it apparent what the problem was.")

But how does one identify a problem? Dewey speaks of a process of exploration in which the clarified (determined) components first have to be separated out of the overall indeterminate situation. This presupposes that there will never be a situation of complete determinateness, that is, that an indeterminate situation always contains some share of determinateness. A problem could never be derived from a completely indeterminate situation.[7]

The above-mentioned example of the outbreak of a fire in a theater—a situation Dewey himself mentions, but without relating it to each of the steps in the problem-solving process—provides a good illustration of the individual steps leading from the identification to the resolution of a problem.

> *A strange, acrid smell spreads in an overcrowded theater; members of the audience in the stalls notice a slight agitation breaking out in the upper tiers. The situation is confusing: on the stage the play is continuing but in the auditorium some people are growing nervous; it is also unclear where the smoke, which is gradually becoming noticeable, is coming from (maybe from the stage?). Thus, the situation is indeterminate: it is not clear exactly what's going on and the individual observations don't form a coherent picture.*[8]

The procedure of *determining and identifying the problem* begins when one brings the (internal and external) agitation that one perceives, the various indications and isolated observations, together and concludes that the strange acrid smell and the initial signs of agitation in the upper tiers are signs that a fire must have broken out somewhere in the theater. The onset of the fire alarm confirms this assumption. The problem now assumes a very concrete form: the task is to make a safe exit from the theater, which will probably soon be consumed by flames. In this case, therefore, determining the problem already involves several phases: specifying the situation (fire!), drawing the conclusion from this (the need to escape), and formulating the problem in a conclusive way: "What's the best way to get out of here?" With this, however, we are already in the middle of the second step and have already begun to solve the problem.

Exploring the Conditions of the Solution to the Problem

This *second step* involves exploring the *conditions of the problem or its solution* and consists in filtering out the "settled constituents" of the situation: "to search out the *constituents* of a given situation, which, as constituents, are settled."[9] Here, therefore, in a sea of indeterminateness there are islands of determinateness. Now the task is to locate these islands in order to be in a position to make connections between them.

It is in this phase, therefore—and as a precondition for developing ideas for solutions—that one separates the open questions from those that have already been answered. In doing so, one simultaneously establishes the conditions of action that provide the background for the practical options now to be determined. In the case of the fire alarm, the characteristics of the fire and of the space in which it is burning constitute the "settled," that is, determinate, elements of the situation. What we already know (even though we do not yet know how to escape from the theater) is that fire always starts somewhere and tends to spread from there. We also know that direct contact with fire and smoke are harmful for us and that a theater has exits. In order to determine an escape route, therefore, we have to find out where the fire is located and in what direction it is spreading, where the exits are, and whether the path to them is clear. We make further observations in order to add to the information we already know. From these constituents, which are in part already clear and in part still in need of clarification by further observation, follow the conditions of our further actions.

This step shows once again how closely the problem posed is connected, or forms a continuum with, its solution. The problem is described differently depending on the conditions for solving it. It may either be the almost insoluble problem of escaping along with three thousand other people within a very short time from a space with only two exits, or the problem of leading three hundred people out in an orderly fashion through ten emergency exits. Therefore, with the exploration of the facts that give rise to further tasks for observation, we are already in the midst of solving the problem. Thus, this exploration is as much a part of the formulation of the problem as it is of its solution.

Search for an Idea for a Solution

The *third step* is the *search for an idea for a solution.* The path leading from a problematic initial situation to its supersession leads through testing-experimental exploration, that is, through the experimental development of possible problem solutions. Ideas are a kind of rehearsal, an "anticipation of something that may happen."[10] How do such ideas for solutions arise? They emerge "from the more or less vague speculations about possible solutions."[11] Flexibility and creativity are required to develop such speculations. The search for problem-solving ideas depends on suggestions of a sudden nature. There is something inaccessible and involuntary about them: they "just spring up, flash upon us, occur to us."[12] One of Dewey's achievements was to work out the role of such suggestions, but at the same time to connect their appropriateness back to a controlled examination. For there is an interaction between the definition and delimitation of facts and the development of ideas:

> Observations of facts and suggested meanings or ideas arise and develop in correspondence with each other. The more the facts of the case come to light in consequence of being subjected to observation, the clearer and more pertinent become the conceptions of the way the problem constituted by these facts is to be dealt with. On the other side, the clearer the idea, the more definite, as a truism, become the operations of observation and execution that must be performed in order to resolve the situation.[13]

Thus, ideas for solutions do not simply arise in a vacuum of boundless possibilities. Moreover, the ideas for solutions that "pop into our heads" work their way from the vague to the determinate; suggestions become possible solutions by playing out consequences: "The suggestion becomes an idea when it is examined with reference to its functional fitness; its capacity as a means of resolving the given situation."[14]

The problem-solving explorations, therefore, first pave the way to a certain extent for the suggestions that then pop up—for the abrupt and sudden inspiration—and create the conditions that enable them to enter the situation. However, the solution is then reintegrated into the continuities of a practical situation, and its effectiveness is demonstrated by the success of this integration.

Examination of the Idea

This step-by-step examination of ideas for solutions already constitutes the *fourth step* in the investigation. Taking the example of the theater fire: you look around you, see this or that way out, and, if difficulties arise, you have the sudden inspiration that there must also be exits behind the stage. The idea finally acquires "form" as you trace the escape route in thought and in the process encounter additional difficulties that can eventually be overcome by new ideas.

When Dewey speaks of ideas as "anticipated consequences,"[15] one can imagine this examination process as a rapid succession of idea and examination, as an interlocking reciprocal (or feedback) relationship. The arbitrariness of the suggestions (their unpredictability and creativity) is thus mitigated, on the one hand, by the recognition that they are conditioned by circumstances and, on the other, by the fact that it is retrospectively "worked through" by the examination process. Nevertheless, the Deweyan problem-solving process, however orderly it may appear, remains a fortuitous process that operates with the method of trial and error.[16]

Dewey describes this process in *Democracy and Education* in a more detailed and succinct manner as the method of trial and error, or what might be called a method of "regulating response" *[abänderndes Reagieren]* involving an interplay between exploratory actions and the reaction to their results:

> All our experiences have a phase of "cut and try" in them—what psychologists call the method of trial and error. We simply do something, and when it fails, we do something else, and keep on trying till we hit upon something which works.[17]

The decisive feature of this description is that the method thus sketched anticipates unexpected side effects of action, hence that many of the effects of our action are unintended and cannot be anticipated, so that the latter are first taught by practice. The feedback process thus described is the precondition for problem-solving knowledge: we do something and through the effects of this action learn that what we have done has been more or less successful with regard to our objectives. "To 'learn from experience,'" writes Dewey, "is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence."[18]

Our actions can give rise to something new that we cannot anticipate, which can in turn have consequences that could not be expected, or we can encounter unforeseeable or contingent obstacles.[19] This applies not only to the major lines of development of world history but also to manual and intellectual work processes. Thus, action (even on a small scale) cannot be so easily understood on the model of the simple realization of a telos.[20] This is precisely why trying out and experimenting are so central: only in this way, only when we have tried out what effects we achieve with certain actions, and only when we have experienced how we can fail in the process, does learning by solving problems become possible.

Modification of the Hypotheses

The *fifth step* in the investigation involves the examination and modification of hypotheses. This is where rational discourse and (logical) operationalization come on the scene, as well as what Dewey calls "examination of the meaning as a meaning": "This examination consists in noting what the meaning in question implies in relation to other meanings in the system of which it is a member."[21] Even if the operationalization will be more limited in the case of the theater example than in the examination of hypotheses in, say, experimental physics, here, too, there is an analytically separable procedure in which the original idea must be formulated in such a way that it becomes verifiable and can be related to the other conditions of the situation.

Restoring the Unproblematic Situation

The *sixth step,* finally, involves restoring the unproblematic situation. Here the problem solution that has been found is inserted into the context that has become problematic, with the aim of (re)producing consistency or "qualitative wholeness." This is followed by validation through experiment (in the case of science) or in practice (in everyday life). The result is a changed situation: the problem has been overcome and the unproblematic situation has been (re)created. In the case of the fire, the practical examination consists in the escape from the theater. If my escape plan was a good one, I am now in a changed situation—namely, outside and in safety.

Incidentally, this does not necessarily mean that problem-solving involves restoring an old condition. The theater example may be misleading in this respect. Even though overcoming crises generally means that the nexus of action and meaning of a situation has to be restored, often this will be achieved only through innovation, the introduction of new elements and adjustments to (or the creation of) a changed situation. For example, if the Copernican Revolution can be understood as the restoration of a situation, then what is meant is that it became possible to make sense of the world again after the conversion to the heliocentric worldview and the observational data could once again be made fruitful. But here, restoring the situation specifically requires the *transformation* and renewal of the traditional view of the world. The procedure of reintegrating and restoring connections thus calls for a dynamic rather than a static concept of problem-solving.

To the dynamic of a problem-solving process belongs, finally, its open-endedness and fallibility—undeniably the most controversial and most important distinguishing feature of a pragmatist conception of problem-solving.[22] Dewey's conception assumes in an experimental spirit that every solution achieved is fallible and hence finite, that is, a solution for the time being in the sense that at any moment it can prove to be inadequate and be replaced by a better one.

Criteria for Problem-Solving

So what is Dewey's criterion for *successfully solving* a problem by means of the process of examination he describes? And, conversely, what signals that it has failed? Whereas the examination of a problem solution with regard to its coherence with other convictions, as outlined in the fifth step above, provides an initial pointer to the suitability of an idea, the ultimate criterion for evaluating a proposed solution to a problem is practical in nature—namely, that the solution *works:*

> The final test of [the idea's] possession of these properties [i.e. suitability for solving the problem] is determined when it actually functions—that is, when it is put into operation so as to institute by means of observations facts not previously observed, and is then used to organize them with other facts into a coherent whole.[23]

The general criterion for the success of the solution to a problem is therefore the dissolution of the prior crisis and hindrance to action or the dissolution of incoherence. Instead of remaining in the precarious situation in the theater, I manage to escape; instead of becoming even more inconsistent with the old worldview with every new observation, the integration of the previously conflicting experiences and their practical implementation (as in the case of the Copernican Revolution) is now once again conceivable. That this integration is appropriate or coherent is shown by the fact that it dissolves the practical impediments to action that prompted the process of inquiry.

However, practical *functioning* as a criterion for the appropriateness of a problem solution does not concern individual aspects, but always the nexus of action of an entire situation that must be reintegrated and made to work. Functioning is therefore a complex concept that also includes the restoration of an internally coherent interpretive framework for the now once again functioning actions and (self-)interpretations.

Metacriteria of a Successful Problem-Solving Dynamic

Very much in line with my initial question, we now have, in addition to the criterion of functioning, a further criterion of the success of a solution—namely, a metacriterion:

> The measure of its success, the standard of its validity, is precisely the degree in which the thinking actually disposes of the difficulty and allows us to proceed with more direct modes of experiencing, that are forthwith possessed of more assured and deepened value.[24]

In addition to actually overcoming a problem, with his reference to "more direct modes of experiencing" Dewey develops a criterion that refers not to the successful solution itself, but to the successful *dynamics* of solving a problem. The outcome of a successful learning process is not only a better way of coping with a previously problematic situation; a successful learning process also works *as* a learning or experiential process. From this we can derive important clues for what we are seeking, namely, the possibility of establishing criteria of rationality that lie within the learning process itself.

What exactly does a learning process that is "successful" in this sense look like? Dewey neither developed nor systematized the metacriteria for a successful problem-solving process hinted at here. However, his theory of education and learning provide clues that can also be applied to social learning processes. Successful learning processes are ones that extend and deepen the possibilities of experience. They present themselves as the "reconstruction or reorganization of experience *which adds to the meaning of experience,* and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."[25] Dewey also calls such a process "growth." A learning process involving growth gives rise to a general extension of competences and a deepening of our access to the world in virtue of the "increased perception of the connections and continuities of the activities in which we are engaged."[26] If a transformation process is to qualify as a genuine learning process, it must have accumulated and reorganized experience; at the same time, it must be so constituted that it is not immunized against new experiences. Thus, the statement "Don't block the path of further inquiry" can serve as a context-transcending criterion for a successful problem-solving process. On the other hand, learning processes fail when they block experience, that is, when they impoverish or limit experience or render it one-dimensional. Growth in the context of Dewey's reflections is an open process and (although the concept of growth as such can also be understood differently) is emphatically understood as an alternative to a teleological conception of development as a process that can be concluded in view of a given goal. "Growth and the possibility of further growth," as Dewey never tires of emphasizing, is not directed to a given and ascertainable end. Instead, growth is itself the end:[27] "Growth is [mistakenly] regarded as *having* an end, instead of *being* an end."[28] Therefore, growth should not be conceived on the model of the development of a child into an adult or that of a plant that will attain a form already implicit in the seed, but instead as an intrinsically valuable and open-ended process into which something new enters through the transformation itself:

> In its contrast with the ideas both of unfolding of latent powers from within, and of formation from without . . . the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is *educative,* it reaches that end—the direct transformation of the quality of experience.[29]

"Cumulative growth," the "direct transformation of the quality of the experience," thereby becomes the criterion for the success and the rationality of a problem-solving process.[30]

Social Blockages to Learning

The *rationality of a pragmatist social learning dynamic* can therefore be described relatively economically, but above all immanently, without any need for an Archimedean reference point "outside" of the development—such as the phantasm of the realization of a human nature or history attacked by Richard Rorty. Such a dynamic unfolds rationally when it does not block either current or future experiences but instead enables them and allows them to be deepened or extended. A general characteristic of blockages to learning is that social change cannot be configured as a social learning process. For example, those social mechanisms prove to be blockages to learning that prevent a society from reflecting in appropriate terms on the realities of social change (that is, changes that have already occurred), from shaping social changes collectively and from meeting them with an adequate collective self-understanding—in short, those mechanisms that prevent us from perceiving and measuring up to the reality of a constantly changing society. Among these mechanisms are, speaking very generally, anything that prevents us from making connections, that is, anything that presents reality to us as fragmented.[31] As a typical mechanism that blocks learning, however, Dewey also describes how processes of collective self-understanding can be obstructed by clinging to outdated patterns of interpretation, as in the paradigmatic example already discussed of individualism that misunderstands itself:

> For the older symbols of ideal life still engage thought and command loyalty. Conditions have changed, but every aspect of life, from religion and education to property and trade, shows that nothing approaching a transformation has taken place in ideas and ideals. Symbols control sentiment and thought, and the new age has no symbols consonant with its activities.[32]

It is no coincidence that this account of obsolescence is reminiscent of Karl Mannheim's definition of ideology as a consciousness that "fails to take account of the new realities applying to a situation, and . . . attempts to conceal them by thinking of them in categories which are inappropriate"[33]—or, to put it in Deweyan terms, as a collective "withdrawal from reality."[34]

Systematic Blockages to Learning

Two aspects of the concept of a rationally progressive developmental dynamic prefigured by Dewey are instructive for my question. First, the concept is in a certain (although not Hegelian) sense *negativistic:* it is a matter of a dynamic of development triggered by a crisis experience whose driving force is the surmounting of the problem. Such a learning dynamic does not have to be directed to a positive goal whose content is specifiable. It is motivated in the first instance by the negative experience that something cannot go on in this way. Second, the concept is *formal* in the sense that I am seeking. As projected at the beginning of this study, the reorganization of experience through learning and growth describe the *how* of the process, not the *what* of what is to be realized in it.[35]

However informative the model of social progress oriented to the enrichment of experience may be, we must ask whether sufficient and stable criteria for *successful* social learning processes can actually be derived from the *absence of blockages,* hence whether one can already make positive inferences from it concerning the rationality of such a learning process. The notion of growth seems too vague in many respects for this purpose, because it only designates the very indeterminate direction of a progressive development that contains not very reliable criteria for establishing whether the situation reached provides adequate resources for current and further solutions to problems. The notion of an extension or "enrichment and differentiation" of experience remains too vague for this purpose, because this experiential process cannot be described in a systematic way as a reflexive process. It is true that, according to Dewey, someone who learns something not only learns something about the corresponding situation or the corresponding object, but always also (on the meta-level of the learning process) about overcoming problems in general ("learning to learn"). Accordingly, learning always has two results: the direct result of *coping with the situation* and the indirect result of the increase in general *competences for coping with situations*. Nevertheless, such a conception of an extension of experience does not reflect systematically on its own foundations of validity.

However, as already suggested above (and even actually implied by Dewey's own examples), the specific blockages to learning in which forms of life can become trapped typically involve forms of collective self-deception or ideology. These are not simply a matter of more or less contingent obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge, but of the categorial organization of existing knowledge; thus, they may concern the fundamental question of the conditions under which we (can) have (social) experiences. But then the lack of knowledge that underlies blockages to learning is not merely a matter of not-yet-knowing which can be overcome through intermittent flashes of insight; there are systematic and immanent reasons for the blockages in question. Then learning, when it comes to the dynamics of forms of life, is not the simple adaptation process that Dewey seems to have in mind when he understands blockages to learning essentially on the model of antiquated ideals failing to keep pace with the innovations of the technological world.[36] But if social blockages to learning involve systematic rather than contingent blockages of access to the foundations of knowledge, which are open to social reflection and can be implemented in learning processes, then progress in learning, which should be understood as a process of enrichment and differentiation, always requires in addition the removal of these systematic causes. In other words, progress in learning calls for reflection back upon the framework or the foundations of the very structure of practice and interpretation that causes such blockages.

Thus, the rationality of social learning processes cannot be demonstrated exclusively in terms of the factual resolution of a crisis. Rather, it must be shown that crises have been resolved in a nonideological and nonregressive way. However, the criterion of learning unhindered by blockages is too weak for this purpose. What is required is instead to qualify such blockages. In other words, what is required is a more precise determination of different kinds of experiences and above all of the possibilities of *loss* of experience that can afflict social learning processes (and hence forms of life).

10.2 The Dynamics of Traditions

A proposal for understanding the appropriateness of problem-solving processes in terms of a retrospective criterion that enables us to identify processes of enrichment and differentiation can be found in MacIntyre's reflections on the rational dynamics of traditions.

MacIntyre does not offer a comparably detailed description of problem-solving processes to the one we were able to trace in Dewey. In MacIntyre's work we find instead an instructive connection between continuity and discontinuity in their dynamics that is particularly apparent in the case of epistemological crises and the associated paradigm shifts. In such situations, there are two ways in which crises can be surmounted. When a tradition in the grip of crisis is confronted with a different tradition, it can respond by abandoning its own tradition and adopting the opposing one. Sometimes, however, the crisis also gives rise to a new tradition, which presents itself as a mixture of the two traditions that have been overcome. Thus, a paradigm can be replaced by another, new and initially unrelated, paradigm. But it can also change by extending its interpretive framework and the framework of the practices conceivable within it in such a way that, with the help of the newly added elements, further and new experiences can be integrated into the now modified tradition.

Retroactive Narrative Integration

In order to render such a recomposition and transformation process intelligible as a rational learning process of a crisis-riven tradition (and not merely as its dissolution or replacement), MacIntyre must combine two leitmotifs: innovation and the new, on the one hand, with continuity and interpretation, on the other. He achieves this through the concept of a narrative reintegration of what has changed in the course of innovation. Taking research traditions as his guide, MacIntyre distinguishes three criteria in terms of which a given solution to a problem can be identified as the result of a rational enrichment and differentiation process, so that the situation arrived at can be shown to be superior to the one superseded.

Firstly, such a theory or tradition must in fact offer a *solution* to the problems that have arisen: "The justification of the new theses will lie precisely in their ability to achieve what could not have been achieved prior to that innovation."[37] Secondly, it must provide an *explanation* for why the problem arose. Thirdly, it must be able to establish a *continuity* between the situation before and after the crisis, and hence to make a connection between the traditional beliefs and the new concepts.

Here, no less than in Dewey, the process of solving problems relies on innovation and imagination. If a crisis is marked by the fact that one no longer knows what to do, then the rescue, the dissolution of the standstill or disturbance, comes from somewhere one simply cannot as yet determine. If the traditional practices, the interpretive framework of communication, have become obsolete, then the corresponding crisis can be brought to an end only by switching to unforeseeable and new concepts, theories, and conceptual systems:

> The theses central to the new theoretical and conceptual structures, just because they are significantly richer than and escape the limitations of those theses which were central to the tradition before and as it entered its period of epistemological crisis, will in no way be derivable from those earlier positions. Imaginative conceptual innovation will have had to occur.[38]

If this were a question of unrelated innovation, however, the problem-solving process would not be a learning process strictly speaking but an occurrence or event that is hard to influence.[39] This is why MacIntyre connects his orientation to innovation and discontinuity back to the moment of coherence to be generated through narrative. Regardless of whether the result is the replacement of an older tradition or a mixture of two traditions, a crisis is really solved only when the changed tradition exhibits sufficient continuity with the old one that it can be understood (and can understand itself) as the successor of this specific tradition. In order to qualify as an appropriate solution, it is not enough that the new tradition solves the problems of the old one *as a matter of fact*—hence that it achieves what was previously unattainable. Rather, its superiority is shown by the fact that it offers a new and enriched scheme in terms of which the problems to which a tradition has succumbed can not only be solved but also be understood.

The two further criteria come into play here. For, assuming, secondly, that a (rightly) victorious tradition reestablishes the continuity interrupted by the crisis, then it must render the crisis intelligible—and sometimes even recognizable in the first place.[40] Only with this, thirdly, does the (new) solution make the old, fragmented tradition accessible once again. Thus, the suitability of the new is shown by its ability to establish continuity with the old, to reassemble what was fragmented, to lend new cohesion to what was incoherent, and to integrate it in the wake of the restored tradition. The reasons that can be cited in support of the claim that one tradition is superior to another, and the reasons for the crisis-riven tradition to abandon its own practices and convictions and adopt those of the other tradition reside, according to MacIntyre, in this very capacity for retroactive integration.

With this we have a criterion of progress within a dynamic of traditions that supersede each other: it can be derived from the possible "construction of more adequate narratives."[41] The latter can be conceived as more and more adequate insofar as they become progressively more complete and inclusive. And this is shown, in turn, by the fact that, analogously to the theoretical development, we not only overcome the respective past tradition (or interpretation of the world) as a matter of fact, but also understand the reasons for its emergence and failure:

> The criterion of a successful theory is that it enables us to understand its predecessors in a newly intelligible way. It . . . enables us to understand precisely . . . why, without and before its illumination, past theory could have remained credible. It introduces new standards for evaluating the past. It recasts the narrative which constitutes the continuous reconstruction of the scientific tradition.[42]

Although it is not possible to provide a prospective justification of a particular development as an instance of change for the better, such a justification can be produced *retrospectively,* after the transformation of the narrative. The "rival" in the conflict of traditions is in this case not only de facto victorious and capable of solving the problems; it is also "better" insofar as it can claim the authority to interpret what occurred and can establish continuity with the situation before the crisis. In contrast to a conception of social transformation processes as discontinuous paradigm shifts or the sudden replacement of one vocabulary by another (as in Rorty), what MacIntyre wants to demonstrate as the overarching rationality of traditions resides in precisely this ability to establish continuity.

Vague and Empty?

Such a solution dynamic describes a differentiating process of enrichment and progress—or, in Bernard Williams's words, a "vindicatory history"—which, as we shall see, is quite moderate by comparison with the model often attributed to Hegel.[43] The process in question does not always have to converge on a particular solution. But if the development is to count as rational, it must be possible to reconstruct it, conceive of it, or piece it together retrospectively as a meaningful process. Thus, the reflection back upon the foundations of one's own validity that was called for above in connection with Dewey is not undertaken by the superseded tradition itself (which in case of doubt becomes defunct), and it is not what triggers the crisis (which is a contingent, empirical occurrence). However, the successor to the defunct (or newly amalgamated) tradition does indeed reflect upon the foundations of validity of the new and the old situation, and in this way it assures itself of its own bases of validity. So factual *progress* in solving problems or overcoming crises no longer consists in simply refuting a false condition or overcoming a dysfunctional one but is measured instead by the fact that the latter can be narratively "incorporated" in retrospect.

Two aspects of this MacIntyrean "solution" can contribute to solving my problem. On the one hand, he also does not need an Archimedean point, that is, a standard of rationality external to the crisis-plagued transformation described; on the other hand (like Dewey), he conceives of the solution or learning process in such a way that continuity and discontinuity coexist. Innovative and unpredictable moments are essential to problem-solving, given that MacIntyre describes the crisis as a situation in which all of the usual resources and problem-solving mechanisms have ceased to be effective. To a greater extent than Dewey, however, he is interested in at least retrospectively integrating these innovative moments and legitimizing them as instances of rational problem-solving. This points to a thicker reconstruction of learning histories as progressive (or, as the case may be, regressive) processes. On the other hand, in this way MacIntyre avoids the temptation of making a teleological notion of development modeled on maturing processes into the preferred scheme of interpretation of crisis-prone social change.

The *rationality of a social learning dynamic* could therefore be conceived as follows (combining the approaches of Dewey and MacIntyre): the course it follows is rational when (following Dewey) it does not block either present or future experiences and it raises itself to the level at which problems are currently posed, and when (following MacIntyre) it allows the past to be integrated narratively as the *prehistory* of a problem in the literal sense.

However, how can an appropriate way of generating narrative continuity be distinguished from an inappropriate one? What is the difference between right and wrong, meaningful and ideological or illusory, ways of integrating the past into a "vindicating history"? Isn't it the case that even successful histories often include controversial and one-sided incorporations of the past—when in contemporary China, for example, a narrative is being woven that allows the Maoist heritage to be connected with Confucianism in such a way that the currently virulent elements of the capitalist, market-driven economic dynamic can be integrated into this heritage? And can't old positions also be narratively woven into new experiences in ways that block further experiences? With this, the problem of demonstrating criteria of rationality for transformation processes shifts from a MacIntyrean perspective to one of judging the appropriateness of the narrative itself; yet MacIntyre lacks the necessary conceptual resources to make such a judgment. Therefore, his criteria are not sufficiently robust to enable us to identify real progress, hence to identify the *rationality* of a development; they remain, as Robert Stern puts it, "so vague" as to be "almost empty."[44]

10.3 The Source of Progress and of Degeneration

If Hegel's criterion of the rationality of social transformation processes is stronger than those that can be derived from Dewey's and MacIntyre's positions, then this can be explained in terms of the notion of *continuity in discontinuity* of change specific to a dialectical conception and of the intermeshing of the old and the new that is the result of the unfolding of inherently determinate contradictions. Corresponding to the fact that forms of life in Hegel do not *succumb* to contradictions but are instead *constituted* as contradictions, the dynamic of social transformation assumes the form of a succession of contradictions that develop out of each other. Thus, it involves the development and surmounting of problems that not only *succeed* each other but *result from* one another.[45]

Charles Taylor offers the following sketch from a Hegelian perspective of the sequence of crises, conflicts, and their overcoming and of the underlying conception of historical-social change as a crisis-prone process of division and of the transformation that sublates it:

> From the collapse of the first form another specific one arises. Having resolved the contradiction of its predecessor, it falls victim to its own, and so on through the whole of history.[46]

If history presents itself accordingly as a sequence of crises resulting from the eruption of contradictions, then each new historical formation is a directed and determinate response to the failure of the old. It is this directed character of the connection between the problem and its solution and between destruction and construction that I would now like to reconstruct.

Determinate Negation

Hegel famously describes the internal logic of such a dynamic of change in terms of the developmental pattern of *determinate negation,* which finds its clearest methodological elaboration in the *Phenomenology of Spirit.*

(1) Negation is *determinate* because in the process of negation thus conceived "this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results.*"[47] A process marked by determinate negation is, according to Walter Jaeschke, one "in which the result of the contradiction is not merely nothing, but constitutes a new object."[48] Thus, determinate negation describes a *continuity in discontinuity.*

(2) However, this new object is not, strictly speaking, *completely* new. When Hegel says that "in every case the result of an untrue mode of knowledge must not be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the nothing *of that from which it results*—a result which contains what was true in the preceding knowledge,"[49] then the

object resulting from a (determinately) negated state contains elements of the old—albeit in a transformed guise. This describes a dynamic that assumes the form of a *process of enrichment and differentiation.*

(3) If one can now say of this process that it is not contingent, then it does not follow an externally mapped out course but can be explained in terms of the *immanent developmental logic* of the stages described, in that one formation proceeds from the other. These stages follow an "inner necessity," not because they are driven by an ominous internal engine, but insofar as the "new" is always obtained only as the result of the process of negation thus described. This is why Hegel can say of the incorporation of the old in the new, "It is this fact that guides the entire series of the patterns of consciousness in their *necessary* sequence."[50]

Applying the continuity thus outlined between the way a problem is posed and its solution and the determinateness (and positivity) of the process of destruction sketched here to social formations enables us to throw light on important cornerstones of a historical-dialectical pattern of development.

Firstly, the old constellation of practices and standards does not become obsolete in a sudden and contingent way. Insofar as the problem in question is a reflexive second order problem, the validity claim of the old constellation is *eroded* because it no longer corresponds to the problems posed with it. Conversely, however, the new practices, beliefs, and claims that arise at the end of the transformation process are already being prepared in the old constellation; their existence has already contributed to the downfall (or obsolescence) of the constellation. For example, if the principle of freedom is the principle of Greek ethical life itself that at the same time transcends it, the disappearance of Greek ethical life is made both necessary and possible by the potentials residing in the old formation, which are at the same time its demise. Thus, the new situation lives off the potentials inherent in the old formation, from the capabilities and claims engendered by the latter, but to which it at the same time cannot correspond. As a result, the position that has been superseded contains—in a negative form—not only the necessity but also the possibility of its supersession, that is, it contains the resources for transforming an untenable situation. The crisis of the old already contains the potential for its productive supersession; what triggers the crisis gives rise to the means for resolving it. Accordingly, the crisis is triggered at a moment when these very resources are already available.[51]

Thus, whereas in the Hegelian model the resources for solving a problem are inherent in the old constellation itself that has fallen into crisis, such a dialectical process of development and experience does not merely consist in superseding and destroying a false position but in transforming it in a way that preserves it. In this precise sense—which can be interpreted as the assumption of a problem definition or of a level at which a problem is posed—it contains the old, superseded position "in itself."[52] (Marxian historical materialism took up this motif. However, with the somewhat pathos-laden and banal metaphor that the new society is prepared "in the womb of the old," Marx himself laid the groundwork for the misunderstanding that this involves a quasi-natural, organic maturation process.)

Then the destructive moment is at the same time a constructive moment. What is negated and has to be superseded (therefore) always has a *partial right,* and the movement described is in an eminent sense not destructive but productive, because it triggers a dynamic in which problems are not only solved in a progressively better way, understood in a linear sense, but also in each case at a higher level of reflection. This involves a qualitatively exacting *process of enrichment and differentiation:* problems are not simply worked away or dissolved but become more complex together with their solutions. And the progressive character of the transformation follows from this very increase in complexity (or, as I put it in Section 7.4, the complex nesting of problems and solutions).

Determinate Negation as a Mode of Development and Justification

What would now qualify as standards, in the sense of dialectical progress, for the rightness of an achieved solution—and to what extent do these here also reside in the rationality of the process itself? On the one hand, it may seem strange within the Hegelian reference system to raise this question concerning the criteria for a successful solution to a problem, for Hegel famously thought that philosophy had no business making itself into the judge of world affairs or even prescribing rules to world history. On the other hand, it would be mistaken to believe that for Hegel the merely factual course of history or naked success decides who is right and whether a new historical formation represents the successful overcoming of the old, crisis-plagued formation. On the contrary, the history that Hegel reconstructs here is a *normative* history whose criteria reside in the *rational* progression of the solution process, hence in a form of progress in which the formations that have become reflexively problematic are rationally superseded.

The decisive point of the Hegelian model of dialectical development for the problem I am pursuing can be expressed as follows: determinate negation is *both a mode of development and a mode of justification* or, more precisely, it is a mode of justification *as* a mode of development. A development (transformation) is justified because and insofar as the path it takes can be rationally comprehended. It can be rationally comprehended, according to Hegel's model, insofar as problem and solution are intertwined and refer to each other in accordance with the pattern of determinate negation. This is why the dialectical presentation of the development and its dialectical justification (or, conversely, critique) coincide. A dialectical reconstruction of such a process is therefore not a matter of description or depiction; rather, it is a *normative history,* because the development itself assumes the form of a normatively guided (and normative induced) transformation and can be understood as such. As "the nothingness of that from which it results," it is not merely a change, but progress for the better over the superseded position. Thus, the rationality or legitimacy of a historical process *consists* in the fact that it undergoes such a movement of enrichment and differentiation. The old paradigm produces the new paradigm out of itself, defines its conditions, and contains the possibilities of its emergence within itself. And the dialectical reconstruction of such a process shows that it is (and constitutes it as) rational.

Terry Pinkard outlines the character of a dialectical history or historiography as a self-founding process in this sense in his interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit:*

> A dialectical history tells a different story from that of the history of the historians in that it does not concern itself primarily with how things came about—what social forces were at work, what contingencies were brought into play—but with showing how succeeding "social spaces" contained resources within themselves that were able to explain and justify themselves over and against earlier alternative accounts and to demonstrate and affirm for themselves that their own accounts of themselves were satisfactory.[53]

Such a history does not have any need of a goal that is already known and presupposed—it only needs criteria of the meaningfulness of the series of successive social formations. In other words, a development that is progressive in this sense, that is in effect legitimized in and through the fact that it is progressive, is one which can demonstrate that something is in the given case the best (hence the most integrative) formation in relation to the preceding development—or that it is the best solution to a problem posed at a certain point in the history of its resolution. It is the solution with which the existing validity claims can be reintegrated and through which practices and institutions marked by erosion can be overcome.

Therefore, the rationality of this process is not a court of appeal external to this process. Rather, it is immanent in the process itself in the sense that each step follows from the internal contradictions of the previous step and thus represents a complex differentiating enrichment of a progressive and integrative problem-solving process. The "necessity" with which this process unfolds hinted at here is not the causally compelling fulfillment of a plan of development, but a practical and rational necessity that observes a logic of problem development and of the rationally plausible resolution of these problems.[54] With this we have an answer to the question of criteria for the success or failure of narration that remained open in MacIntyre: if the narrative coincides with the development in this way, then criteria of justification develop out of the development itself.

Freedom as a Principle, Not as a Goal

But how open can we conceive of this process rationality as being, if one thinks of the formula quoted above of history as "progress in the consciousness of freedom"? Isn't the goal of the process after all the guarantor of its rationality—and isn't the approximation to this goal the indicator of normative progress?

My thesis is that here freedom cannot be understood as a substantial goal. Freedom is not some sort of "good" that is striven for and stands at the end of history as its goal. (Therefore history is not developing toward a goal that would have to be conceived in a reified sense as the end of an obstacle race in which freedom could be accepted like a trophy.) The conception of history as progress in the consciousness of freedom refers instead to the insight which is mediated by crisis experiences, into the conditions of the performance of our practice.[55] Therefore, what history—as the form in which human practice unfolds—actually is becomes increasingly clear in the course of the historical process: human forms of life, ethical life, as moments of objective spirit, *are* instantiations of freedom because they are always instances of something that human beings could do in one way but also in a different way—manifestations of human practice that are bound up with a certain room for reflection and shaping. In other words, they are instances of *nomos* as opposed to *physis*. The fact that this "insight" into crisis experiences is mediated means that it does not impose itself as a sudden increase in knowledge or as the direct imposition of a free-floating normative idea alone; rather, it is mediated by a practical movement of transformation in which practices and institutions that have become normatively implausible and dysfunctional are eroded and replaced.

According to this interpretation, therefore, freedom is the pattern of movement of human history and at the same time its content, which is increasingly realized and recognized as such in the course of this history. But, as mentioned above, freedom is not the *goal* but the *principle* of history as a spiritual process, or in Hegel's exact formulation, "[World history] presents the development of spirit's consciousness of its freedom *and of the actualization produced by such consciousness*."[56] When Hegel elsewhere also speaks of "the *stages* of development of the principle whose content is the consciousness of freedom,"[57] this does not mean, as I interpret it, that these stages already exist (like the steps of a staircase) and that the "upward path" is prefigured by them; rather, *the sequence of steps is first produced* by the directed development of the problems out of each other. The principle of freedom first has to unfold—and that means imposing or "actualizing" itself—by overcoming problems and crises that continually arise anew.[58] Therefore, if the realization of the consciousness of freedom can be interpreted as a process through which something that objective spirit as a matter of fact (actually, in itself) already is comes to awareness—or as making something implicit explicit—then what is involved here is a procedure of practical self-knowledge, of reflecting back upon oneself and one's constitutive characteristics, though at the same time they first have to be recognized and realized as constitutive. Below I will return to the question of how this "actualization" and "becoming real" of the idea of freedom should be conceived.

Summary

By now it should be apparent what Hegel's description of the crisis-induced dynamic of transformation can contribute to answering my initial question. With this it becomes possible to conceive of complex rational learning and enrichment processes that can be identified in a systematic way as a succession of progressively more exacting problem descriptions and solutions—and hence as progress toward the better. If the "old" constellation already contains a description of the problem that *demands* a certain solution and also tends to *facilitate* it, then in the field of such problems the solution represents a directed "answer" to a specific problem development. It is this view—each new paradigm is not unrelated to its precursors but can be understood as a direct effect of the shortcomings of the old—that makes it possible to interpret the paradigm shifts thematized by Hegel as *rational.* Therefore, the sequence of paradigms is *not contingent* but is in a certain sense rationally motivated.[59] As we saw above, while MacIntyre's "intermediate position" of retrospective narrative integration remains unclear when it comes to demonstrating the rationality of learning processes, here the assertion that a social paradigm shift can be rationally comprehended stands on more stable ground. In Hegel, the new position is not only better able to cope with the crises that arise. Because the crises are systematic and can therefore be resolved only by changing the frame of reference (which in this context means by critically "working away" what made it deficient), the position reached must be the result of an improved self-understanding and (mediated by this) of an improved understanding of the world. In this sense, Stephen Houlgate states,

> Hegel argues that the most important changes in history have involved shifts in the categories through which human beings understand their world, but that these have not been mere shifts in historical convention. They have been shifts brought about by humanity's growing self-awareness.[60]

Accordingly, the changes in the interpretive framework of historical formations or forms of life triggered by crises cannot be conceived as mere *changes;* rather, they always also involve a deepening of how these formations understand themselves and the world, and ultimately as a progressive movement. Whereas the idea of an enlarged self-understanding (to which the successful narrative attests and at the same time produces) was also implicit in MacIntyre's conception, Hegel is confident that he can establish criteria of success—of the extension of our self-understanding for the better—that are directly related to the form assumed by the process of change.

This definition of a rational or "progressive" dynamic of transformation now also makes possible a systematic classification of its pathological variants. For Hegel is not only able to explain the obsolescence and inappropriateness of some self-understandings and the associated institutional practices. His approach (in contrast to Dewey's, for example) also enables us to establish a *systematic relationship* between this inappropriateness and the fact that it nevertheless remains socially effective. Blockages to learning are then essentially ideologies, and pathological learning processes are essentially regressive reactions to problems that call for (and admit of) different solutions. Therefore, social blockages to learning do not assume the form of obstacles that arise unexpectedly, but of systematically induced *regressions*.

Conversely, however, this possibility that Hegel opens up of diagnosing problems by means of the concept of a determinate, and hence directed, problem-solving process also involves a certain danger. In an analogous way to the immanence of the concept of contradiction criticized above, here there is a danger of the conceptual compartmentalization of problem situations and of a process thus conceived becoming incapable of integrating *new* and possibly *conflicting experiences,* and thus of taking into account the unforeseeable course taken by some transformation processes.

Even if a problem situation is determinate and is directed to (or prepares) a certain answer, not only does the dynamic of its solution (if we are faced with real social crisis situations) not arise spontaneously; it also cannot be anticipated directly and unproblematically from how the problem is posed. As it unfolds, it must expect to encounter contingent events and constellations—but also the existence of resistance or, one could say, the materiality of a recalcitrant world that is not always already our own. Even though the potential for overcoming a problem may already be implicit in it in some respect, this does not imply the existence a finished blueprint for the further development, nor would it be a foregone conclusion that the corresponding dynamic will be triggered at all. Therefore, Hegel's dialectical concept of continuous discontinuity seems to be too narrow in some respects, and the inner logic of the process presupposed here seems to purchase the possibility of understanding changes in normative (and rational) terms with excessively strong assumptions about their necessity. But then it also threatens to become unclear what distinguishes the continuity in discontinuity described here from an organic maturation process and in what respect making explicit the implicit content of human forms of life (of freedom) is supposed to be different from what Dewey, criticizing Hegel, calls a "mere unfolding of what is given."

Then such a process of development would no longer be a progressively richer and more differentiated *learning process* in the sense sought here (and implicit in Hegel). There would no longer be learning because nothing new would be added, no experience would be had with oneself and the object as this is conceived in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* notwithstanding its ambivalence. For my purposes it would also be counterintuitive to assume that such a development could no longer be conceived as open, whereas for Dewey and for MacIntyre problem-solving processes are very clearly and programmatically processes whose outcome is in principle *open.* New situations can repeatedly occur, and new problems will arise again and again. But, above all, a solution that has been found for a problem can repeatedly turn out to be inadequate or be rendered obsolete by a still better one.[61]

10.4 A Dialectical-Pragmatist Understanding of Learning Processes

How can we take advantage of the strengths of Hegel's conception of a dialectical transformation dynamic while avoiding the above-mentioned dangers? The reference to the justificatory character of determinate negation already lays the groundwork for an answer to the question of the openness of problems: since the rationality of the dialectical process is a function of the determinate way in which it unfolds, the standards for a progressive development need only claim to be able to identify something in the given case as the best (and most integrative) formation in relation to the preceding development or as the best solution to the problem occurring at a certain point in a problem-solving history. As already mentioned, such a history does not need a goal that is already known and presupposed, but only criteria of the meaningfulness of the series of successive formations. That the history is meaningful is shown, among other things, by its continuity with the past historical formation and by its ability to resolve the contradictions of this formation and to redeem its potentials. If as a result the Hegelian criterion for justifying the rationality of formations of ethical life (or of forms of life) appears to be somewhat stronger than MacIntyre's criterion of the retrospective narrative integration of traditions, this understanding is nevertheless compatible in principle with MacIntyre's notion that the solution thus achieved is always only the *provisionally* best solution in a transformation process whose end cannot be foreseen.

In order to actually rescue Hegel's version of a dialectical transformation process in this sense, however, the character of the implied dialectical necessity of the further development (and, mediated by this, the character of the assumed continuity) must now be reconceptualized and modified in a further step. My thesis is that such a modification can be achieved through a performative-constructivist understanding of the procedure of the historical realization and actualization of freedom and by integrating the pragmatist principle of "regulating response" into the procedure in question.

The Emergence of New

I will begin by addressing the question of how the above-described actualization or realization of the fact that we are "free" can be conceived such that the process described contains moments of contingency, even though it unfolds in a rational and (as described above) comprehensible way. How can history be conceived as a *productive* process even though at the same time, as Hegel maintains, in a certain sense nothing new arises in this process because historical formations as they develop merely become what they already are implicitly or "in themselves"? As Hegel emphasizes in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History,* the development of the new is a hallmark of human history that sets it apart as a "spiritual" process from developmental processes in nature:

> Changes in nature, no matter how diverse they are, exhibit only an eternally recurring cycle. *In nature there is nothing new under the sun,* and in this respect the manifold play of its shapes carries on in wearisome fashion. *Something new emerges only through the changes that take place in the spiritual realm.*[62]

The course of history—the developments and transformations that take place in the "spiritual realm"—must therefore be understood as changes that are brought about actively in which new practices and institutions supersede the old ones.[63] Hegel describes this process, in contrast to natural transformations, as a conflict: "Development, which as such is a peaceful procedure . . . is, within spirit, in a hard and ceaseless conflict with itself."[64] If world history is the stage on which this conflict plays out, then something must be achieved on this stage that is not already posited and present with what is given but that, if we follow the metaphor of conflict, is at stake and must be achieved through struggle.

This difference between innovation and contingency on the one side, and peaceful growth on the other, now also enters into the motif of history as the realization or actualization of potentials—or, in Hegelian terminology, into the becoming explicit or "for itself" of something that already exists "in itself." In both organic-natural and spiritual processes, a development takes place in which something first has to make itself into what it actually already is: "Thus the organic individual produces itself; it makes itself into what it is in itself. Spirit too is simply what makes itself; it makes itself into what it is inherently."[65] However, natural development (for example, the development of a plant from a seed or of a flower from a bud) does in fact suggest a process of unfolding that occurs of its own accord: "Nothing can intrude between the concept and its realization, between the implicitly determined nature of the germ and the adequacy of its existence to its nature."[66] In the spiritual realm, by contrast—and thus in the historical development of civilizations—we are dealing with an active process, one that depends on actions. This is why something can indeed intrude here—or, even more, the development described as a conflict with itself specifically depends on the intrusion of acting subjects.[67]

The Unfolding of the Consciousness of Freedom as a Productive Process

A closer examination of Hegel's description of the development of the consciousness of freedom in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* is instructive for understanding the specific way in which, in the domain of spirit and of human history, what already exists "in itself" unfolds and in the process nevertheless something new emerges:

> That which is in itself must become an object to mankind, must arrive at consciousness, thus becoming for man. . . . But even though man, who in himself is rational, does not at first seem to have got further on since he became rational for himself—what is implicit merely having preserved itself—the difference is nevertheless quite enormous: no new content has been produced, and yet this form of being for itself makes all the difference. The whole variation in the development of the world in history is founded on this difference. This alone explains how, since all human beings are rational, and freedom is the hypothesis on which this freedom rests, slavery nevertheless has been, and still in part is, maintained by many peoples, and these peoples have remained contented under it. The only difference between the African and Asian peoples and the Greeks, Romans and the modern era is that the latter know it is for them, that they are free. The former are also free, but without knowing that they are, and thus without existing as free. This constitutes the enormous difference in their condition. All knowledge, learning, science, and even action have no other object than to draw out what is inward or implicit and thus to become objective.[68]

The crucial question here is what Hegel means when he says that the "only"—but nevertheless "enormous"—difference between the various peoples and eras is that some (that is, we moderns) *know* that they are free, whereas the others do not: "The former are also free, but without knowing that they are, and thus without existing as free." How should we understand the assertion that they are free without knowing it—that they *are* free but do not *exist as free?* What could it mean to be free without knowing this? And, conversely, what changes in the condition of one's existence once one knows that one is free?

I would like to explain briefly what is at stake in this status description. Let us assume that I belong to the blood group A. I have had this blood type all my life but never had any reason to want to discover it. Therefore, I *have* this blood type without *knowing* it. If I now learn by chance to which type I belong when donating blood, this additional knowledge (presumably) will not change my life very much. Above all, however, this *knowledge* in no way changes the *fact* that my blood belongs to blood group A. The biochemical composition of my blood remains the same whether I know it or not.

Obviously, things are different in the case of freedom. Knowledge of freedom changes the circumstances of our lives by changing our self-understanding and our opinions concerning the world in which we live. Once we *know* that we are free, we know that the conditions in which we live depend crucially *on us*. At the very least, we know that they do not depend on any other, higher powers or exclusively on natural constraints. But in that case, a people, which *knows* that it is free, will probably behave differently from a people that does not know this. Whereas, to remain with Hegel's example, a people that is only free in itself but not for itself knows slavery and is "content" with it or submits to authorities that it considers natural or God-given, a people that not only *is* free but also *knows* this will possibly not do so. Some social institutions will not be able to survive among such a people, and others will become conceivable.[69] Whatever the institutional design and the social practices that become established in such a society may then look like, and whatever limits there may be on what shape institutions and practices assume, their shape will be determined by the awareness of freedom. In contrast to the case of the blood group, the knowledge *changes* something in the object itself.[70]

So it is reflection on the fact of freedom that makes the difference between being free in itself and being free in and for itself so "enormous," even if there are no additional facts or contents. The knowledge that we are free has a practical character. Therefore, acquiring this knowledge is also not a mere (quantitative) extension of what we know, but entails a transformation of our entire relationship to ourselves in our practical relations to the world. The additional knowledge here is therefore reflexive knowledge, which does not add any new contents to what we know about the world but *situates it differently.* The familiar facts regarding the basic institutions of our form of life—that employment contracts exist, that goods are exchanged in markets, that being married brings tax advantages, and that human beings are traditionally divided into two sexes—do not change as regards their *content* once we know that these facts are socially constituted, that they are in principle created by us. The facts remain the same whether we identify them as socially constituted or not. However, they do change as regards their *form* as soon as they are deciphered as social (and not natural) facts that can be shaped (and do not occur of necessity).

The knowledge or reflective moment achieved step-by-step in the course of the crisis-riven history of transformation is *productive;* it is a form of knowledge in virtue of which our practices are not only understood differently but are also *changed*. Thus, our knowledge of the fact that we make our history (even if, as Marx observes, we do not do this "under circumstances chosen by ourselves" and even if we do not directly seize this power to shape) changes us and our historical form of life.

When Hegel says that those societies are also free which do not as yet know this, he must mean that even those institutions whose design and maintenance was not or is not (yet) accompanied by that knowledge of their free essence are *in fact* the product of human activity, and hence arise in and through social practices and interpretations. Slavery, heteronormative gender relations, or the constitution of the market are also products of human activity even when those involved regard them as natural. However, these creative exertions and attitudes become our activity in a different sense after knowledge of our contribution to the existence of these institutions comes into play for the simple reason that this activity is not conscious. In some respects it is not yet a *real activity,* and we are not yet really free in it precisely because we do not know about it. Similarly, although the institutions thus created are (as we can say) *in fact* or in themselves instances of freedom, they are not yet really such (in and for themselves); they have not yet realized themselves (and we have not yet realized them) as instances of freedom, because we are not, or are not sufficiently, aware of them.

Then these societies *are* free in this precise sense but do not yet *exist* as free. Therefore, the reality that we determine is first realized as such by this knowledge and by the activity it informs. It is only through our knowledge of our power to shape reality that our practices and institutions become what they really are, namely, instances or forms of freedom. "History" then refers to the procedure or process in which the fact of freedom becomes real in this sense. Here "realization" acquires the twofold meaning of coming to awareness and becoming real.

This procedure can be explained (following Stephen Houlgate) as one of *making explicit what is implicit*. However, it must be made clear that something *happens* along the way from being implicit to becoming explicit—or, in other words, that this is a productive process. Whether we formulate this with or against Hegel, what is made explicit regarding our historical forms of life through the process of historical development is not something that was already there—somewhere "inside." Therefore, this process should not be understood as if it *merely* brought something from the inside to the outside (like removing laundry from a washing machine), even if Hegel somewhat misleadingly says that it is a matter of "drawing out what is inward." If something that already exists implicitly is made explicit here, then it changes in and through this process of being made explicit. If the knowledge that it is *we* who make history—who bring forth our form of life—changes us and our form of life, then something happens in the course of this transformation, even if this change adds nothing new to what is made explicit in the sense of a fixed store of knowledge being supplemented by new facts or empirical information. In a certain sense, therefore, that which is made explicitly here first *arises* through its very explication. Thus, the realization of freedom points to a productive dynamic in which *something happens* without its course being determined. That which is now outside or real had not been hiding away somewhere. This explains why, even though we and the world we have created are already characterized by freedom, this characteristic is nevertheless first produced at the moment of its realization. At any rate, that would be one possible way of interpreting the process of the actualization of freedom described by Hegel, which enables us to rebut Dewey's criticism that this is merely a matter of "making explicit and outward of what is wrapped up" (see Section 8.3).

Dialectic as Retrospective Teleology

But this understanding of actualization or realization also has implications for how the process of dialectical transformation itself unfolds. This will not be compelling or necessary in a causally deterministic sense. But how can the internal logic of the development described be understood in such a way that it yields a changed view of the necessity of the sequence of shapes it describes? Terry Pinkard's conception of dialectic as a kind of *retrospective teleology* provides an illuminating strategy for answering this question. Pinkard argues with reference to the dynamics of change in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that, in a dialectical process of development, the judgment about whether the position reached is appropriate can only be made *retrospectively.* That a given formation is better than the old one is not something that can be anticipated; rather, it emerges only in retrospect:

> Such a dialectical history does not claim that the later "formations of consciousness" were "fated" to succeed the earlier forms, or that the earlier forms were "aiming" at the later forms; it claims that only they (or something very much like them) can be seen in retrospect to have *completed* the earlier ones, to have provided a structure that in retrospect may be understood as having worked out the insufficiencies of the earlier ones in such a manner that this later form of life has the resources within it to justify its way of taking things as making up for the insufficiencies of the earlier reflective forms of life.[71]

This is no longer a development whose necessity can be recognized in advance; rather, its conclusiveness is a retrospective matter. It is conclusive, and hence justified, insofar as it can resolve the problems and insufficiencies of the formation that has been superseded and can do so *better* than the latter could. If one asks oneself, following this interpretation, how this success can be demonstrated and how someone who has recognized the inadequacy of an existing practice and is searching for a new practice that solves the problem should proceed, then it is probable that the problem-solving process thus conceived involves *anticipations* of a successful practice whose conclusiveness and legitimacy must then be redeemed retrospectively.

Dialectical problem-solving would then take the form of a hermeneutic anticipation of an assumed solution, of a desirable goal. The cogency of such an anticipation can only be demonstrated retrospectively in interaction with the results of the correspondingly changed practice (similar to the hermeneutic interpretation of the material to be interpreted). This means that (like any successful interpretation) it must be open to correction and must be responsive to the possible sources of resistance, effects, and repercussions of the practice thus employed—and then must modify its position as in a process of trial and error. At each stage, the next *goal* of a dialectical process functions as an informative assumption that guides the interpretation. Such an anticipation imposes an order on the interpreted material—the material of a problem-solving process. But it has to prove itself in turn with reference to this order, that is, in terms of the successful ordering.

The opening of the dialectical process in this way leads to a modification of what appears in the dialectical process to be a historically compelling "necessity." Pinkard distinguishes with reference to this problematic between two kinds of necessity:

> The necessity to be found in the dialectical history of self-consciousness therefore is not a casual necessity but something more like *the necessity to be found in a line of argument*. Just as only some kinds of things can complete a certain line of argument, only some types of things can complete a dialectical historical progression.[72]

Therefore, if historical necessity is not a causal but instead a *rational* necessity that is compelling merely in the manner of a consistent argument,[73] then in each case a different continuation from the one suggested by determinate negation is possible. There is no causal force that could prevent the historical events and their actors from adopting a different direction of transformation, and there is no necessity that would allow just one dialectical retelling of this history and no other. To borrow a distinction made by Charles Taylor, dialectical narration that retraces this development belongs to the "interpretive hermeneutical dialectics": these convince us, as Taylor puts it, "by the plausibility of their interpretation."[74]

However, this does not mean that any arbitrary history can be related or that any arbitrary process can be presented as a learning process. Some of the steps within such a process are irrational or inconsistent; some purported solutions do not measure up to the level at which the problem is posed, inasmuch as only certain solutions fit with certain problems (which were thrown up by the respective preceding constellation). This relation of fit provides us with criteria that must be understood in terms of the problems and crises that arise and of the practical necessities resulting from attempts to deal with them.

This suggests the possibility of integrating new and resistant phenomena into a dialectical process. A dialectic on this conception relies on aligning its interpretation of how the process unfolds with the material it organizes interpretively. So the integration of what I distinguished above in the discussion of contradiction as "that which offers resistance" *[das Entgegenstehende]* (and hence as the actual content of experience) is not only possible but is even required. Such processes are *permeable* to unexpected experiences and insights, and in the attitude of "regulating response" outlined by Dewey, they expect that the impulses for change, once initiated, will meet with countervailing and unintended consequences. Here the "feedback process" sketched by Dewey provides resources for a progressively richer and more differentiated development within which our knowledge of the world can be brought into line with what the world opposes to us in an ongoing process of achieving reflective equilibrium. In this way—following Dewey *and* Hegel—a connection could be made between the pragmatist and the dialectical solution dynamics, between the description of the problem-solving process and of learning as an active-passive process and the dialectical unfolding of contradictions.

The World-Historical Individual

I would like to explain this in terms of the controversial role played by the "world-historical individual" in Hegel's philosophy of history.[75] What I find interesting about this motif is not so much the heroism of "great deeds" as the role of individuals who act in determining the course of history. Consider Hegel's description of this role:

> Such are all great historical men—whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the world spirit. . . . Such individuals had no consciousness of the general idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs; on the contrary, they were *practical, political men.* But at the same time they were thinking men, *who had an insight into the requirements of the time, what was ripe for development.* This was the very truth of their time and their world; as it were, *the next species which was already formed in the womb of time.* It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, next step which their world was to take; to make this their aim and to expend their energy in promoting it. World-historical men—the heroes of an epoch—must, therefore, be recognized as its clear-sighted ones; *their* deeds, *their* words are the best of that time.[76]

The crucial point here is the ambiguous role of world-historical individuals. As "agents of the world spirit" they are the actors who overcome the old conditions through their actions and set new conditions; they are the revolutionaries who create something new, the genuine actors.[77] At the same time, in this role they seem only to be accomplices of the Zeitgeist, of the historical situation, in effect, of the "truth of their time and their world." The world-historical individual acts—but he acts because he "[has] insight into the requirements of the time, what was ripe for development," and he acts in accordance with this insight by helping what "was already formed in the womb of time" to make its breakthrough. Thus, he is at once active and reactive; he makes history, but in the process only realizes the tendencies and possibilities that lie within it.

But if history relies on acting individuals and at the same time operates through them, then historical processes seem to be at once contingent and noncontingent. What happens in history depends on the (contingent) emergence of individuals, on their actions and decisions and on what turns out to be the effect of their actions, even though they cannot exercise complete influence and control over this effect. At the same time, it does not seem to depend on them alone, since the contingent actions and decisions of each individual are not the sole determinants of how a particular situation develops. But isn't the middle position thus described quite plausible on closer inspection? Isn't it equally implausible to think that the history of the world would have been completely different if Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy had not got stuck in the mud in 1477 or Marie Antoinette had not become entangled in the Diamond Necklace Affair as it is to conceive of the relationship between acting individuals and world history as if the world spirit were nestling like a parasite in the bodies of completely interchangeable individuals? The tension between active and passive moments, between freedom and determination,[78] can also be resolved by interpreting the course of history as a matter of realizing *possibilities* residing in a situation that are not always realized—that is, if the constellation is bad or there are no world-historical individuals to realize it, these possibilities can also remain unrealized. Then they are possibilities whose realization in the course of a given development with its prehistory and conditions is rational but not compelling. This is where the contribution of the principle of dialectical retrospectiveness and of the integration of trial and error into the dialectical process becomes apparent: it is the world-historical individual who has in fact done the right thing at the right time, who has comprehended and channeled the trends of his time in appropriate ways and has responded to them by acting. In case of doubt, world history presumably avails of several individuals simultaneously who prove to be "great," to have "willed and accomplished something right and necessary"[79] at the very moment when their intervention in world history led to the right consequences and thus was successful. But the practical decisions of the individuals themselves also follow a method of "regulating response": among the different possibilities for rendering the potentials residing in something fruitful, only certain variants, which cannot be anticipated, may be promising. World-historical action means embracing one among several possibilities and making it effective. We are confronted with the results of this action, which can then be productive in one way or another—or can remain ineffectual—and then it is our task to improve them in one way or another or accept them.[80]

This also explains Hegel's striking assertion about the invention of gunpowder: "Humanity needed it, and it made its appearance forthwith."[81] Of course, Hegel does not mean that humanity could have simply willed into existence its key technological inventions and the developmental steps they made possible. Rather, the history of many inventions shows that often they are not completely novel occurrences but that at least some of their elements are already available and are then assembled and rendered fruitful by innovative individuals at a given moment in a situation determined by several enabling factors. In this sense, the discovery encounters a possibility and a need that first make it possible, so that the "world-historical individual" (whether she be a revolutionary or an inventor) brings together the possibilities available here and in this way renders the constellation inherent in a specific situation fruitful. As a result of the discovery (or social transformation) that has now been made, changes take place that no inventor could have anticipated as the effect of her discovery (so that, in a reverse process, the discovery—the factual change and the resulting possibilities—can then again awaken a need or bring forth further possibilities).

The assumption that there is a continuity between the old and the new and the notion anchored in the idea of determinate negation that the potentials of the new are already prepared in the old as potentials to supersede it—because the new possibilities and the needs that arise in the course of their development render the old practices deficient—can now be restated as the claim that in each case there can be several resources and a range of possibilities on which the determinate answer can build. In an analogous way to the thesis put forward in Section 9.4 that contradictions can be realized as such only in the form of conflict, we can now assert that the resources and potentials residing in an obsolete social formation or form of life become such only at the moment of transformation triggered by crises.

The circumstance highlighted by the model of "regulating response" that what we do (or what happens historically) can have unanticipated consequences for us can now be integrated into this conception. Even if action "succeeds," it may have consequences that could not have been expected; in the course of our activity, we can also encounter obstacles that we could not have anticipated. Then the solution to a problem is neither directly continuous (in the sense of being derivable from) nor discontinuous with the "old state," inasmuch as the solution, as a successful one, merges with the problem and the potentials implicit in it. The new and "that which offers resistance" has a place in such a transformation process provided that the advance into what cannot be anticipated is a constitutive part of the learning process conceived as *differentiating enrichment through experience.*[82] MacIntyre's concept of narrative integration, insofar as it already contains the invoked performative trait of the dialectical problem history, enables us to explain in turn how the changing process contains within itself the emergence of the new.

Regression and Progress

We have now achieved a synthesis of pragmatist and dialectical motifs and, as a result, are in a position to conceive of social change as a rational transformation that is both continuous and discontinuous—that is, as a learning process which becomes progressively richer and more differentiated while nevertheless remaining open. Historical social transformations can then be understood as learning processes with reference to which one position can be characterized as better or worse than the position overcome, and hence as representing *progress* or *regress* vis-à-vis that position. Different traditions or forms of life can then be distinguished from each other or differentiated qualitatively in terms of the "depth" they have achieved and the appropriateness of their self-understanding and of the possibilities they present for coping with the world—and thus ultimately in terms of their ability to deal rationally with crises.

One can find a clear Eurocentric hierarchy in this regard in Hegel, which can be criticized as "imperialist," as Pinkard does when he speaks of Hegel's "limited provincial understanding" of the civilizations that existed in his day. At the same time, however, Pinkard also points out that "we should not be too confident that this kind of 'different but equal' understanding we have today of world cultures"[83] can be upheld and therefore that it is possible to compare and evaluate historical social formations.

The fact that we can identify a progressive movement as such and try to define criteria for what constitutes such a progressive movement does not mean, of course, that history will not actually exhibit any setbacks (these are even more than likely). The decisive point for our purposes, as Pinkard notes, is that such an analysis provides us with criteria for evaluating these setbacks *as setbacks:* "Nothing can prevent us from experiencing setbacks; but a philosophical approach to history shows us that we must understand this as *regress,* and not just as change."[84] But then (in the spirit of my negativistic and formal approach) progress does not have to be defined in positive terms or in terms of its content. However, we cannot avoid assuming progress if we want to speak meaningfully of regressions or setbacks. Progress could then be described tentatively as the determinate negation of the setback.

Even though the idea of progress has largely lost its luster, in many respects we clearly still cling, whether willingly or unwillingly, to the idea that it is possible to identify setbacks. The reflections developed here on the rationality of social transformation processes are intended, among other things, to contribute not only to identifying them *as a matter of fact,* but also in a way that (once again) allows us to derive conceptual possibilities of criticism from this.

In certain respects, it now seems as if a metacriterion for criticism of forms of life exists in the guise of the level of insight into the possibility and the ability to shape our conditions of life. In other words, *emancipation* as the practical development of such self-determined living conditions evidently becomes the intrinsic measure of the rationality of forms of life and of criticism of them, even if this measure takes its orientation from the occurrence of historical transformation processes. Such a conception is not only reminiscent of Hegel's "consciousness of freedom" but in certain respects also stands in the tradition of early critical theory. As Max Horkheimer wrote in 1930 in his programmatic essay "Traditional and Critical Theory," "In the transition from the present form of society to a future one human beings will for the first time constitute themselves as conscious subjects and actively determine their own forms of life."[85] Although Horkheimer may be using the term "form of life" here without any appreciable conceptual intent, this description of the task nevertheless expresses a desire shared by the generations of emancipatory positions (and not only those inspired by Marxism). This intuition could be reconstructed as asserting that a form of life can be regarded as successful and flourishing when it is the result of procedures of collective self-determination.

In the light of the reflections developed here, however, such an outcome would be both consistent and strange. It seems *strange* because this conclusion suggests that forms of life can be straightforwardly "created" by active and conscious subjects, so that they can be collectively determined in the mode of complete transparency. In my study, on the contrary, forms of life have proven to be complex formations of more or less accessible practices and more or less fixed moments whose modes of transformation exhibit a more complex pattern than that suggested by Horkheimer's rationalistic optimism concerning the leeway for shaping forms of life. My reflections nevertheless converge on the view that this conclusion is *consistent,* because the examination of forms of life has also shown that they can undergo change and are at the same time subjected to the necessity of having to adjust to new conditions. These new conditions, as evolved normative expectations, may have developed "from within," but they can be externally induced by changes in external conditions. In any case, however, a dynamic of change encounters an already determinate shape and a historically evolved horizon of expectations, that is, a problem situation whose configuration decides the direction of a rational change (of a learning process, as I have conceived it). Subjects make their own history—but not under circumstances that they choose themselves. If we want to explore the preconditions of emancipation and collective self-determination, therefore, we must understand the complicated relationship between the power to shape conditions of life, the lack of transparency, and the often intractable complexity of interlinked practices and attitudes. It is precisely in this relationship that an immanent critique of forms of life seeks to intervene.

Conclusion

A Critical Theory of Criticism of Forms of Life

What at this time should be understood by the term "progress"
one knows vaguely, but precisely: for just this reason
one cannot employ the concept roughly enough.

—Theodor W. Adorno

If we follow my investigation, there is no positive answer to the question of what makes a form of life a good or adequate form of life. However, there is a negative, indirect answer: failing forms of life suffer from a collective practical reflexive deficit, from a blockage to learning. In other words, they are not able to solve the problems they face or to perceive the crisis experiences to which they are exposed in appropriate ways as experiences and to transform themselves accordingly.

Insofar as this signals a shift in what it means for a form of life to be "good" toward the rationality of forms of life, then this effect is intentional. After all, the narrowing of the possibility of a critique of forms of life down to the question of the "good life" (or even of happiness) had proved to be misleading step-by-step. The *success* of forms of life is bound up with a complex process of dealing with problems and of developing and redeeming ethical and functional norms that guide or underlie such processes. When we say that forms of life are "successful," we mean that they function well, and this good functioning, in virtue of the internal constitution of forms of life, has something to do with their rationality—in effect, with their capacity to deal with problems in rational ways. Therefore, forms of life are not about the big question discussed in a free-floating debate over ethical values, namely, "How do we want to live?" At stake is also the relationship between what we (should) want and what we *already do* and *can* do.

Experimental Pluralism

Does the conception of forms of life as problem-solving activity imply a form of monism concerning forms of life? Can there only ever be *one* right solution for problems in the sense outlined in this study, so that the criticism of forms of life would converge on the horror scenario of a single form of life encompassing all of humanity? No. The quote by Hilary Putnam in the introduction implies both that it is possible to evaluate forms of life and that a plurality of forms or ways of life can be recognized in principle. For, as Putnam observes, it is not so much a matter of being undecided between a multitude of irreconcilable forms of the good life, as of the shortcomings of every single one of them:

> The notion that history has thrown up a number of "optimal"—optimal but mutually incompatible—ways of life is much too simple. Every way of life, every system of values, traditions, and rituals that humans have so far invented has defects as well as virtues. . . . Simply to declare any way of life perfect is to violate a maxim which should govern the search for truth in *every* area of life: do not block the path of inquiry! . . . Our problem is not that we must choose from among an already fixed and defined number of optimal ways of life; our problem is that *we don't even know one optimal way of life.*[1]

Viewed in this light, there are, on the one side, different forms of life that stand in a relationship of competition over the (provisionally) best or better life, so that they can be compared, evaluated, and criticized as regards their shortcomings when it comes to solving the problems they face. This approach yields a critical theory of criticism of forms of life, because it is a matter of criticizing forms of life under the aspect of the possibility and necessity of their (emancipatory) transformation. However, this also provides a motive for recognizing and even cherishing an irreducible pluralism of forms of life, a motive that is not exclusively of a practical-pragmatic kind and does not lead to the romanticization of diversity criticized above. For the kind of plurality that this brings into view is not the plurality of monads that are closed off from each other, but a plurality of diverse experimental approaches to solutions that can never be fully planned. These approaches should be as numerous as possible for the simple reason that their diversity increases the likelihood of a good outcome. Therefore, if we do not in fact have too many, but so far not even a single good solution to the question of how to live, then a pluralism of forms of life is necessary for the simple reason that (in the pragmatist tradition) a variety of experimental constructions and a variety of experiments is needed to get closer to a satisfactory solution. And if—also in the "pragmatist spirit"—in the attempt to develop appropriate forms of life, consequences of actions cannot be anticipated in purely conceptual terms, then steering and countermeasures will be necessary as a result of practical confrontations with the outcomes of action.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the reflections outlined here. In the first place, therefore, the problems with which forms of life are confronted are problems for which there can be *more than one good solution*, as Hilary Putnam and Ruth Anna Putnam note: "The idea of ethical objectivity is not the same as and does not presuppose the idea of a universal way of life. . . . Not only individuals but also communities and nations may have different but satisfactory ways of life."[2] Thus, there is a range of conceivable good solutions. In modern societies, this range of variation is not restricted, but instead is sometimes made possible and created in the first place by public debates over the right solution and the attempts to implement it. Think, for example, of the impacts of the public thematization and criticism of gender relations. Furthermore, if we conceive of problems as interpreted and historically situated problems, then the same problem cannot so easily arise for all existing forms of life. (Unemployment, as we have seen, can arise as a social problem only under specific historical conditions and against the background of a specific, normatively constituted interpretation. Possible solutions to the problem are similarly specific, hence historically and normatively situated.)

However, these considerations by no means entail the (relativistic) principle that every form of life has "its own right," that is, a particular context that makes it incomparable and hence renders inclusive standards impossible. Different and at the same time fully rational forms of life may exist—but, by the same token, there are also (obviously) wrong and regressive forms of life whose wrongness can be shown by their inability to deal with problems and crises. But whether the specific situation or the context of a form of life is so constituted that it must be superseded in order to make solutions possible and experiences accessible is to a large extent an empirical matter—for example, a matter of contact with other, rival forms of life that challenge it to undergo transformation. (Then it makes no sense to accord traditional ways of life a "right of their own" in a zoological sense, if such rivalry is in fact escapable only at the cost of an immense loss of reality.)

Thus, in effect, there is not just *one* form of progress—as Hegel seems to assume—or only *one* possible progressive development. History provides evidence of different, in part overlapping, and possibly even mutually contradictory progressive movements. Every form of life is constantly confronted with empirical problem constellations. What matters is whether they make progress *with respect to these* constellations, and hence whether rational learning processes can be deciphered.

In the second place, problem-solving histories have an open character—they cannot be brought to a close. Problems arise again and again, and problems that have been solved provisionally also lead to (unforeseen) further problems. If one finds the pragmatist "materialism" of the approach pursued here plausible and hence the notion that forms of life are inherently dynamic formations, it follows that the surroundings of the respective forms of life, the *situation,* changes, so that new attempts at adaptation always have to be made (even in the case of successful solutions) in order to take account of these changes. Moreover, there are tensions regarding the circumstances of social coexistence that cannot be completely resolved and therefore have to be repeatedly brought back into equilibrium and readjusted if necessary.

Furthermore, if we assume with Putnam (and against the "naturalization of values" criticized in the introduction) that we as yet are far from having complete knowledge of our nature, abilities, desires, and interests because they are not fixed—but that, on the contrary, we first have to discover them in a process of evaluation and reflection—then it becomes apparent once again that not only the solutions to problems but also even how problems are formulated is subject to change.[3]

Taken together, this leads to the following conclusion: forms of life, precisely to the extent that they constitute attempts to solve problems, should be conceived as experiments; however, not in the sense of aesthetic experimentation for its own sake, but in the sense (stressed by Dewey) in which problem-solving action is always experimental. Therefore, my conception does not lead to a form of monism, but, on the contrary, to an *experimental pluralism* of forms of life. Yet, this is different in crucial respects from the pluralism that I sketched in the first part. It is not the form of pluralism that defers such questions in principle, but a pluralism of debate over the correct solution to the problem of the successful form of life. Therefore, we can now say that the liberal bracketing outlined at the beginning of this book, which adopts an agnostic stance on these questions, represents a hindrance to experiment.

Then what is right about the "liberal abstinence" that I criticized in the introduction—namely, its justified opposition to the interference of moralizers—must be acknowledged, but it is also placed in perspective. From the standpoint of the position developed here, the liberal bracketing of criticism of forms of life would be the result of a truncated learning process that threatens to impede further learning.

Notes

Preface

1. Hans Bahrdt's sociology of the city provides a very precise picture of the extent to which life in (big) cities has always been understood as a form of life and, as such, has been the focus of heated debates. See Hans Paul Bahrdt, *Die moderne Großstadt: Soziologische Überlegungen zum Städtebau* (Hamburg: Wegner, 1969), especially ch. 1, "Kritik der Großstadtkritik."

2. One of the reasons why the recent debates in Germany over childcare or adjusting pension claims to take account of periods of childcare have been so heated is that traditional forms of life—as manifested in the housewife marriage and full-time motherhood—see themselves losing ground to other forms of life. These policies do in fact amount to legally codifying the change in a form of life and to supporting the emergence of a new family model (dual careers with the corresponding greater need for childcare institutions outside the family) in financial terms, but also as regards public recognition, even if there are good reasons to argue that this is in the first instance just a matter of achieving parity with the traditional models of life.

3. Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 194 (emphasis added).

4. Note that "success" should be understood in the context of the present study in the broad sense of "going well" or "turning out well" or "flourishing," rather than in the narrow, instrumental sense of fulfilling a purpose or solving a problem that can be specified independently of the practice or form of life in question. (On this and related points of translation, see the "Note on the Translation.") *Trans.*

5. Thus, Habermas repeatedly speaks (albeit in a rather loose sense) of forms of life with reference to the questions raised here. Forms of life are also discussed in the relativism debate, although Wittgenstein already made far-reaching use of this concept, which was brought into circulation by Eduard Spranger's best-seller *Lebensformen* (1921); see Spranger, *Types of Men: The Psychology and Ethics of Personality,* trans. Paul J. W. Pigors (Halle [Saale]: Niemeyer, 1928).

Introduction

1. It would be worthwhile to make a separate study of the dynamics of the forums in which something akin to the thematization of forms of life takes place (talk shows, newspaper feature articles, etc.) and to analyze what effects it has that such mass media forums have become the preferred location for debates about forms of life. Eva Illouz has drawn on a prominent example of such a forum in the United States—namely, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*—to defend the surprising thesis that, for all its extravagance, this is the place where certain emancipatory ideals of the 1968 movement have survived, though not necessarily in the form intended by the actors at the time. See Eva Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery: An Essay on Popular Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

2. Burkhard Liebsch, "Lebensformen zwischen Widerstreit und Gewalt: Zur Topographie eines Forschungsfeldes im Jahr 2000," in *Lebensformen im Widerstreit: Integration- und Identitätskonflikte in pluralen Gesellschaften,* ed. Liebsch and Jürgen Straub (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2003), 17.

3. Lutz Wingert, *Gemeinsinn und Moral: Grundzüge einer intersubjektivistischen Moralkonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 174.

4. Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities,* vol. 1, *A Sort of Introduction and Pseudo Reality Prevails,* trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Vintage, 1996), 4.

5. According to this usage, therefore, only humans, but not animals, would have a form of life. This is also the position of Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1–2. But, thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Friedrich Kambartel, Rüdiger Bubner, Martin Seel, and Lutz Wingert, to name only a few, also use the term "forms of life" to refer to cultural formations.

6. Thus Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and, following her lead, Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

7. My point here is that even the rejection of such patterns occurs in a socially determined space. A little boy who develops a preference for pink clothes and pink bicycles will be able to indulge this preference "innocently" only for a very short time. Sooner or later he will be confronted with the fact that his taste is coded as "girlish" and thus with the requirement either to behave self-confidently in accordance with his preferences or to abandon them.

8. See the deliberations in Pierre Bourdieu's study *Der Einzige und sein Eigenheim* (Hamburg: VSA, 1998).

9. A compelling example of such a perspective is provided by Theodor W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005). I try to trace Adorno's lines of argument in my essay "'Kein Einzelner vermag etwas dagegen': Adornos *Minima Moralia* als Kritik von Lebensformen," in *Dialektik der Freiheit,* ed. Axel Honneth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 115–41.

10. See Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 43.

11. However, Axel Honneth defends a broader concept of justice, for example, in *Suffering from Indeterminacy: An Attempt at a Reactualization of Hegel's* Philosophy of Right, trans. Jack Ben-Levi (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000). See also Honneth, "The Fabric of Justice: On the Limits of Contemporary Proceduralism," in Honneth, *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 35–55; and Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

12. On the problem of marketization, see my conversation with Axel Honneth and Rainer Forst, "Kolonien der Ökonomie," in *POLAR—Zeitschrift für Politik, Theorie, und Alltag* 1 (2007): 151–60; see also my article "Die Zeit der universellen Käuflichkeit," on pp. 145–50 of the same issue. On the recent philosophical discussion of the limits of the market, see Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Margaret J. Radin, *Contested Commodities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); and my review article "Der Markt und sein Preis," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47, no. 6 (1999): 987–1004. On this debate, see also Debra Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

13. This is in a certain sense the approach that Michael Walzer has in mind in his theory of spheres of justice and the criticism of marketization based upon it: treating certain goods as being for sale is not in keeping with our understanding of ourselves as a community. See Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Walzer defends the corresponding conception of social criticism in his *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

14. See Georg Lohmann, "Zwei Konzeptionen von Gerechtigkeit in Marx' Kapitalismuskritik," in *Ethik und Marx: Moralkritik und normative Grundlagen der Marxschen Theorie,* ed. Lohmann and Emil Angehrn (Königstein im Taunus: Hain bei Athenäum, 1986), 174–94. Here Lohmann refers to Cornelius Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, and Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Ourselves," in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth,* trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 260–339.

15. See Hilary Putnam, "Values and Norms," in *Die Öffentlichkeit der Vernunft und die Vernunft der Öffentlichkeit: Festschrift für Jürgen Habermas,* ed. Klaus Günther and Lutz Wingert (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 280–313.

16. On the role of collective patterns of interpretation and the changes they undergo as a precondition for changes in and the interplay between moral principles in relation to moral learning processes, see Albrecht Wellmer's reflections in "Ethics and Dialogue," in *The Persistence of Modernity,* trans. D. Midgley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 197–98.

17. The reference to the images and attributions of femininity and masculinity underlying the dominant gender system, its understanding of roles and the associated practices, involves a thematization of framework conditions that previously passed virtually unnoticed. It was a necessary precondition for being able to identify the relations of dominance built upon these conditions. Thus, so-called consciousness-raising referred not only to the thematization of injustices within an existing framework of conceptions of justice but also to rendering certain things visible as injustice for the first time by readjusting the frame of reference. Nancy

Fraser has developed this point using the example of the interpretation of needs; see her "Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 161–90.

18. That these problems cannot be captured by John Stuart Mill's harm principle—that is, the principle that we should be permitted to do anything that does not harm others—is shown by the fact that the perspective of forms of life seems to undercut the boundary between harming others and harming oneself, which is in any case notoriously difficult to draw. In addition, to speak of "harm" with reference to many of the problems in question here amounts to a false disambiguation and a misleadingly unequivocal ascription of responsibility within a complex situation. See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty,* in *Texts, Commentaries,* ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Norton, 1975), 41–132.

19. See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

20. See Charles Taylor, "Leading a Life," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason,* ed. Ruth Chang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 174. Taylor argues that contemporary practical philosophy often consigns broader questions of the good life and the goods constitutive for a human life to "extra-philosophical darkness" in order to achieve philosophical clarity in a limited domain (be it that of the morality of justice or of the principle of utility, both of which are candidates for modern moral theory formation).

21. Martin Seel, quoted from Hans Joas, *The Genesis of Values,* trans. Gregory Moore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 186.

22. Ernst Tugendhat, "Ancient and Modern Ethics," trans. Martin Livingston, in *Contemporary German Philosophy,* vol. 4, ed. Darrell E. Christensen (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 41.

23. On this historical background, see John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," in *Collected Papers,* ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 412–13.

24. In political discussion, very different things are often subsumed under the catchphrase "liberal." Here I am only referring to the theoretical tradition known in political philosophy as liberalism, which originated with John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill and is nowadays associated with John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, among others. For an excellent, concise overview of political liberalism, see Alan Ryan, "Liberalism," in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy,* 2nd ed., vol. 1, ed. Robert Goodin et al. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 360–82.

25. Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," in *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 191.

26. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity,* 43.

27. See Rawls, "Justice as Fairness."

28. The insight into the pluralism of ethical orientations can also be given an affirmative twist. This position, which can be distinguished as a normative as opposed to a merely pragmatic form of pluralism, regards diversity as a source of enrichment

and every attempt at homogenization as a loss of the specific beauty of idiosyncrasy and individuality. See John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: New Press, 2000). However, it suggests that here we are dealing with an ethical position and a certain—romantically imbued—conception of the good life and of self-realization.

29. The distinction need not be described in these terms, but in substance it can be found in a wide range of authors and traditions. On this, see Jürgen Habermas, "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments of Practical Reason," in *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics,* trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 1–17; and Rainer Forst, "Ethics and Morality," in *The Right to Justification,* trans. Jeffrey Flynn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 62–78. For a helpful classification and criticism of the different and not entirely consistent formulations of the morality-ethics distinction in Habermas, see Joas, *Genesis of Values,* and Hans Joas, "Values versus Norms: A Pragmatist Account of Moral Objectivity," *Hedgehog Review* 3 (2001): 42–56.

30. See, among other places, Habermas, "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments."

31. See Jürgen Habermas, "Morality, Society, and Ethics: An Interview with Torben Hviid Nielsen," in *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics,* trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 150.

32. Forst, "Ethics and Morality," 63. For Forst, the significance of the distinction can be traced back to the "need for a higher-order morality containing principles of conduct toward persons that hold no matter how one's own 'ethos,' conception of the good, or form of life differs from theirs; and is more than a strategically or pragmatically motivated modus vivendi" (Forst, 63–64).

33. See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy,* trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 151–52.

34. As mentioned earlier, the terminology used here varies. Thus, the distinction is sometimes formulated in terms of "norms" versus "values" or of "the right" versus "the good." It is interesting that Ernst Tugendhat prefers to speak of "modern versus ancient ethics" (and dispenses with the conceptual distinction between ethics and morality), thereby clarifying the historical character of the separation.

35. The conceptions of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas, for all their commonalities, differ specifically when it comes to the strength of their respective claims to justification.

36. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms,* 153.

37. Notions of the good vary, according to Kant, and therefore happiness is "not an ideal of reason," as he puts it. See Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29 (Ak. 4:418).

38. Habermas, "Morality, Society, and Ethics," 151.

39. As Habermas puts it in his response to Hilary Putnam's criticism of the distinction between norms and values; see Habermas, "Norms and Values: On Hilary Putnam's Kantian Pragmatism," in *Truth and Justification,* trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 228–29.

40. Joseph Raz, “Facing Diversity: The Case of Epistemic Abstinence,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19 (1990): 4.

41. See, among others, Jürgen Habermas, “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action,* trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 43–115.

42. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §124, 151.

43. Ludwig Siep, *Zwei Formen der Ethik* (Opladen: VS, 1997), 20.

44. See Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Privatization of the Good: An Inaugural Lecture,” *Review of Politics* 52, no. 3 (1990): 344–77.

45. It may be a question of perspective whether under such conditions one prefers to emphasize the diversity that liberal-pluralist forms of life still facilitate or their underlying homogeneity. In his diagnosis of contemporary society and culture, Fredric Jameson has pointed out the deep-seated leveling processes that counteract the emerging “superficial antagonisms” in the era of globalization. See Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 48–50, 97–98.

46. Here one can speak of “ideology” in a sense even less freighted with presuppositions insofar as my description alludes to a classical pattern of ideology formation, namely, the inadmissible generalization of the particular. For a differentiated presentation of various moments of ideology and the critique of ideology, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

47. See Hartmut Rosa, “Lebensformen vergleichen und verstehen: Eine Theorie der dimensionalen Kommensurabilität von Kontexten und Kulturen,” in Liebsch and Straub, *Lebensformen im Widerstreit,* 76.

48. I do not mean to deny that today there are still parents who beat their children. One can still observe situations in which parents seem to think nothing of engaging in such a practice even in full public view. I nevertheless assume that the basic pedagogical principles excluding corporal punishment, at least in general, have become more or less universally accepted in the Western countries in the wake of the 1968 movement. Astonishingly enough, however, the Act Prohibiting Violence in Education (§1631 para. 2 BGB [German Civil Code]), which stipulates that children have a right to “violence-free education” and declares “physical punishments, psychological injuries and other degrading measures” to be inadmissible, only came into force in November 2000.

49. Already the question of where “my concerns” end and those of others begin is not uncontroversial, because the answer is informed by my assumptions about the limits of what is mine and of my person—and hence by concepts of individuality that are not self-evident.

50. See Slavoj Zizek’s repeated polemics against “multiculturalism light.”

51. For an attempt to take account of this fact within moral philosophy see Wellmer, “Ethics and Dialogue,” especially ch. 11 and 222–31.

52. One can dismiss the scene in which the pastor reproaches the children that the knowledge of the chastisement he has scheduled for the following day will keep

him awake all night as simply cynical. The suggestion, however, is that the father is trapped in a closed system of reference in which he cannot actually recognize the cruelty of his actions. See Michael Haneke and Thomas Assheuer, *Nahaufnahme Michael Haneke: Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer,* 2nd ed. (Berlin: Alexander, 2010), 163–65.

53. This is one of the points at which the discussion usually begins to move in circles, because this position seems to deny that modernity itself embodies a specific form of ethical life. This has probably been developed most clearly by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

54. Seyla Benhabib, "On Reconciliation and Respect, Justice and the Good Life: Response to Herta Nagl-Docekal and Rainer Forst," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23, no. 5 (1997): 108.

55. This is the metaphor often used following Ludwig Wittgenstein for the point in an argument at which bedrock is reached and further questioning of a certain practice becomes pointless.

56. See Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 394.

57. Whereas the most popular objection against certain traditionalist forms of life is connected with the horror scenario of the "arranged marriage," the cliché of the German granny lying dead and undetected in her apartment for three weeks enjoys great popularity with critics of modern forms of life. These are reciprocal imputations that would certainly benefit from a public exchange.

58. See Hartmut Rosa, "Wider die Unsichtbarmachung einer Schicksalsmacht," *Berliner Debatte Initial* 15, no. 1 (2004): 81–90.

59. John Rawls, "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," in *Collected Papers,* 477, 478.

60. Habermas, "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments," 2 (translation amended).

61. Habermas sometimes refers to the issues that arise in this context as "clinical questions"; see Habermas, "Was macht eine Lebensform 'rational'?," in Habermas, *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 47.

62. Habermas, "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments," 12.

63. Hilary Putnam, "Values and Norms," in *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 130–31.

64. See Habermas, "Was macht eine Lebensform 'rational'?," 31–48.

65. See Rüdiger Bubner, "Rationalität, Lebensform, und Geschichte," in *Rationalität,* ed. Herbert Schnädelbach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 198–217.

66. Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature,* trans. Hannah Beister, Max Pensky, and William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 3–4. "Precisely with regard to the questions that have the greatest relevance for us, philosophy retires to a metalevel and investigates only the formal properties of processes of self-understanding, without taking a position on the contents themselves. That may be unsatisfying,

but who can object to such a well-justified reluctance?" (Habermas, 4) And Habermas already argued concerning the theory of communicative action, albeit on different grounds, that "such a theory . . . must refrain from critically evaluating and normatively ordering totalities, forms of life and cultures, and life-contexts and epochs as a whole." Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 2, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 383.

67. See Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 175–196.

68. For a critique of this normativistic orientation, see Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), and Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life,* trans. Joseph Ganahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

69. The classical statement of the position is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985). Compare now, also in the light of a changed global situation, Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political: Thinking in Action* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

70. See the highly polemical formulations in Mouffe, *On the Political,* 2ff., 16ff.

71. A further position, inspired by Michel Foucault, asserts, for example, that the point is not to criticize forms of life, but simply to live differently. This, it is claimed, is less a question of criticism than of the aesthetics of existence. Moreover, the problem with certain (dominant) forms of life is not these forms as such, it is claimed, but the fact that they exclude others. The difficulty with this is that it then seems as though this different life comes out of nowhere, whereas I believe that the concept of a different life is always also a result of the confrontation with the life plans that are regarded as wrong and inadequate.

72. This means that the criticism of life forms is situated in the tradition of the (Marxist) critique of ideology. On the distinction between internal, external, and immanent critique and a corresponding understanding of the critique of ideology, see Part 3 in this volume and Rahel Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy,* ed. Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher Zurn (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 63–86.

73. On normative reconstruction, see Honneth, *Freedom's Right.*

74. See Maeve Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

I. An Ensemble of Practices

1. This is an approach hitherto followed by a large part of the philosophical literature, notwithstanding the differences in the resulting concepts.

1. What Is a Form of Life?

1. This represents a small selection from among the entries to be found in the catalog of the Berlin State Library under the subject heading "form of life."

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein also initially adopted the concept from Spranger, thereby initiating the transformation of Spranger's sociocultural and sociopsychological concept into a concept in the philosophy of language. In many cases—also in the adoption of Wittgensteinian motifs in the social sciences, for example by Peter Winch—the Wittgensteinian concept of a form of life has been brought into close proximity to the talk of cultural forms of life. However, there is disagreement among Wittgenstein scholars over the status of his concept of a form of life. Thus, Newton Garver's thesis that the human form of life features in Wittgenstein "only in the singular," as the "common behavior of mankind" *[gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise]* (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §206), which contrasts with the forms of life of animals and can by no means be equated with cultural forms of life in the plural, has sparked a wide-ranging debate. See Newton Garver, "Form of Life in Wittgenstein's Later Work," *Dialectica* 44, nos. 1–2 (1990): 175–201; the opposing position is defended by Rudolf Haller, "Form of Life or Forms of Life?" in *Questions on Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 129–36. See also Rafael Ferber, "'Lebensform' oder 'Lebensformen'? Zwei Addenda zur Kontroverse zwischen N. Garver und R. Haller," in *Akten des 15. internationalen Wittgenstein-Symposions,* vol. 2, ed. Klaus Puhl, (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1993), 270–76; and Rudolf Haller, "Variationen und Bruchlinien einer Lebensform," in *Der Konflikt der Lebensformen in Wittgensteins Philosophie der Sprache*, ed. Andreas Roser and Wilhelm Lütterfelds (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 53–71. On the renewal of the philosophy of social science in the spirit of Wittgenstein, see Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1958); see also Rolf Wiggershaus, ed., *Sprachanalyse und Soziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975).

3. See Spranger, *Types of Men: The Psychology and Ethics of Personality,* trans. Paul J. W. Pigors (Halle [Saale]: Niemeyer, 1928). This work by the educator and philosopher Spranger, which originally appeared in 1921, quickly caused a sensation. By 1930 it had appeared in seven editions, making it virtually a bestseller in this area. It lent currency to "form of life" as a catchphrase, even though nowadays no one would refer directly to the author when interpreting the concept.

4. Thus, Max Weber recognized that capitalism not only influences how people conduct their lives but that it is also based on and dependent on the latter. Of particular relevance in this connection are, of course, his studies on how economic modes of conduct are shaped by religion. See in particular Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992).

5. Since the 1970s, however, the concept of the everyday and research on everyday life can also be said to have undergone a veritable boom in social theory informed by very different motives and sources. See, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* 3 vols., trans. John Moore and Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1991, 2002, 2005). In historiography, the turn toward the study of everyday life is manifested in the work of the Annales school. In addition, the specificity of critical theory, its "cultural Marxist" trait, can be understood in terms of a turn toward everyday forms of life. For an interpretation of Theodor W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia* along these lines, see Rahel Jaeggi, "Kein Einzelner vermag etwas dagegen: Adornos *Minima Moralia* als Kritik von Lebensformen," in *Dialektik der Freiheit,* ed. Axel Honneth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 115–41.

6. See the review of Schneider's book *Rebellion und Wahn: Mein '68* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2008) in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 11 April 2008, 1.

7. See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 23–48.

8. Joachim Renn claims that the concept of a form of life "fulfills its function" in connection with the analysis and normative permeation of cultural conflicts "only as long as it remains blurred." See Renn, "Explizite und implizite Vergesellschaftung: Konturen einer Soziologie der kulturellen Lebensformen in der Moderne," in *Lebensformen im Widerstreit: Integrations- und Identitätskonflikte in pluralen Gesellschaften,* ed. Burkhard Liebsch and Jürgen Straub (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2003), 86.

9. That is why Jutta Hartmann, in the context of the pedagogical reflections she develops in her book *Vielfältige Lebensweisen: Dynamisierung in der Triade Geschlecht—Sexualität—Lebensform* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2002), explicitly prefers the concept of a way of life over that of a form of life. In her view, the dynamic character of a changing and diverse social world that escapes clear classifications can be captured better by the concept of a way of life.

10. Stefan Hradil, *Soziale Ungleichheit in Deutschland,* 8th ed. (Wiesbaden: VS, 2005), 46.

11. The German term *Sitte* has a stronger normative connotation than the English term *custom*. This connotation is important in the context of the present study, which draws a connection between forms of life and Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* (generally translated as "ethical life"). *Trans.*

12. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* ed. and trans. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 29: "As distinguished from both 'convention' and 'law,' 'custom' refers to rules devoid of any external sanction. The actor conforms with them of his own free will, whether his motivation lies in the fact that he merely fails to think about it, that it is more comfortable to conform, or whatever else the reason may be. For the same reason he can consider it is likely that other members of the group will adhere to a custom." When Weber goes on to assert in the following sentence that "custom is not 'valid' in anything like the legal sense; conformity with it is not 'demanded' by anybody," this is explained by the fact that in this passage he is trying to clarify the distance from legally codified social forms. On the concept of custom in relation to law, see Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie,* vol. 9, *Das Recht* (Leipzig: Kröner, 1918), ch. 4.1: "Sitte und Recht." See also Ferdinand Tönnies, *Custom: An Essay on Social Codes* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014).

13. The crucial point here is then, of course, how the concept of tradition is understood. As I will explain later, the term—as used, for example, by Alasdair MacIntyre in explicit contrast to Edmund Burke's static concept of tradition—exhibits many parallels to what I understand by a form of life. I will deal with Macintyre's notion of tradition in detail in Part 4.

14. It is at any rate part of the self-understanding, and sometimes also of the strategy, of those who appeal to traditions as sources of authority to assume or pretend that the traditions in question are long-standing, even though they often have a relatively short history and, far from being handed down, were *invented* for a

particular purpose in a particular situation. See the discussion of the invention of traditions in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

15. For example, the German Confederation of Trade Unions is not a form of life for this very reason, among others, but an institution with an organizational character, even if something like a social milieu involving certain cultural preferences may have developed around it.

16. There are also debates within the theory of institutions over whether institutions are founded or evolve. See Maurice Hauriou, "La théorie de l'institution et de la foundation: essai de vitalisme sociale," in *Aux sources du droit: le pouvoir, l'ordre et la liberté* (Caen: Centre de philosophie politique et juridique, 1986), 89–128; on the understanding of institutions, see also Rahel Jaeggi, "Was ist eine (gute) Institution?" in *Sozialphilosophie und Kritik,* ed. Rainer Forst et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 528–44.

17. It is significant that the two concepts are used to explain each other. Thus, the *Historische Wörterbuch der Philosophie,* ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1976), defines culture ("Kultur," vol. 4, column 1310), as the "form of life of nations, peoples, communities" *[Lebensgestalt und -form von Nationen, Völkern, Gemeinschaften].*

18. T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), 31.

19. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture,* vol. 1, *The Origins of Culture* (London: John Murray, 1920), 1.

20. Arnold Gehlen, "Ein Bild vom Menschen," in *Anthropologische Forschung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961), 47, also understands "the cultural sphere" of human beings as the "quintessence of actively transformed natural conditions . . . within which alone human beings live and can live."

21. Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Ethnologie—Die Wissenschaft vom kulturell Fremden* (Munich: C. H. Beck 2000), 132.

22. See Hubertus Busche "Was ist Kultur? Erster Teil: Die vier historischen Grundbedeutungen," in *Dialektik. Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* 1 (2000): 69.

23. On overcoming a concept of culture aimed at totality and homogeneity, see Andreas Wimmer, "Kultur: Zur Reformulierung eines sozialanthropologischen Grundbegriffs," in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 48 (1996): 401–25. Wimmer is accordingly at pains to reformulate the understanding of culture as an "open and unstable process of negotiating meanings" (Wimmer, 402).

24. Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstaone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 197.

25. See Lutz Wingert, *Gemeinsinn und Moral: Elemente einer intersubjektivistischen Moralkonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 174.

26. Burkhard Liebsch, "Lebensformen zwischen Widerstreit und Gewalt: Zur Topographie eines Forschungsfeldes im Jahr 2000," in *Lebensformen im Widerstreit: Integration- und Identitätskonflikte in pluralen Gesellschaften,* ed. Burkhard Liebsch and Jürgen Straub (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2003), 17.

27. The form of life of a hermit devoted to meditation is still a form of life in this sense insofar as it is not only socially shaped but also has a place and a function in social life.

28. I will develop an appropriate understanding of the normativity of forms of life that goes beyond their mere conventionality in Ch. 3 of this book.

29. Georg Simmel, "Philosophy of Fashion," in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings,* ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 193.

30. Weber, *Economy and Society,* 29.

31. Fashions change not only judgments of taste but also perceptual grids. All of a sudden, bell-bottoms no longer seem strange. Suddenly pants hanging down around the knees no longer seem unkempt, but cool—and you don't even have to like them. Even those who do not see themselves as following the latest fashions are affected in a variety of ways by such changes.

32. For a contemporary (systems-theoretical) interpretation of the paradoxes of fashion, see Elena Esposito, *Die Verbindlichkeit des Vorübergehenden: Paradoxien der Mode* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004): "Fashion involves a form of imitation in an attempt to impose your own individuality; you strive for originality by doing what everyone else is doing; you make pure provisionality into your permanent point of reference; you accept something as binding solely because it changes" (10).

33. Simmel, "Philosophy of Fashion," 189–90 (translation amended).

34. This makes it clear that the criterion of substantive or factual adequacy can also refer to higher-level conditions and hence is not limited to basic conditions or the fulfillment of basic needs. With regard to clothing, the purpose (situated outside the realm of fashion) of representing a profession, a social class, or an ethnic or religious group by conforming to a stipulated dress code can also be said to be "adapted to reality." The appropriateness of clothing that serves this purpose, unlike that of clothing which is merely supposed to protect against the weather, is measured by whether it is suited to differentiating in an appropriate way between different social occasions or between the members of social groups.

35. Here one can go so far as to attribute them content insofar as they do not stand in isolation but in (to use Robert Brandom's term) "inferential" relationships to each other. This means that the practices that are part of the nexus of a form of life fit with each other and, in contrast to fashion, cannot be arbitrarily combined with the practices of other forms of life. Brandom explicates the semantic content of a concept in terms of the inferential relations in which it stands, that is, when its appropriateness can be judged as a reaction to specific inputs. For this, it must stand in relations of compatibility with presuppositions, consequences, and other concepts. See Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

36. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) infers trends toward individualization from changes in recreational behavior.

37. Simmel, "Philosophy of Fashion," 192.

38. The difference between the classical and the fashionable could then be understood as consisting precisely in the presence or absence of this exhortation.

39. Heidegger defines "distantiality" in *Being and Time* as the "care as to the way one differs from [the others]." Insofar as it remains in a relation of negative dependence vis-à-vis others, it constitutes an "inauthentic" pattern of behavior. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), §27.

40. This striving for self-sufficiency is shown, among other things, by the fact that these life plans, in contrast to subcultural lifestyles, also contain elements of transmission and tradition, of socializing-someone-into-this-form of life, and thus lose the purely transitory character of a youth movement. Thus, the ability of a social formation to reproduce itself also says something about its quality as a form of life.

41. The different manifestations of the *vie de la bohème* can nevertheless be said to be inseparable from the bourgeois world—as deviations from it—and as such to represent the other side or the permanent corrective of the bourgeois form of life rather than an alternative to it.

42. Insofar as it is a phenomenon of distinction, the currently much-touted "new bourgeoisie," with its rediscovery of manners, classical educational values, and refined gastronomy should be understood not so much as the restoration of an obsolete form of life than as the cultivation or recultivation of a lifestyle within a form of life. Thus, one can speak with greater justification of the nineteenth-century (educated) bourgeoisie than of the "new bourgeoisie" of the twenty-first century as a form of life. On the classical form of life of the bourgeoisie, see Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918,* vol. 1, *Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990), 382–89.

43. This also touches on the problem of the hermit. If I said of the hermit that he, too, shares in a collective form of life, then this is true when (and only when) such exemplary external spaces are part of the whole social structure. Living outside the gates of the community, the hermit exemplifies the location of the noncommunal—the negation of the community that defines the boundaries of the community—and for this very reason he belongs to the community. It is no accident that today there are no longer any hermits (at least not in modern large cities) but only factually isolated existences.

44. Martin Seel, "Ethik und Lebensformen," in *Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit,* ed. Hauke Brunkhorst and Micha Brumlik (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993), 245.

45. See, among many others, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Das ganz normale Chaos der Liebe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

46. Against the thesis of new forms of life, one can object that the central idea of the bourgeois family—the separation and self-sufficiency of the newly formed nuclear family from the family of origin—persists in the patchwork family. For a detailed discussion of the idea of the bourgeois family with and after Hegel, see Section 4.3 below.

47. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2006), 34 (aphorism 14).

2. Forms of Life as Inert Ensembles of Practices

1. The social theory that best captures this moment is Anthony Giddens's "theory of structuration"; see Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

2. As a philosophical concept, the concept of practice draws its inspiration from a variety of sources, ranging from Aristotle to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and the pragmatists, to Pierre Bourdieu. For an avowedly Wittgensteinian contemporary conception, see Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Titus Stahl, *Immanente Kritik: Elemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013), whose study addresses many of the same questions as mine, although with different results.

3. According to some authors, one can even speak of a "practice turn" in contemporary theory. On the praxis paradigm in contemporary social theory, see the excellent overview in Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (2002): 243–63. See also Theodore R. Schatzki et al., eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001).

4. One can argue about how complex such sequences have to be in order to qualify as practices or, conversely, about whether it makes sense to ascribe such complexity to a simple practice such as greeting. But even greeting as a relatively simple practice of restricted scope involves several practical components.

5. On this, see David Hume's definition of custom or habit: "For wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom.*" Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding,* in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 43.

6. For a more detailed account, see Section 2.3 below.

7. For a particularly helpful overview of "collective intentionality" in connection with social-ontological analyses of such collective activities, see *Kollektive Intentionalität: Eine Debatte über die Grundlagen des Sozialen,* ed. Hans Bernhard Schmid and David P. Schweikard (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).

8. John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Review* 64, no. 1 (1955): 3n1, defines a social practice as "any form of activity specified by a system of rules."

9. Stahl, *Immanente Kritik,* 263.

10. I will discuss the normativity of social practices in forms of life in greater detail in Ch. 3.

11. On the other hand, someone who cheats and secretly peeps through her fingers is still participating in the rule-governedness of the game insofar as the others assume that she has not seen anything and she also acts as though she still has to search.

12. Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," 25.

13. Long before the appearance of *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), he did this in John Searle, "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," *Philosophical Review* 73, no. 1 (1964): 43–58.

14. This is, of course, a controversial aspect of the definition of practices and is not accepted by all theorists of practice. One might even be tempted to see in this the criterion that distinguishes a Wittgensteinian from an Aristotelian-Hegelian understanding of practice. Thus, Terry Pinkard, for example, states quite plainly along the lines suggested above: "Practices take their essential orientation from purposes . . . which constitute what they are." (Pinkard, "Innen, Außen, und Lebensformen: Hegel und Wittgenstein," in *Hegels Erbe,* ed. Christoph Halbig et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 277f). For a contrasting, socio-ontological version of the teleological conception of practices and institutions, see Seamus Miller, *Social Action: A Teleological Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially 37–56; Miller, *The Moral Foundations of Social Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Miller, "Joint Action," *Philosophical Papers* 21, no. 3 (1992): 275–97; and Miller, "Social Institutions," in *Realism in Action: Essays in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences,* ed. Kaarlo Miller et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 233–49.

15. The crucial point is that the purposive character of practices is what makes it possible to draw the distinction they imply between right and wrong behavior in a different way from a conventional determination.

16. See Miller, "Social Institutions."

17. That this is not obvious was shown famously by Phillippe Aries in his (not uncontroversial) book *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life,* trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, 1962).

18. We do not need to think of the conventions of distant cultures or eras to grasp this point. It can be seen from the surprises that the rules governing the U.S. practice of dating hold in store for visitors and the proverbial parties where only the European guests are still there late into the night because they missed the hints to leave early.

19. In Section 2.2 above, I pointed out that both extremely large-scale formations such as modernity or urban life and smaller formations such as the bourgeois nuclear family can be construed as forms of life. Now it becomes clear that it is always also a matter of perspective and context which group of practices one combines into a specific form of life or brings together in the context of a form of life.

20. Raymond Geuss has provided an apt description of the difficulties involved in providing a more accurate definition of the relationship of such a cluster of practices and attitudes as they relate to individuals: It is clear that "individuals and groups don't just 'have' randomly collected bundles of beliefs, attitudes, life-goals, forms of artistic activity, etc. The bundles generally have some coherency—although it is very hard to say in general in what this coherency consists—the elements in the bundle are complexly related to each other, they all somehow 'fit,' and the whole bundle has a characteristic structure which is often discernible even to an outside observer." Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 10.

21. Lutz Wingert, *Gemeinsinn und Moral* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 174.

22. Similarly, Talcott Parsons understands culture as a "system of meanings in which practices and beliefs are shared." Parsons, "Culture and Social System Revisited," in *The Idea of Culture in the Social Sciences,* ed. Charles Bonjean and Louis Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 34.

23. Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45–76. See also Charles Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language,* especially 43.

24. This holds, for example, for the self-sacrificing nineteenth-century housewife immortalized on old-fashioned embroidered tablecloths: "Lament not the cares that come with morning's start. A beautiful thing it is to care for those close to one's heart." The tedious morning chore of lighting the stove is invested with overarching importance and higher meaning and is thereby transfigured, in connection with a particular concept of the family—the woman as custodian of the hearth and keeper of domestic space.

25. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.

26. In this context, sharing schemata of interpretation precedes or underlies the actual agreement on the substantive interpretations, and this remains true even when there is disagreement over interpretations.

27. See Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 278–91.

28. Because this is a genuinely *practical* process, one must bear in mind the surplus of the practice. The practice first posits the (innovative) moments to be recuperated and integrated through interpretation in the mode of initially undirected trial and error.

29. The whole is in this sense more than the sum of its parts in the best holistic manner, and the parts acquire their meaning in connection with the whole. Nevertheless, the whole is not known in advance as such and is not already given in the sense of a very thick "horizon of understanding." The elements reciprocally constitute each other as elements-in-relation whose constellation forms the emerging and constantly changing shape of the whole. If it is true of the nexus of a form of life, therefore, that the reference system as a whole can change when individual parts are removed or undergo change and that, conversely, the parts derive their meaning from the nexus, it follows that this conception involves an at least moderate holistic orientation. For an overview of the recent discussion on social holism, which at the same time marks a kind of intermediate stage, see Georg W. Bertram and Jasper Liptow, eds., *Holismus in der Philosophie: Ein zentrales Motiv der Gegenwartsphilosophie* (Wielerswist: Velbrück, 2002).

30. That small towns and big cities exhibit different kinds and patterns of movement can be seen if one compares the nimbleness of New York street life with the

congestion that immediately occurs in a small town setting when a larger crowd assembles.

31. See Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The City Cultures Reader,* 2nd ed., ed. Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall (New York: Routledge, 2004), 12–19. In this sense, Simmel derived the basic psychological disposition of the big city and the big-city dweller from the metropolitan “intensification of nervous stimulation” that springs from the rapid and incessant interchange between external and internal impressions: “There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved for the city as the blasé outlook. It is at first the consequence of those rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts and from which it seems to us the intensification of metropolitan intellectuality is derived. . . . This incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy constitutes in fact that blasé attitude which every child of a large city evinces when compared with the products of the more peaceful and more stable milieu” (Simmel, 14; translation amended).

32. Also indicative is the following sketch by a New Yorker, which paints a not untypical picture with a few brushstrokes: “I’m a New Yorker: I eat bagels, I read the *Times* and I walk fast.” Quoted in Carolin Emcke, *Kollektive Identitäten: Sozialphilosophische Grundlagen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000), 11.

33. Just as there are cities that are not genuine cities, so too there are people who live in the city but are not urbanites.

34. Here I am speaking specifically of the classical bourgeois family with the strong emphasis it places on the emotional attachments of individuals and the tendency to dissociate childrearing from care of the elderly.

35. For a more detailed discussion, see Ch. 3.

36. One could speak here of something like “practical-inferential commitments” that go hand in hand with engagement in practices: practices imply a connection to certain other practices and, in turn, make other connections impossible. It follows that practices cannot be arbitrarily combined with each other.

37. The choice of this example of converting *parental* childcare efforts into pecuniary values is deliberate. Things may be different with relations between adults, as is shown, for example, by the feminist discussion of wages for housework and marriage contracts. See Angelika Krebs, *Arbeit und Liebe: Die philosophischen Grundlagen sozialer Gerechtigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

38. An example is the island location of Manhattan as a precondition for the special density of this city, as analyzed in Rem Kohlhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retrospective Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994).

39. With regard to the social life of animals, one can say by analogy with the famous architect/bee example in Marx’s *Capital* that even the most elaborate social order of animals does not exhibit the malleability of the human form of life. See Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 284.

40. Here I agree with the distinction that Hannah Arendt emphasizes following Aristotle between “mere life” and life in a human world or *bios* as a human life that has been shaped, the “mode or way of life particular to an individual or a group,” a distinction that may also inform Giorgio Agamben’s use of the concept “form of

life." See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13; and Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics,* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3–4.

41. Giorgio Agamben takes this up when he connects forms of life with the concept of "possibilities of life" in such a way that forms of life are "never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power. Modes of behavior and forms of human living are never prescribed by a specific biological predisposition, nor are they assigned by any necessity whatsoever; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory they may be, they always preserve the character of possibilities; that is, life itself is always at stake in them" (Agamben, *Means without End,* 4; translation amended).

42. On the other hand, the fact that forms of life have a thinglike side also says something about the nature of the beliefs and attitudes at work here. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 355: "Since beliefs are expressed in and through rituals and ritual dramas, masks and modes of dress, the ways in which houses are structured and villages and towns are laid out, and of course by actions in general, the reformulations of beliefs are not to be thought of only in intellectual terms; or rather the intellect is not to be thought of as either a Cartesian mind or a materialist brain, but is that through which thinking individuals relate themselves to each other and to natural and social objects as these present themselves to them."

43. Compare Mexican houses facing onto courtyards, so that the streets consist of walls, with houses in Italian cities whose living rooms spill out onto the street. Or compare the urbanity of open meeting places with the Sony Centre in the "non-place" (Marc Auge) of the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. On this, see the opening scene of Ulrich Peltzer's novel *Part of the Solution* (London: Seagull Books, 2011).

44. This simplifying observation deliberately overlooks all the grey areas and intermediate stages in which urban spaces can be appropriated in incongruous ways, and which are the focus of extremely interesting research especially in urban sociology. My only concern here is to point out this reciprocal relation between the material shape and the form of life as such.

45. This can be thought of analogously to Charles Taylor's model of articulation: the houses and squares articulate and materialize something that did not exist previously, that took shape only as a result of this, and in this now articulated form exercises influence back on the self-understanding and life possibilities of those who created and formed it. In this respect, it is not simply a matter of imposing a fixed form on what already exists, but always also of creating something new. See Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?," 35–37.

46. Arendt, *Human Condition,* ch. 4.

47. See William James, *Principles of Psychology,* vol. 1 (n.p., 1950), 121: "Habit is thus the enormous flywheel of society, its most precious conservative agent."

48. Hume, *An Inquiry concerning Human Understanding,* 43.

49. Joachim Renn, "Explizite Vergesellschaftung," in Liebsch and Straub, *Lebensformen im Widerstreit,* 95.

50. This is also emphasized by Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus. For Bourdieu, the internalization of objective living conditions to which

this concept refers is at the origin of the "practical sense" with which actors orient themselves in the social world. See, among other writings, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), especially ch. 3.

51. See, among other writings, Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

52. Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension,* 2

53. See Stuart Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," in *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 23–53; on the inexhaustibility of description, see p. 30, among other passages.

54. On the analysis of manners, see Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," 26–29; on condensed thinking, see pp. 25ff.

55. Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," 25. Hampshire transfers the implicit character to the conduct of life as a whole and concludes that its principles are necessarily vague: "The concept of a way of life is vague if for no other reason then because it refers not only to explicit and freely chosen ideals of conduct, but also to ideals that were not explicitly formulated and can be expressions of not completely conscious preferences, feelings and aspirations" (Hampshire, 19). See Heidegger's analysis of the "becoming conspicuous of the useful" *[Auffälligwerdens des Zeugs]* in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* §§16, 22; on Wittgenstein, see David Bloor, *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions* (London: Routledge, 1997). However, the idea that implicit mechanisms become "conspicuous" and explicit when problems arise already appears in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, and we will encounter it again in connection with John Dewey.

56. That such moments of disruption can also be brought about deliberately is shown by practices such as those associated with the Invisible Theatre, situationism, and so-called guerrilla communication. On this, see Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979), and Luther Blisset and Sonja Brünzels, *Handbuch der Kommunikationsguerilla—Wie helfe ich mir selbst,* 4th ed. (Hamburg: Assoz. A, 2001). On the situationist program of interventions in everyday activities aimed at stripping the obvious of its taken-for-granted character, see Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

57. Here we do not have to go so far as to embrace the thesis that fundamentalism is a reaction to modernity. Norbert Bolz's manifesto for traditional family values, *Die Helden der Familie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), is an example of such a reactive program.

58. See especially Harold Garfinkel, whose 1967 book *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall) can be regarded as the founding text of ethnomethodology. See also part 2 of Robin Celikates, *Kritik als soziale Praxis: Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009). The dynamic character of the constitution of social structures is also highlighted by Anthony Giddens's "theory of structuration," which examines the dynamic processes in which apparently fixed social structures arise, decay, and are transformed by social actors (Giddens, *Constitution of Society*).

59. Even Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasizes this moment of the process of adopting traditions, although for him the latter are distinguished by the fact that

they hold “prior to every justification”—and that one “slides into” them, as it were. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 292.

60. A good example of this was how the Christian concept of the family was systematically implemented by means of changes in marriage, inheritance, and adoption law in the Middle Ages, as described by Jack Goody in *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

61. Julius Posener describes the claim raised by architecture around the turn of the twentieth century in the following terms: “But Art Nouveau came on the scene with the claim to renew not only the forms of life, but also its meaning. . . . Until then architects had tried to measure up to new tasks, but now they assumed an active role. They became educators not just of new forms—no small matter—but of a new life.” Julius Posener, “Architektur und Architekten im 20. Jahrhundert,” of *Was Architektur sein kann: Neuere Aufsätze* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995), 11.

62. “In the 1920s, avant-garde architects thought that architecture could help to change society. Today this idea is ridiculed. But every built environment has a social impact.” Posener, “Architektur und Architekten,” 39. One could add that the effects are not always exactly those planned by their authors.

63. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy,* trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

II. Solutions to Problems

1. Martin Seel, “Ethik und Lebensformen,” in *Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit,* ed. Hauke Brunkhorst and Micha Brumlik (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993), 244–59.

3. The Normativity of Forms of Life

1. Arno Borst, *Lebensformen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1979), 69.

2. Wilhelm Flitner, *Geschichte der abendländischen Lebensformen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1990), 11.

3. Simon Blackburn, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), s.v. “norm.”

4. Peter Stemmer, *Normativität: Eine ontologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 239. Heinrich Popitz understands norms in similar terms as agreements that make human community possible, so that one can even speak of a “normative constraint” as a condition of the possibility of society. See Heinrich Popitz, *Soziale Normen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 95.

5. “Norms cut up behaviour in instances of right and wrong, correct and incorrect.” Titus Stahl, “The Social Ontological Foundations of Immanent Critique,” unpublished manuscript, Frankfurt am Main, 2008. Robert Pippin understands “the normative” accordingly as “a class of activities characterized by deliberate efforts to ‘do it right.’ ” See Pippin, *Die Verwirklichung der Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005), 66.

6. From this, one can distinguish another type of sentence—namely, evaluative sentences. For example: "The Berlin State Library at Potsdamer Platz is one of the most beautiful libraries in the world" and "This paper smells pleasant." One can easily see that characterizing a space as being "flooded with light" already alludes to such evaluative moments.

7. The "direction of fit" motif has its origin in the speech-act theory of John L. Austin and John Searle, but it is also used in the philosophy of the mind and in the discussion of Hume's theory of motivation. Elisabeth Anscombe provided an apt illustration of what is involved in terms of the different direction of fit of the shopping list of a customer in a supermarket in contrast to the list of a detective spying on the customer. The customer's list determines what should go into the shopping cart, whereas the detective's list describes what is contained in the cart. If the list and the shopping cart do not match, in the case of the detective the mistake is in the list; in that of the customer, it is in what she has done. See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For an overview of the different references to the motif of the direction of fit and a problematizing discussion, see I. L. Humberstone, "Direction of Fit," *Mind* 401 (1992): 59–83.

8. Of course, it could be that the normative statement about the emergency exits or the requirement to observe silence is wrong. However, they are not false because the real circumstances do not correspond to them. Thus, norms are not disproved by empirical evidence. Nevertheless, the relevant standards will probably change if it transpires that emergency exits do not contribute to user safety or that concentration does not depend on the noise level.

9. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); and Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

10. That is why the attribute "social" is actually redundant with regard to norms. As already in the case of practices, all norms are social insofar as they are created by human beings and are introduced into the world in man-made contexts. Although social norms are often referred to as those norms that govern interpersonal behavior, it is important to recognize that regulation of behavior regarding objects can also be understood as regulation of social behavior.

11. One can agree with Peter Stemmer when he speaks of the "artificial" normative pressure of norms without agreeing with his overall approach. See Stemmer, *Normativität,* 30.

12. The expression "space of reasons" was coined by Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

13. This is true even though the property of being red-haired can become so absurdly charged that it has normative consequences, as witch-hunting shows.

14. In attempting to comply with rules, one can also do something wrong without immediately falling out of the form of life as a result. In the first place, therefore, it is a matter of the willingness to follow these rules, not already of the success of the rule-conforming behavior.

15. Someone who eats a fine dinner with his fingers because he wants to outrage society still belongs in a basic way to the form of life he rejects, but someone who

wants to shake hands with a woman in Pakistan without being aware that this is an affront does not belong to the form of life in question. Thus, to a form of life belong not simply all who take part, but also all those who relate in any way to the norms at work in it, hence all those who know the rules and for whom the social space is structured, whether positively or negatively, by these rules. Louis Bunuel's film *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) is an example of a negative reference to a form of life that achieves its polemical aim only because it remains related to the form of life in question.

16. However, the remark of Robert Pippin quoted above that "the normative is a class of activities characterized by deliberate efforts to 'do it right'" is only partly correct. The normativity within forms of life is not only manifested in deliberate efforts but also in habitual "resonances"; if norms can also be implicit, our ways of orienting ourselves to them may be involuntary. For example, we often realize that we have internalized certain rules of spatial distance in social contact only when someone violates them and gets too close to us. Thus, we sometimes identify the normative character of our everyday modes of conduct only when the normative order that they constitute is violated or collapses. See Pippin, *Die Verwirklichung der Freiheit,* 66.

17. Behaving at variance with the well-established gender roles, for example, is not even an identifiable possibility of behavior until such time as nameable and named modes of social conduct ("queer," "metrosexual") have become established. Or it is a mode of social behavior that can only be explained in terms of its difference from the established norms ("He is not a man and not a woman"). It is precisely in this sense that social norms constitute behavioral possibilities just as much as they restrict them.

18. Heinrich Popitz, "Soziale Norme," in *European Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 1 (2001): 185.

19. On the other hand, they are often enough made explicit when it is a matter of preserving them against the background of challenges or controversial changes in the shape of a form of life.

20. Georg Henrik von Wright, *Norm and Action: A Logical Inquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

21. This "presence" can assume very different forms. For example, the relations between members of a family are confronted with a series of legal regulations some of which aim directly at how family relations are structured (the proper area of responsibility of family law) but some of which merely *also* hold in families (such as those of criminal law). In families, people also follow Parcheesi rules and study vacuum cleaner instructions. In contrast to this, however, here we are concerned with norms (and the mode of operation of norms of this kind) that make a family into what it is as a family or make it into a family, hence with the normative expectations to which it is subject as a family and what determines whether something is a family or not. Here I cannot pursue further the (nevertheless very interesting) question of the extent to which the legal form of forms of life contributes in decisive ways to constituting them. For the time being, however, it is sufficient for my purposes that it would be counterintuitive to assume that a formation like the family is constituted *in toto* by legal regulations. Rather, the law evidently attempts, on the one hand, to correspond to what a family is—hence to make regulations that

are in conformity with the social understanding of what constitutes families—and at the same time to shape and influence the family.

22. Von Wright, *Norm and Action,* 8.

23. Von Wright, 25.

24. Von Wright, 8.

25. Von Wright, 9.

26. One of the reasons for this unspoken and self-evident efficacy is that it is sometimes difficult for people who are unfamiliar with certain customs to adapt to them. On the other hand, this is a matter of degree, since customs are also communicated publicly in some sense.

27. Von Wright, *Norm and Action,* 9.

28. We already encountered this constitutive moment in relation to social practices in Chapter 2. John Searle made the existence of such constitutive moments the basis for his momentous distinction between constitutive and regulative rules: Regulative rules are rules that regulate already existing behavior, hence behavior that can be described independently of the corresponding rules and is merely regulated by them. Constitutive rules, by contrast, are rules that first make a particular behavior possible and first create a behavioral possibility by coming into force. Searle now attributes a decisive role to such rules in the constitution of social reality.

29. To avoid a misunderstanding, this is not a question of the available power to impose sanctions, that is, the means of violence available to enforce a norm, but of the basis of the claim to enforcement.

30. Von Wright, *Norm and Action,* 9.

31. Von Wright, 9.

32. See my remarks in Ch. 1 and the distinction developed there between lifestyles and forms of life.

33. It is a matter of controversy whether the practices portrayed in this 1958 film actually corresponded to the reality of life in this part of Japan.

34. Likewise, nowadays customs such as the wedding-eve party or the white wedding are more likely to be viewed in folkloristic terms, so that not observing them is no longer proscribed. On the other hand, polygamy and same-sex marriage still provoke disputes over forms of life.

35. Von Wright, *Norm and Action,* 9.

36. Even describing the condition of being an outsider or being foreign as normative in the relatively weak sense is, of course, a trivialization from a sociohistorical and sociological perspective.

37. For the assertion that social roles have a specific obligation character, see Michael O. Hardimon's instructive essay "Role Obligations," *Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1994): 333–63, which has sparked a wide-ranging discussion on the specific ethos of roles.

38. As we shall see below, second order reasons can indeed be found for playing games or even a certain type of game.

39. Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 117.

40. Raz, 123. With the term "systems of joint validity," Raz refers to complexes of rules characterized by the fact that they are independent and are interrelated in such a way that following them individually makes no sense.

41. Raz, 114.
42. Raz, 123.
43. Raz, 122.

44. The difference between cases in which such a connection exists and ones in which it does not can also be clarified using the example of the game itself: that there cannot be any general justification for the orientation toward the values of the game or any possibility of justifying when someone has to take his orientation from these values is no longer correct precisely when one begins to situate the game in the context of other life orientations and values. Thus, one can say, "Erwin shouldn't spend all of his free time playing chess, but should instead take care of his children." And one can also say conversely, "It would do her good to forget about work for once and play a parlor game." But this is just to view and judge playing in the context of wider human concerns and no longer to ask about the basis of the validity of the rules themselves.

45. Here it is not a question of whether they are good reasons or of the sense in which such reasons can be compelling, but only of illustrating the kind of connection with general interests that can be meant here. This is also why I have provided a mixture of common forms of justification: "because you have an interest," "because it is meaningful," and "because it is absolutely necessary."

46. Even if one can also opt out of such contexts of cooperation in part, the possibility of opting out has a different character from a situation in which we decide in the abstract on possible participation.

47. This is not true for the practical nexus in which the profession of doctor plays a role, of course, in the sense that everyone is not always already a doctor, but only in relation to the associated wider context of interpretation of the scientific worldview and the associated practices. The same holds for the example of the father role. Insofar as the family exists as a formative social pattern, every type of behavior, be it refusing to accept a father role or reinterpreting it, is related to the context of interpretation that is posited with the family. Forms of life are not something voluntary, a club that one can choose to join or not.

48. Thus, insofar as norms of ethical life always in a certain sense regulate participation in something that already exists as a nexus, they are not constitutive in the radical sense, even if they have the "stage-setting character" mentioned by Rawls. After all, the corresponding practices are not brought into being out of nothing by the rule, but always emerge from precursors of these practices. But this is precisely why conditions of appropriateness can also be found in the domain to be regulated by them. From a more fundamental point of view, this supports the argument also defended by Joseph Raz and Anthony Giddens against Searle that in the social sphere rules often have simultaneous constitutive and regulatory effects. Even the rules of an elegant dinner party are, viewed in this way, simultaneously constitutive and regulative. They constitute the social form of the dinner party; they regulate that of eating, a practice that, although never presocial and unregulated, also assumes less formal guises than the dinner party.

49. Most philosophical theorists of convention discuss this criterion. See the classic study David Lewis, *Convention: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

50. See Maurice Hauriou, "La théorie de l'institution et de la foundation: essai de vitalisme sociale," in *Aux sources du droit: le pouvoir, l'ordre et la liberté* (Caen: Centre de philosophie politique et juridique, 1986), 89–128. Joseph Raz also assumes the existence of a game idea in his discussion of the normativity of games. However, this refers above all to what I have localized as a game idea on the first level. See Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms,* 113–14.

51. The German name for Parcheesi (the board game also known as "Ludo" in Britain) is "Mensch ärgere dich nicht!" which, loosely translated, means, "Hey, don't get worked up!" or "Don't lose your rag!" *Trans.*

52. Limits of the conventional grounded in the subject matter are also easy to ascertain for the above-mentioned technical norms. Thus, the exact dimensions of the legal- and letter-size paper formats are contingent (the German paper formats are just as suitable as the American ones). However, the fact that there can and must be different sizes is justified by the factual and material conditions surrounding the use made of paper: making notes on poster formats is just as impractical as trying to post announcements in the miniature format. Thus, formats are determined based on the function that paper serves in our contexts of use, and they are constrained by factual circumstances (for example, our ability to perceive things over certain distances). Here, too, it is a determination of purpose, combined with the real (factual or substantive) conditions under which it is fulfilled, that places limits on the scope of the purely conventional agreement and thus on the purely conventional justification of norms.

53. That judges must wear a robe for trials is a convention. That the judge must examine the case thoroughly, on the other hand, is a question of professional ethics and is in accordance with the guidelines inherent in the process of legal adjudication. Here, again, the boundary is fluid. Thus, the wearing of a robe may serve to underline the character of the trial as something removed from everyday life.

54. Here I am assuming that it is only a case of sloppiness and inexactness, not of criminal offenses of medical malpractice—hence, that it is not a matter of a violation of the duty of medical care with the corresponding legal consequences. In the criminal case, the person is not only bad "as a doctor."

55. To avoid confusion, it is important to point out that here I am not concerned with functional *explanations* (with the known difficulties) but with functional *justifications*. The direction of fit here, therefore, is precisely the opposed, because conditions or norms are not supposed to be explained in terms of their function, but instead are founded (and if necessary created) by it. On the problem of "functional explanations" see the famous account in G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

56. Philip Pettit argues that functional explanations should be related less to the origin than to the *resilience* of certain social institutions, provided that, regarding social institutions, neither is an intentional connection probable nor is a selection mechanism analogous to biological selection available in the case of social practices. See Philip Pettit, "Functional Explanation and Virtual Selection," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 47, no. 2 (1996): 291–302.

57. See the election program of the KPDRZ (Kreuzberger Patriotische Demokraten, Realistisches Zentrum) for the 1999 Berlin municipal elections, in

which the legalization of parking in a third row was expressly demanded as an easily enforceable traffic calming measure.

58. Alasdair MacIntyre speaks in this context of "standards of excellence"; see MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

59. Here there is a connection with what von Wright calls "ideal rules" and construes as a further subclass of norms. Ideal rules are "closely connected with the concept of goodness"; the qualities that they demand are virtues of a kind. They also assume an informative intermediate position in von Wright's classification between technical standards (which provide information on the use of the correct means to achieve a particular purpose) and rules (which define a paradigm or standard). However, ideal rules are not instrumental. See von Wright, *Norm and Action,* 29.

60. Sally Haslanger mentions this consideration in her essay "On Being Objective and Being Objectified," in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42: "In general, our evaluation of the goodness or badness of a tool will be relative to a function, end, or purpose, and the norm will serve as an ideal embodying excellence in the performance of that function." The same applies correspondingly to the performance of social roles: "For each role, there are ways of filling it out, as successes, and others that would be mistaken" (Haslanger, 42n). Whether a particular role is being performed is then measured by these standards with their orientation to excellence, even if they are not fully satisfied by the individual role bearers. I will discuss the question which then arises—"What accounts for the fact that even a bad instantiation of a particular practice or of a particular role can still count as an instantiation of this practice or role?"—below with reference to Hegel.

61. Here, again, it is important to keep in mind that the terms "success" and "succeed" (as translations of *Gelingen* and *gelingen*) are used in this study in a broad sense that includes but is not limited to instrumental senses. To say of a form of life that it is successful is not simply to imply that it is instrumental in achieving an external purpose, but that it satisfies normative criteria of excellence that are internal to the practices that constitute it. *Trans.*

62. Here we are entering morally sensitive terrain because, translated into the terms of the lifeworld, this question becomes one of whether the mass murderer obsessed with the smooth operation of bureaucratic procedures can legitimately appeal to such an internal normativity. MacIntyre provides an innovative discussion of this question in his essay "Social Structures and Their Threats to Moral Agency," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays,* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186–205.

63. Strictly speaking, here I only borrow the problem from Hegel; my explanation is decidedly un-Hegelian or is situated beyond the Hegelian terminology, but it is also beyond the suggestive narrow philological reference to Hegel's logic.

64. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic,* trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 712 (translation amended).

65. Of course, the question of the relationship between specimen and species is also much more complicated when it comes to animals; on this, see Michael

Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

66. Perhaps we find it wrong to disregard autonomy, to commercialize or prettify public spaces, or to reduce democratic will formation to private consent. Put this way, however, such positions remain external or normativistic provisions, which need have nothing to do with the shape of the corresponding formation itself.

67. It is also in keeping with this view that a formation seldom corresponds completely to its concept.

68. Robert Brandom's account of the Hegelian motif, on the other hand, does not seem to go essentially beyond the conception described here as "traditionalist": "Hegel's theory of normativity is as follows: A conceptual norm is nothing other than what was put into the norm by our actual applications of it. By applying an expression to concrete cases, however, we can at the same time institute a norm that will subsequently stand in judgment over all of our applications and perhaps find them inadequate." See Matthias Haase, "Semantik ohne Wahrheit: Ein Interview mit Robert Brandom," in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 54, no. 3 (2006): 459.

69. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

70. In this case, one can in fact speak of a conceptual-political intervention operating within the framework of a broad-based campaign. On the other hand, there are the far more frequent cases of unofficial-subversive conceptual reevaluations (or reinterpretations).

71. Here one can simultaneously observe that such gestures of tolerance are often accompanied by a gesture of integration into the community. Especially if one takes the pictorial component of the poster campaign mentioned into account, it can be surmised that there is a concomitant conformist hope that these "new" families may prove to be not too different.

72. I will deal with external and internal criteria of criticism at length in the third part of this book.

4. Forms of Life as Problem-Solving Entities

1. See Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), s.v. "problem."

2. Kluge.

3. Sometimes the concept of needs is developed by making a contrast between desiring and needing; then, in contrast to preferences or desires, needs would not be what we *want* in a subjective sense (like chocolate), but what we *need* objectively speaking (like vitamins). On the concept of need, see Barbara Merker, "Sind angemessene Wünsche solche, die unseren Bedürfnissen entsprechen?" in *Angemessenheit: Zur Rehabilitierung einer philosophischen Metapher,* ed. Merker et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998), 133–44; and David Wiggins, "Claims of Need," in *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1–57. An instructive systematic reappraisal of the contemporary

discussion is provided by Nora Sondhauss, “Zur politischen Theorie der Bedürfnisse” (MA thesis, Berlin, 2011).

4. I do not want to address the wide-ranging discussion about needs in the present context because I distance myself from the concept of needs in relation to this context. However, if one wanted to understand the concept of needs differently from what is suggested by their interpretation as fixed basic needs, then one could define the difference between desire and need by drawing the dividing line not so much between different objects of need as between the different ways of relating to these objects. Having a need would then mean not being able to distance oneself from this, in the sense that there is no alternative to it and its satisfaction cannot be postponed. Desires, by contrast, are negotiable and can be postponed and replaced. Infants and toddlers are needy beings insofar as they can distance themselves from their needs only with difficulty or not at all. This holds as much for the need for food as it does for the need for amusement or closeness. Children then gradually work their way out of this condition of being determined by needs—this is an aspect of the process of maturing—as can be seen from the fact that needs gradually turn into postponable and negotiable desires.

5. On the concept of needs in the early Marx, see Andrew Chitty, “The Early Marx on Needs,” *Radical Philosophy* 64 (1993): 23–31.

6. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft),* trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 92.

7. Theodor W. Adorno, “Theses on Need (1942),” trans. Devi Dumbadze, *Constelaciones—Revista de Teoría Crítica* 6 (December 2014): 464.

8. Arnold Gehlen, “On Culture, Nature, and Naturalness,” excerpted in *Conservatism,* ed. Jerry Z. Muller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 401.

9. It should be noted that the objections merely sketched here can also be met by developing an advanced—that is, dynamic and higher-level—concept of needs or a sophisticated definition of the human form of life that takes into account its specific features (for example, the existence of practical reason). Both approaches are pursued at a high level in the contemporary discussion and merit more extensive treatment. My concern here, however, is to indicate the point of the concept of a problem using the conception of needs as a contrasting foil.

10. Forms of life—in contrast, for example, to what Foucault calls “strategies”—are not subjectless; they are transsubjective or intersubjective. See, for example, Michel Foucault, “The Formation of Strategies,” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 64–71. On the problem of forms of life as collective subjects, see Ch. 7 below.

11. When I speak of “conceptual” here, I am following a distinction von Wright uses when he explains the status of ideal rules. Someone who pursues an ideal, pursues an end; nevertheless, according to von Wright, it would “be a mistake to think of the ideal rules as norms concerning means to ends. In order to be a good teacher, a man ought to have such and such qualities. In order to fetch a book from the top shelf of his bookcase, he ought to use a ladder. But those qualities of a man which determine his goodness as a teacher are not causally related to the ideal—as the use of a ladder may be a causal prerequisite of fetching a book from a shelf. The former relation is conceptual (logical). The ideal rules determine a concept, e.g., the concept

of a (good) teacher or soldier." See Georg Henrik von Wright, *Norm and Action: A Logical Inquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 29.

12. I will discuss Dewey's theory of inquiry in greater detail in Part 4. Here I am only interested in the problem of the objective or subjective status of what can be regarded as a problem.

13. John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 104–5. [See also Dewey, *The Later Works 1925–1953,* vol. 12, *1938: Logic: The Theory of Enquiry,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 121].

14. Dewey, *Logic,* 107 [111].

15. Dewey.

16. In other words, as Hans-Peter Krüger writes, Dewey asserts that "in the process of scientific inquiry not only knowledge of the object but also the object of knowledge undergoes change." Krüger, "Prozesse der öffentlichen Untersuchung: Zum Potential einer zweiten Modernisierung in John Deweys *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry,*" in *Philosophie der Demokratie: Beiträge zum Werk von John Dewey,* ed. Hans Joas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 196.

17. Dewey, *Logic,* 105–6 [109].

18. Dewey, 108 [112].

19. Dewey, 66–67 [72].

20. For an interpretation of the concept of world in Heidegger that is compatible with pragmatism, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time, *Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

21. Dewey's theory of indeterminateness makes it possible to think of the posing of a problem and its solution as parts of a continuum—namely, a process of gradually overcoming indeterminateness. Incidentally, to this also belongs the fact that, given Dewey's modification of the initial definition cited above, we are never faced with a completely indeterminate situation.

22. Cornelius Castoriadis defends a similar position in the controversy with ethnological functionalism. Institutions cannot be interpreted in purely functionalist terms, because the problems they have to solve do not exist in uninterpreted form prior to these institutions, and needs and their satisfaction can only be understood against the background of a socially constituted horizon of meaning. In Castoriadis's terminology, this points to the role of "imaginary meanings." See Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society,* trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 116–17 (social institutions cannot be reduced to their functional role in maintaining society) and 133–34 (critique of the idea that there are "real" social problems independently of how they are represented).

23. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §§158–81. On Hegel's theory of the family, see also Siegfried Blasche, "Natürliche Sittlichkeit und bürgerliche Gesellschaft: Hegels Konstruktion der Familie als sittliche Intimität im entsittlichten Leben," in *Materialien zu Hegels Rechtsphilosophie,* vol. 2, ed. Manfred Riedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 312–40; and Herbert Schnädelbach, *Hegels praktische Philosophie: Ein Kommentar der Texte in der Reihenfolge ihrer Entstehung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 251–63.

24. To this also belongs the fact that the family is a precondition of integration of the individual into the other institutions of ethical life, hence of the individual becoming a legal person, a moral subject, and a citizen. It is in the family that the individual learns, for example, to defer her own needs, to adopt the perspectives of others, and to take the welfare of the whole into account.

25. As Frederick Neuhouser puts it in his study *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 276: "Formulated more generally, the family is good, or rational, because it is an arena within which human beings can find satisfaction of their basic needs for sex and love in a way that also imbues those needs with ethical significance."

26. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* §161. Here and in what follows, quotations in the text are cited by paragraph number of this edition.

27. On the idea of social freedom, see, among others, Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory;* Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life,* trans. Joseph Ganahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

28. In the light of the theses developed by Jack Goody, it might be more accurate to speak of the model of the family promoted by the Christian Church, which as a result shaped the development of marriage and the family in Europe and thus became a contrasting model to the oriental or Arab model of the family. See Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Goody argues that the ban on endogamous structures (central to the diverse forms of intermarriage) and the preferential treatment of the conjugal relationship are rooted not so much in Christian teaching as in a deliberate ecclesiastical policy pursued in the centuries immediately following the establishment of Christianity. According to Goody, these principles (regarding, among other things, the right of adoption and the custom of levirate marriage in Judaism and Islam), which contrasted sharply with the traditional customs also prevalent in Europe, were enforced by the Church in spite of certain obstacles in order to increase its assets. Endogamous structures ensure that family property remains within the family, but in the case of childlessness, exogamy and dissociation from the kinship group lead to the existence of "ownerless" inheritances, which could then fall to the Church, as also often actually occurred.

29. The irritating fact that at the same time he seems to be indifferent as to whether such a marriage may be initiated by the family does not alter this fact.

30. Accordingly, in the addition to §161, Hegel once again summarizes three notions of marriage to be rejected—namely, as a natural sex relationship, as a civil contract, and as romantic love.

31. The example of Romeo and Juliet shows that it is love that generates the self-sufficiency of the person. Thus, love is the natural basis of individual freedom and at the same time of the sociality of freedom.

32. On Hegel's critique of Romanticism, see Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999).

33. On Hegel's idea of love, see Dieter Henrich, "Hegel and Hölderlin," in *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 119–40.

34. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62 (Ak. 6:277).

35. As I already stated at the outset, notwithstanding its need for renewal, we still share the Hegelian concept of the family. The need for renewal primarily concerns, of course, the unacceptable subordinated position of the woman and her assignment to the spheres of privacy and feeling in contrast to the spheres of rationality and the public arena. On this, see in particular the addition to §166 of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* where we find this famous quotation: "Women may have insights, taste, and delicacy, but they do not possess the ideal. The difference between man and woman is the difference between animal and plant." See Frederick Neuhouser's discussion of Hegel's conception of the family in Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory,* 275–77. At the same time, however, Neuhouser's critical account emphasizes that, taken as a whole, the Hegelian interpretation of the family as a sphere of ethical life can withstand the necessary substantial revision in these questions, even allowing that the subordination of women concerns a nontrivial element of his theory. Nevertheless, Neuhouser argues, the dogma of male superiority does not constitute the core of what makes the family rational. I believe that Hegel's understanding of the family still goes to the heart of the normative expectations we associate with the bourgeois family, by which I mean that the contemporary transformations of the family are probably still situated within the framework of this model and its interpretation, if one compares it with the opposing models of the patriarchal traditionalist view outlined above. This is almost trivially true of the extension of the concept of the family to homosexual couples, but also even of the attempts to subject this model of the family to radical criticism and to supersede it.

36. See Werner Schiffauer, ed., *Familie und Alltagskultur: Facetten urbanen Lebens in der Türkei* (Frankfurt am Main: Universität Frankfurt Institut für Kulturanthropologie, 1993), on the tension between "modern" and "traditional" conceptions of the family in contemporary Turkish families and the corresponding conflicts within immigrant families.

37. One could argue that this occurs only where traditional models are confronted with nontraditional models. On the one hand, that would already be enough, given the factual inevitability of the confrontation, to render a more integrative model superior. On the other hand, the nontraditional, "modern" models are themselves the result of a conflict-ridden transformation—*vide* the Romeo and Juliet motif.

38. It is not difficult to imagine a continuation of this problem history along the lines of the possibilities for renewal alluded to above, culminating in the dissolution of the bourgeois family in the interest of fulfilling these tasks. The decisive point here, however, is that even the dissolution into patchwork families or polyamorous relationships can be understood in terms of the claims to autonomy and authenticity established with the bourgeois family.

39. I will return to the question of the integration of the individual (micro-)forms of life into larger contexts in Part 4. Here my intention is not to defend the position, for example, that temporal dislocations, such as enclaves of premodern forms of life within modern contexts are as a general rule regressive; nevertheless, it is a matter of relations of fit and of the consistency and viability of forms of life as contexts of practices.

40. G. W. F. Hegel, “Rede zum Schuljahrabschluß am 2. September 1811”, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden,* vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 349.

41. One would be justified in asking how certain forms of life maintain themselves in spite of constantly failing to live up to their claims. For example, one could easily argue that families organized on a patriarchal basis seldom allow their members to lead an autonomous life; nevertheless, this form of life has been able to survive. This makes it clear that “failure” does not necessarily mean actual disappearance but can assume a variety of forms, including continuing to exist in spite of obsolescence, stagnation, and ideological distortion. This also makes clear the role of criticism: in the face of such phenomena, criticism can be construed as the court of appeal that makes a form of life that is in a certain sense inconsistent aware of its internal tensions as being plagued by contradictions and ultimately as a matter of “failure.”

42. This does not mean that traditional models of the family cannot function per se. But where they function, it is in different environments and under different conditions of subsistence. This still holds in part for the model of family-run retail stores in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, in which the whole family, including half-cousins, is involved in one way or another, and which performs an invaluable integrative function by compensating for socially precarious conditions. Something like this can represent the best available solution under given (suboptimal) conditions. And where a whole culture and business culture function differently—the standard example is always Japan—things are different again. My concern here was with the enclave character of a situation that is internally static and externally dynamic.

43. This is particularly evident in the lecture notes to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* edited by Karl-Heinz Ilting; see G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie: 1818–1831* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1974).

44. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 134 (translation amended).

45. See Andre Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason* (London: Verso, 1989); and Robert Castel, *Les Métamorphoses de la question sociale: Une chronique du salariat* (Paris: Fayard, 1995). On historical transformations of the understanding of work since antiquity, see Christian Meier, “Griechische Arbeitsauffassungen in archaischer und klassischer Zeit,” in *Die Rolle der Arbeit in verschiedenen Epochen und Kulturen,* ed. Manfred Bierwisch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003); and Andreas Arndt, “Arbeit und Nichtarbeit,” in *Recht auf Rechte,* ed. Franz Josef Wetz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008), 89–115.

46. See Axel Honneth, “Work and Recognition: A Redefinition,” in *The Philosophy of Recognition: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,* ed. Hans-Christoph Schmitt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 223–40.

47. But this also means, for example, that the unconditional basic income, if it is not to become a “gigantic stay-at-home parenting credit” (Julian Nida-Rümelin) with socially disintegrative effects, must decidedly not be marked by a return to a prebourgeois understanding of work but must instead transform the bourgeois understanding of work. A serious alternative to the work-oriented society involving a basic income would have to differ just as clearly from the simple distain for work

as contemporary dissolutions of the bourgeois nuclear family into queer hexagonal relations must differ from prebourgeois polygamy.

48. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* §254. The problem is poverty qua unemployment, based on the fact that bourgeois civil society is not able to provide people with the means that in this society is the only means of subsistence. Other forms of poverty—resulting, for example, from inability to work and illness—do not constitute a "homemade" problem in this sense and are therefore not a problem that besets bourgeois civil society in the sense intended here.

49. At the end of Part 4, I will discuss the relationship between contradiction and conflict that plays a role in this context.

50. Hegel stresses the duty of society toward the poor in §238 of the *Philosophy of Right:* "Thus, the individual becomes a *son of civil society,* which has as many claims upon him as he has rights in relation to it." And in the addition to §244: "The important question of how poverty can be remedied is one which agitates and torments modern societies especially." The difficulty of solving this problem based on the principles of civil society is discussed in section 245: "This shows that, despite an *excess of wealth,* civil society is *not wealthy enough*—i.e., its own distinct resources are not sufficient—to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble." But civil society's "own distinct resources" here refers to work. Accordingly, earlier in the paragraph, Hegel explains that ensuring the subsistence of the needy "without the mediation of work . . . would be contrary to the principle of civil society and the feeling of self-sufficiency and honour among its individual members." With regard to the second alternative, the creation of work (which ultimately means a political intervention in the [capitalist market] economy), Hegel writes, "Alternatively, their livelihood might be mediated by work (i.e. by the opportunity to work) which would increase the volume of production; but it is precisely in overproduction and the lack of a proportionate number of consumers who are themselves productive that the evil consists, and this is merely exacerbated by the two expedients in question" (§245). When, finally, Hegel argues in §246 that "this inner dialectic of society drives [civil society] . . . to go beyond its own confines," this points at any rate to the instability and crisis-proneness (the "contradictoriness") of this situation. It is a complex debate to what extent the corporations (that is, professional associations or guilds)—as a regulative institution of ethical life within the sphere of the market—are capable of solving this problem.

51. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* §244.

52. On the distinction between normativistic and immanent criticism, see Part 3 below.

53. The orientational significance of the existence of the rabble for Hegel's philosophy of right is emphasized in Frank Ruda, *Hegels Pöbel: Eine Untersuchung der "Grundlagen der Philosophie des Rechts"* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2011).

54. Whether Hegel himself could see things this way is, of course, open to question. I will take up the thesis of the open character of the progression from solutions to problems again in Part 4.

55. This is true in the sense developed above (Section 3.4) with reference to Hegel's understanding of the divergence between concept and reality.

56. It will become apparent that the process of criticism (of forms of life) is based not least on providing such analyses, that is, on showing that problems or crises that initially seem to be external have reasons immanent to the forms of life. On this and on the relationship between analysis and criticism, see Part 3 below.

57. Whether one then wants to say that the corresponding form of life always had the problem and that these external factors made it evident, or whether one speaks of "problem" or "crisis" only when it has actually been made evident—as proof of its inability to learn—is then ultimately a matter of taste.

58. Of course, the picture is more complicated, as Diamond acknowledges. After all, the colonization of Greenland was successful over a certain period of time. The attempt to maintain a mixed economy and establish agriculture also had advantages over the Inuit form of economy focused on fishing, and ultimately nobody could have foreseen the worsening of climatic conditions. See Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed,* rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 2011). I am grateful to Eva von Redecker for drawing my attention to this book and to Jakob Jaeggi for reviving my interest in the Vikings.

59. Instead, the Vikings apparently made great efforts to help freezing and starving cattle to survive in an attempt to measure up to their self-understanding as European cultivators of the land and breeders of cattle.

60. The above-mentioned essay collection *Familie und Alltagskultur,* edited by Werner Schiffauer, provides a wealth of material for such interpretations. In many cases, it can even be said that it is highly unlikely that the external challenge will lead to a crisis-prone formulation of a problem at all unless internal inadequacies already exist. This marks the limit of the analogy to famine, which exists as a matter of fact, whether as a form-of-life problem or not.

61. See Part 4, Sections 9.3 and 9.4.

62. The readily apparent fact that I construe the third case as paradigmatic for crises of forms of life can be made plausible by appeal to the fact that here the situation that a form of life lacks internal resources can be best explained in turn as a consequence of an immanent malformation and of an immanently induced blockage to learning.

63. Larry Laudan, *Progress and Its Problems: Toward a Theory of Scientific Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 15.

64. Laudan, 48.

65. Compare Hegel's critique in *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), of the epistemological notion of an instrument through which one observes reality. See also Wilfrid Sellars's critique of the "myth of the given" in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,* ed. Robert Brandom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), and John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Both writers take up Hegel's critique.

66. The decisive point is that coping mechanisms do not consist simply in these mechanisms themselves, as "raw practices" as it were, but in an amalgam of practices and their interpretation; coping mechanisms are possible against the background of interpretations insofar as practical dealings with the world are bound up with its interpretation.

67. See the similar position (albeit with different implications) of Ernesto Laclau und Chantal Mouffe: "An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God,' depends upon the structuring of a discursive field." Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics,* 2nd ed., trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 2001), 108.

III. Forms of Criticism

Epigraph: Karl Marx, "Letter to Ruge, Kreuznach, September 1843," accessed October 19, 2017, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm. In the same letter, Marx writes, "On the other hand, it is precisely the advantage of the new trend that we do not dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through criticism of the old one." Here we also find an interesting remark on the position of the critic: "In short, therefore, we can formulate the trend of our journal as being: self-clarification (critical philosophy) to be gained by the present time of its struggles and desires."

1. This is not to say that they can only either succeed or fail; most cases probably lie somewhere in between.

2. For a different attempt to develop an alternative between internal and external social criticism through an examination of the discussion in the social science, see Robin Celikates, *Kritik als soziale Praxis: Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009).

3. See Onora O'Neill, "Starke und schwache Gesellschaftskritik in einer globalisierten Welt," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 48, no. 5 (2000): 719–28; and Michael Walzer, "Mut, Mitleid, und ein gutes Auge," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 48, no. 5 (2000): 709–18.

4. Although I do not want the typology of forms of nonexternal criticism to become too elaborate here, a total of three forms of criticism can easily be juxtaposed—namely, internal criticism, reconstructive immanent criticism, and negativistic, ideology-critical immanent criticism. Here I will concentrate on the negativistic aspect. I have developed such a conception of immanent criticism as critique of ideology in Rahel Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy,* ed. Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher Zurn (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 63–86.

5. Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," 63. These distinctions coincide for the most part, although not entirely, with those made by Axel Honneth. Honneth distinguishes, on the one hand, between reconstructive and constructive criticism. Whereas the former *reconstructs* the normative principles and ideals inherent in a community or a social formation and measures reality against this reconstruction, the latter *constructs*—in this regard, externally—the normative ideals against which the community must be measured. Within the camp of reconstructive criticism, Honneth distinguishes in turn between "hermeneutic" and Left-Hegelian variants. See Axel

Honneth, "Reconstructive Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of 'Critique' in the Frankfurt School," in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory,* trans. James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 43–53.

5. What Is Internal Criticism?

1. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

2. Therefore, the Kantian variety of "constructive" criticism is a demanding special case of external criticism in the general sense. But good reasons could be found for asserting that the categorical imperative in particular, insofar as it is immanent to our faculty of reason, is not an external standard and that Kant does not understand it as such either.

3. On the distanced perspective of the critic, see Martin Saar, "Die Kunst, Abstand zu nehmen: Überlegungen zur Logik der Sozialkritik," *Texte zur Kunst* 70 (2008): 40–50.

4. See, for example, Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Walzer, "Mut, Mitleid, und ein gutes Auge," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 48, no. 5 (2000): 709–18.

5. In Walzer's terminology, that would represent the "path of discovery" and the "path of invention" (as something external vis-à-vis the existing practices of the moral community), in contrast to the "path of interpretation," which starts from the inside. See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism.*

6. Walzer tacitly assimilates the social, epistemic, and normative locations of internal criticism, even though these aspects are not necessarily connected with each other. One can conceive of someone who occupies a social location outside of the community nevertheless bringing the community's own normative principles to bear in her criticism. Conversely, one can also imagine a socially bound critic bringing externally derived normative criteria to bear against her own community without thereby distancing herself from it entirely.

7. Hegel (in his critique of Jacobinism) identified in abstract radicalism the danger of a "fury of disappearance" that acts in a purely negative way. See G. W. F. Hegel, "Absolute Freedom and Terror," in *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 255–363.

8. Here and in what follows, I always assume cases of social (rather than aesthetic) criticism. The counterpart of the uniformity of the community in the case of example E—the bad novel—would be agreement over the description of the genre.

9. As, for example, in the case of the "procuration paragraph" (§180 German Penal Code), which was abolished in 1969.

10. See Jürgen Habermas's remarks on the critique of ideology in "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 421–61.

11. Of course, it is open to question whether such a formation could ever exist as a stable social formation. As is well known, even bands of robbers have a certain morality.

12. After all, the political demands expressed by many internal critics are anything but *politically* conservative. And it is also rarely a question of a return to a factual past. Here "conservatism" only refers to a structural element of internal criticism and not to a political stance.

13. Even the social-educational "opt-out work" with neo-Nazis makes use of internal criticism in certain cases—for example, when in presentations it attempts to sow doubts in the minds of adherents concerning the radical right-wing orientation by pointing out the profiteering in this milieu, or even that right-wing memorabilia and publications are not manufactured in Germany but in low-wage countries as a cost-saving measure. On this, see a report on the opt-out support network Exit in the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, October 17, 2008, 3.

14. For reasons of clarity and in order to be able to elaborate the differences that are relevant for me, here I have not explored in greater detail the different forms that internal criticism can take. It goes without saying that certain answers to the questions raised here can be found in the practice of internal criticism. How transformative such criticism can become in practice also depends on the radicality of critical hermeneutics. Moreover, normative modesty does not necessarily go hand in hand with political modesty. Indeed, Michael Walzer argues on the basis of an interpretation of "shared values" for extensive social reforms and transformations. See Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

6. "To Find the New World through Criticism of the Old One"

1. Therefore, immanent criticism, contrary to what Walzer claims concerning local internal criticism, does need a "good theory." The normative foundation of a community and the violation of this foundation, which can be uncovered only through analysis, by contrast, cannot be seen with the "good eye" of the critic alone. I will return to this point below in the context of the critique of ideology.

2. See Axel Honneth, "Reconstructive Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of 'Critique' in the Frankfurt School" and "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today," in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory,* trans. James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 43–53 and 63–79.

3. On the Hegelian diagnosis of deficient relations of ethical life as a form of "objective criticism," see my essay "Freiheit als Nicht-Entfremdung," in *Freiheit: Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2011,* ed. Axel Honneth and Gunnar Hindrichs (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2013), 341–69.

4. Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 19. See also Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988).

5. "Vulgar criticism falls into an opposite *dogmatic* error. Thus, for example, it criticizes the constitution, drawing attention to the opposition of the powers etc. It finds contradictions everywhere. But criticism that *struggles* with its opposite remains dogmatic criticism, as for example in earlier times, when the dogma of the

Blessed Trinity was set aside by appealing to the contradiction between 1 and 3 [i.e., the supposed contradiction in the Christian dogma of the Trinity: How can God be one person and three persons at the same time?]. True criticism, however, shows the internal genesis of the Blessed Trinity in the human brain. It describes the act of its birth. Thus, true philosophical criticism of the present state constitution not only shows the contradictions as existing, but *explains* them, grasps their essence and necessity. It comprehends their own *proper* significance." Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* ed. and trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 92 (emphasis added).

6. Karl Marx, "Letter to Ruge, Kreuznach, September 1843," accessed October 19, 2017, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm.

7. Even though this motif bore strange fruit in the political history of Marxism, criticism in this sense is the revival of Socratic midwifery, which helps to bring forth the new principles that have already developed in the womb of the old society.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, "Critique," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords,* trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 288.

9. "The eternal, unchangeable archetype of the object itself as the standard of judgment becomes, through the *dialectic of the standard* that no longer lets it appear as a pure presupposition, the treatment of the object in criticism in which the standard always first has to prove itself." Kurt Röttgers, *Dialektik als Grund der Kritik* (Königstein im Taunus: Anton Hain, 1981), 163.

10. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 52, 89.

11. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12.

12. On the controversy surrounding Hegel's critique of the critique of knowledge, see, among others, Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests,* trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), and Hans Jürgen Krahl, *Erfahrung des Bewußtseins: Kommentare zu Hegels Einleitung der Phänomenologie des Geistes und Exkurse zur materialistischen Erkenntnistheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Materialis, 1979).

13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* vol. 3, *Medieval and Modern Philosophy,* trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 428.

14. For such an understanding, but also a discussion of the limits that Marx encounters in pursuing an immanent approach, see Georg Lohmann, *Indifferenz und Gesellschaft: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Marx* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

15. Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol. 1, *A Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 272–73.

16. For a particularly penetrating description of the parallels between the procedure of psychoanalytic treatment and "dialectical development," see Gottfried Fischer, *Dialektik der Veränderung in Psychoanalyse und Psychotherapie: Modell, Theorie, und systematische Fallstudie* (Heidelberg: Asanger, 1989). See also Joachim

Küchenhoff, "Mitspieler und Kritiker: Die kritische Hermeneutik des psychotherapeutischen Gesprächs," in *Was ist Kritik?* ed. Rahel Jaeggi and Tilo Wesche (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 299–318.

17. Even if Hegel did not pursue this line of criticism and transformation (and hence, ultimately, the program of immanent criticism) further for various reasons (see, among others, Michael Theunissen, "The Repressed Intersubjectivity in Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Hegel and Legal Theory,* ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson [New York: Routledge, 1991], 3–63), and it would ultimately be Marx who situated the potential of a process of ethical life *[Versittlichungsbewegung]* in the sphere of bourgeois society itself or in its economy, the quintessence of Hegel's model of criticism remains the following: bourgeois civil society makes a claim to being an institution of ethical life and must therefore be measured against the claims of ethical life. However deficient it may be, it nevertheless remains a deficient form of ethical life, not no form of ethical life at all. And where the deficiency must be overcome and is overcome, it is overcome with the forces of ethical life that are nevertheless inherent in this formation of ethical life.

18. I will discuss the related dynamics in greater detail in Ch. 10.

19. Here, of course, more and less pessimistic interpretations are possible. See, for example, the somewhat more optimistic interpretation of Hegel's "dialectic of civil society" in Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life,* trans. Joseph Ganahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

20. Therefore, one problem that I discussed in relation to internal criticism does not arise for immanent criticism: it does not have to fear that social reality could lose its ideals and become cynical. A "norm-free" (social) reality is not even a possibility from the perspective of immanent criticism. If the talk of "norms" does not merely mean shared "values" but normative functional principles, then social order is inconceivable without them.

21. This point stands in a complex relation to the fact that the norms in question are—in a manner that will have to be explained—not only factually given but apply as justified, reasonable norms. According to the proposal developed here, the rationality of the corresponding norms is to be sought in how the process triggered by crises itself unfolds. See Part 4 below.

22. This is a relatively cautious description. In the corresponding discussions, one often hears also of *necessarily* generated contradictions, though the nature of this necessity is of course controversial. See the current research program of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research and the contributions in Axel Honneth, ed., *Paradoxien kapitalistischer Modernisierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002). There, for reasons bound up with the claim of the concept of contradiction, the focus on contradictions is replaced by talk of "paradoxes." Below I will return to the sense in which, on the other hand, it is possible to continue to speak in terms of contradictions.

23. At this point one might ask whether internal and immanent criticism are actually directed at fundamentally different cases or whether they provide different interpretations of similar cases. The answer is that both options are conceivable. There may be genuine cases for internal criticism, but there may also be situations in which internal criticism might turn out to be abridged or even ideological. This

is to a large extent a question of the context in which one situates the respective cases. Xenophobia, for example, can be understood more as a matter of contingent memory, or it can be localized within the systematic structure of a social system of power relations.

24. On my interpretation, the relationship between the ideal norm and its actualization in the process of immanent criticism is complicated. Specifically, if the actualization of ideals evoked by immanent criticism simultaneously means their transformation, then what is redeemed here is not an actualization of something implicit in a static sense, but a movement that becomes progressively richer and more differentiated. What would have to be redeemed here arises first and foremost in this redemption process. Such a (performative-constructivist) interpretation of the philosophical motif of potential and actualization assumes that the motivational connection between potential and actualization is important, even if the two do not become perfectly congruent.

25. It is here that the difference between my interpretation of immanent criticism and that of Axel Honneth, as well as our different typologies, becomes apparent. When mapped onto each other, three variants emerge: internal criticism (in Honneth, the hermeneutic version of immanent criticism); reconstructive-immanent criticism, which takes a positive stance on the rational norms embedded in reality; and negativistic transformative-immanent criticism—that is, the version of immanent criticism oriented to crises that I highlight in the present text. It should be noted, however, that transformative-immanent criticism remains reconstructive in the sense that it looks for an incipient "reasonable" development in the moments of crisis. Thus, I also conceive of the problem differently from Seyla Benhabib, for whom the desire for transformation already goes beyond the concept of immanent criticism. See Benhabib's distinction between "fulfillment" and "transformation" in Marx in Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia,* 67. As I understand it, by contrast, the transforming moment—especially when one takes Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a starting point for understanding immanent criticism—belongs to the procedure of immanent criticism itself.

26. The "educational process" *[Bildungsprozess]* of which Hegel speaks in §187 of the *Philosophy of Right* (G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* ed. A. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 224–26), would be such a social experiential process in which the starting point, that is, independence, itself undergoes change: the insight into the interdependence posited by the institutions of general trade (for example, in commodities) and the practical realization of this interdependence aims to transform the social bond that hitherto remained deficient.

27. Part 4 will deal with the nature of this learning process and will offer a more precise characterization of the movement of determinate negation.

28. In contrast, behavioral therapy is directed solely at the result, namely, restoring functionality. As such, it does not need a process of coming to awareness, and it treats the symptom in a purely negative way; psychoanalysis needs and works with the symptom and conceives of the cure, one could say, as a process of sublating appropriation.

29. Even if it is questionable whether the idea of development through crises and the idea of the "positive content" of what is negated can be affirmed in all

cases, in this regard psychoanalysis is closely related, especially in metapsychological respects, to the Hegelian or dialectical model of development. The psychoanalyst Gottfried Fischer describes this model accordingly as a "dialectical developmental process" (in Fischer, Dialektik der Veränderung in Psychoanalyse und Psychotherapie).

30. Alfred Lorenzer, *Die Wahrheit der psychoanalytischen Erkenntnis: Ein historisch-materialistischer Entwurf* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 138.

31. We can go even further. Not only are exploitation and alienation not obvious, but our perception of violations and adverse conditions—whether they concern others or ourselves—is shaped and made possible by the terms and concepts that make something accessible to us as injurious or bad. Whether or not we find it cruel to let infants cry depends not only on cultural influences but also—especially when it comes to changing these influences—on what we know and are able to imagine about the subjective experiences and the internal experiential world of infants. Thus, interpretations always play a role here. And in this respect renouncing theory merely means relying on one's customary everyday interpretations. This is not to deny that sometimes it could be other media besides theory that render such experiences accessible to us.

32. Paul Redding, "Hegel and Contradiction," ch. 7 in *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), argues that the contradictions are first produced by being transformed in the space of reasons.

33. See Lohmann, *Indifferenz und Gesellschaft,* 47: "Marx describes the unity typical of bourgeois society in terms of the same concept that Hegel also used to characterize it, namely 'connection'. In Hegel's terminology, 'connection' designates a reflexive relationship between individual elements that appear to be self-sufficient (particularities), but which, in order to realize their particularity (the realization of their needs), require a relationship to other particularities. The need to be related to others constitutes the determination of universality, although this becomes a means for realizing the particular. This realization is qualitatively different from the 'seeming initial self-sufficiency of the individual.'"

34. That is basically a reformulation of the question raised in Anton Leist, "Schwierigkeiten mit der Ideologiekritik," in *Ethik und Marx: Moralkritik und normative Grundlagen der Marxschen Theorie,* ed. Emil Angehrn and Georg Lohmann (Königstein im Taunus: Athenäum 1986), 58–81: How can the critique of ideology be nonnormative and nevertheless critical? I previously answered this question by pointing out that, although critique of ideology is normative, it is not normativistic, and to that extent it develops its critical potential as immanent criticism; see Rahel Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy,* ed. Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher Zurn (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 63–86. Now it is apparent what normative baggage is associated with the concepts of problem, crisis, or conflict and their resolution.

35. Adorno, "Critique," 288.

36. Michael Theunissen, "Negativity in Adorno," trans. Nicholas Walker, in *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory,* vol. 1, ed. Simon Jarvis (New York: Routledge, 2006), 186.

IV. The Dynamics of Crisis and the Rationality of Social Change

1. See Ernst Tugendhat, “Drei Vorlesungen über Probleme der Ethik,” in *Probleme der Ethik* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 57–131. I made use of this distinction in my study on the problem of alienation: Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation,* trans. Fred Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Here the analogy can be carried still further: If what sets successful conduct of life apart is (as I developed in this study in relation to Tugendhat) that the subjects involved “dispose” over themselves in the sense of having themselves at their command, then, correspondingly, forms of life that fail to flourish would be collective ways of not having oneself at one’s command, collective ways of failing to have access to experiences, and the corresponding collective blockages to learning.

2. Such a shift can be regarded as one of the typical turns taken by Left Hegelianism up to (early) Critical Theory. If this can also be regarded in a critical light as an occlusion of ethical questions by the philosophy of history, then here I am interested in the normative potential of such a shift and in how it can be reconstructed in a meaningful way.

3. The problems with the philosophy of history have been discussed many times, and there have been many different leave-takings from the philosophy of history; see, among others, Odo Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973). On the discussion of the philosophy of history, see also Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, “Subjekt und Geschichte: Über die Aufgaben von Geschichtsphilosophie heute,” in *Geschichtsphilosophie und Kulturkritik: Historische und systematische Studien,* ed. Johannes Rohbeck and Herta Nagl-Docekal (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 278–92.

4. On the project of deflating the philosophy of history as a “hermeneutic reduction of the idea of progress” in relation to Kant’s philosophy of history, see Axel Honneth, “The Ineluctability of Progress: Kant’s Account of the Relationship between Morality and History,” in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory,* trans. James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1–18.

5. This relationship is intended to take up the model of problem-driven immanent criticism as I developed it in Part 3. My approach shares its antinormativism with the method of normative reconstruction developed by Axel Honneth in *Freedom’s Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). However, my version of such a reconstruction starts from the negative phenomena and crises in which a normative requirement is manifested, rather than from the positive content of the existing norms.

7. Successful and Failed Learning Processes

1. See Helmut Skowronek, “Lernen und Lerntheorien,” in *Pädagogik: Handbuch für Studium und Praxis,* ed. Leo Roth (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1991), 183. In this respect, learning to walk, in contrast to learning to read, would

(on balance) not be learning but a maturation process, at least if one assumes that learning to walk is predetermined by the child's genetic program and could be prevented at most by counteracting environmental influences. In fact, however, the idea of potential and actualization is sometimes deceptive even with regard to childhood development. Although there seem to be blueprints for certain sequences of developmental stages, such as from crawling to running, or for the acquisition of language, and certain development schemes that are realized on a regular basis, this applies only under conditions of sufficient stimulation. That some basic stages of development seem to be realized so spontaneously may also be due to the fact that very few conditions would the insufficiently stimulating to ensure the development of the specific potentials in question. As is well known, differences quickly become apparent in the case of language development, but also of abilities such as color perception.

2. In pedagogy, the canonical definitions conceive of learning as "a relatively permanent change in behavior based on experience, that is, on the interaction of an organism with its environment." Skowronek, "Lernen und Lerntheorien," 183.

3. On the difference between learning and training processes, see John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1944), 13.

4. This example concerns a so-called Presta bicycle valve with a knurled nut. I am indebted to Lukas Kübler for this reference.

5. This point is important when it comes to countering an excessively rationalistic understanding of learning and an exaggerated understanding of the reflexive moment. A learning process does not become reflexive only when the interrelationships in question are understood "exhaustively."

6. For a classical account, see Plato, *Meno,* 79e–86c, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981). If the question of how what has been learned was acquired is resolved here by defining learning as recollection, this becomes plausible when learning is conceived as a matter of combining what is already known—that is, creating references from which the allegedly "new" arises.

7. Georg Henrik von Wright, "Progress: Fact and Fiction," in *The Idea of Progress* ed. Arnold Burgen et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 1.

8. It is questionable whether the motif of progress can also be used purely descriptively in the sense of an approach to any destination, for example, in the talk of a "progressive illness." It can be argued that even here the goal in question is a positive one—from the point of view of the illness, as it were.

9. Gereon Wolters, "The Idea of Progress in Evolutionary Biology: Philosophical Considerations," in Burgen, *Idea of Progress,* 201.

10. I have elaborated on these reflections in an attempt to develop an open-ended and nonteleological approach to progress in my book, *Fortschritt und Regression* (forthcoming, winter 2018).

11. The idea of a collective macrosubject is not only in need of explanation in general. Even if such an idea of the collective could be explained in socio-ontological terms, it would be unsuitable as a characterization of forms of life, which were defined above as nexuses of practices and not as nexuses of subjects, however constituted.

12. On the difference between evolution and cultural learning processes, see Klaus Eder, *Geschichte als Lernprozess* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 19:

"The role of learning processes in evolutionary theory is unclear. . . . With this, development takes place without the need for learning. The experience that is constitutive for phenotypical learning is irrelevant for evolution if phenotypical variations cannot be transmitted." According to Eder, a theory of sociocultural evolution that seeks to integrate the phenomenon of learning therefore requires "a double theoretical frame of reference" in which learning processes independent of evolution and antecedent learning processes can be integrated (Eder, 22).

13. The much-discussed question of how changes can be conceived at all if existing practices at the same time first enable individuals to act—that is, the question of where the scopes for acting and shaping or the space for "unruly practices" are supposed to come from—cannot be discussed here. But if, as Goffman claimed, unruly behavioral possibilities arise in the "cracks" of the respective social formation, then here I defend the view that these cracks are brought about by crises.

14. Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 21.

15. Dewey, 19.

16. Thus, the inability of individuals to learn leading to the "collapse" of societies described by Jared Diamond does not consist in the stubborn attitude of each individual. Rather, individuals cling obdurately to certain ideas against the background of the collective horizon of interpretation, and for a variety of reasons cannot transform the fabric composed of interpretations, self-images, and traditional practices that determines them. See Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed,* rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 2011).

17. Although one could employ a different definition here, I still consider failing learning processes to be learning processes because I want to emphasize that failure is a matter of degree and that a failing learning process fails to live up to its claim to be a learning process.

18. It should be noted, however, that the case in question is not one of massive guilt and entanglement that first have to be uncovered by the children, but of the blameworthy followership *[Mitläufertum]* of someone who was nineteen years old at the time.

19. See Hannah Arendt, *Besuch in Deutschland* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1993).

20. On the argumentative structure of "genetic" criticism, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

21. See Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation,* in *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982); and Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior,* trans. Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove, 1975).

22. See Martin Riesebrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der "Kampf der Kulturen"* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001).

23. However, forms of life are not subjects capable of reflecting upon themselves. As such, the modes of reflection at work here are practical and, at least in part, of a more implicit kind; the erosion of the bases of their validity is reflected in the diverse ways in which they can be undermined and in which the actors concerned can actively and passively refuse to comply with them.

24. Here I am alluding to Charles Taylor's description of human beings as "self-interpreting animals"; see Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in Taylor, *Human*

Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45–76.

25. Karl Polanyi has vividly described such (in my words) regressive problem-solving dynamics taking the example of the introduction of the Speenhamland laws in England in the seventeenth century. See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 81–89.

26. The economic unproductiveness of the feudal working relationships under changed economic conditions and their incompatibility with concepts of freedom and equality based on natural law could be described as such "problem situations."

27. Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol.1, *A Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 271–72.

28. Such "nesting," as we shall see, is different from the dogmatic assumption of a sequence of developmental steps.

8. Crisis-Induced Transformations

1. See Martin Hartmann, *Die Kreativität der Gewohnheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 268.

2. Hilary Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," in *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 180. In addition, an instructive examination of Dewey's theory of democracy can be found in Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," trans. John Farrell in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 218–39.

3. This corresponds to Dewey's characterization of the public sphere as the sphere of action that has implications beyond the domain of those directly affected. See John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954) [Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953,* vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 235–372].

4. See Dewey, *Public and Its Problems,* and Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1944) [Dewey, *The Middle Works, 1899–1924,* vol. 9, 1916, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980)].

5. "Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself." The explanation that Dewey appends to this sentence is instructive concerning the normative status of the ideal of democracy: "It is an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal: namely, the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected." See Dewey, *Public and Its Problems,* 148 [328].

6. Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* ed. and trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 29–30.

7. Dewey assumes "that inquiry, in spite of the diverse subjects to which it applies, and the consequent diversity of its special techniques has a common structure or pattern: that this common structure is applied both in common sense and science, although because of the nature of the problems with which they are concerned, the emphasis upon the factors involved varies widely in the two modes" (Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* [New York: Henry Holt, 1938], 101) [Dewey, *The*

Later Works 1925–1953, vol. 12, *1938, Logic: The Theory of Enquiry,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 105].

8. The "primacy of the practical" does not imply an exclusive orientation to practical feasibility. It only means that the theoretical and the knowledge that has become independent from direct application are also practically constituted. The fact that I learn something only when I retroactively process the effects of my actions and make inferences from them, therefore, is as true of an attempt to translate Homer or to solve a mathematical problem as it is of repairing a radio.

9. At any rate, Putnam understands Dewey's theses in this sense as allowing an evaluation of progress without a metaphysical foundation: "Dewey believes (as we all do, when we are not playing the sceptic) that there are better and worse resolutions to human predicaments—to what he calls 'problematical situation.' That this is so is not something Dewey argues on a priori grounds" (Putnam, "Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," 186). Putnam considers this reluctance to provide a foundation of progress in a notion of ontologically "real states of affairs" or absolute facts to be something that enables us, conversely, not to have to restrict ourselves to the "local validity" of such assessments. However, Richard Rorty's interpretation of Dewey goes in the opposite direction. For Rorty, a pragmatist assessment of cultural differences and historical developments schooled in Dewey confines itself to a local and contingent "dramatic narrative." See Richard Rorty, "Rationality and Cultural Difference," in *Truth and Progress,* vol. 3 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191. By contrast, I consider it to be the point of a pragmatic interpretation that transformation processes can be qualified as more or less successful depending on how they unfold.

10. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); and MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

11. This is not to imply that MacIntyre is straightforwardly hostile to modernity. On MacIntyre's criticism of modernity, see Terry Pinkard, "MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity," in *Alasdair MacIntyre,* ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 176–98.

12. In this context, MacIntyre criticizes the fact that in liberal culture "central areas of moral concern cannot become the subject of anything like adequate public shared systematic discourse or inquiry." MacIntyre, "The Privatization of the Good: An Inaugural Lecture," *Review of Politics* 52, no. 3 (1990): 353.

13. "What the Enlightenment made us for the most part blind to and what we now need to recover is, so I shall argue, a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of the same tradition." MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 7.

14. Tradition is one of the leading concepts not only in *Whose Justice?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry,* but in early essays such as "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *Monist* 60, no. 4 (1977): 453–

71. See also Jean Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre," in Murphy, *Alasdair MacIntyre,* 38–70.

15. MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 461.

16. MacIntyre, 460.

17. Here there are parallels with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding of the active appropriation of tradition. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2004). In an interview with Giovanna Boradori, MacIntyre emphasizes his attachment to Gadamer in spite of not discussing his work explicitly. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "An Interview with Giovanna Boradori," in *The MacIntyre Reader,* ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 265.

18. If MacIntyre himself can ultimately understand revolutions as a means of continuing a tradition, then this is a matter of the interpretive creation of continuity and discontinuity: "Every tradition therefore is always in danger of lapsing into incoherence and when a tradition does so lapse it sometimes can only be recovered by a revolutionary reconstitution. . . . It is traditions which are the bearers of reason, and traditions at certain periods actually require and need revolutions for their continuance." MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 461.

19. MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 461. MacIntyre goes so far as to interpret the avoidance of conflict explicitly as a symptom of degeneration: "It is yet another mark of a degenerate tradition that it has contrived a set of epistemological defences which enable it to avoid being put in question or at least to avoid recognising that it is being put in question by rival traditions" (MacIntyre, 461).

20. Robert Stern interprets MacIntyre's project in this sense as an attempt to find a kind of third way between Hegel and a form of historicism that becomes skeptical or relativistic. See Stern, "MacIntyre and Historicism," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre,* ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 146–60.

21. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* vol. 1, *Greek Philosophy to Plato,* trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 2.

22. Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 161.

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 265. My account here does not claim to be a comprehensive, philologically founded interpretation of the relationship between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's philosophy of history. Rather, it seeks to capture the systematic impulses that can be gained from relating the dynamic of movement developed in the *Phenomenology* to the notion of a change in formation as this features in the philosophy of history, and in general to use it to understand the dynamics of social learning processes.

24. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. John Sibree (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2001), 24.

25. On this critical stance, see Dewey's characterization of teleological models, which is expressly also directed against Hegel, in Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 58. MacIntyre also adopts a critical stance toward Hegel when he contrasts

his own conception with the Hegelian model of development: "Implicit in the rationality of [Hegelian] enquiry there is indeed a conception of a final truth, that is to say, a relationship of the mind to its objects which would be wholly adequate in respect of the capacities of that mind. But any conception of that state as one in which the mind could by its own powers know itself as thus adequately informed is ruled out; the Absolute Knowledge of the Hegelian system is from this tradition-constituted standpoint a chimera." MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 360–61.

26. With this I also place Hilary Putnam's alternative in question—namely, the claim that the idea of historically situated rationality, if one strips it of the notion (which he ascribes to Hegel) of a necessary goal and end of history, can no longer differentiate normatively between the different cultural and historical instantiations. Thus, my claim will be that, even without such a goal (which would only be a historically postponed "Archimedean point" of criticism), criteria for the rationality of a process can be derived from Hegel's dialectical model of development. See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

9. Problem or Contradiction?

1. John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 104–5 [Dewey, *The Later Works 1925–1953,* vol. 12, 1938, *Logic: The Theory of Enquiry,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 121].

2. Dewey, *Logic*, 105 [109].

3. Dewey.

4. Dewey, 68–70 [74].

5. It would be worth exploring in greater detail the parallels between Heidegger's concept of world and Dewey's concept of a situation or the "surroundings" of animate or inanimate objects. Lowell Nissen's harsh criticism of Dewey's concept of situation as incomprehensible and meaningless makes it abundantly clear that certain things could be better understood in terms of Heidegger's concept. See Lowell Nissen, *John Dewey's Theory of Inquiry and Truth* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966). Thus, it may be no coincidence that the rehabilitation of Dewey's work in postanalytical philosophy, for example in Rorty, has gone hand in hand with a rehabilitation of Heidegger's work. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

6. Dewey, *Logic,* 68 [72].

7. Again, analogously to Heidegger's analysis of the surrounding world, the nexus in question involves the performance of practices and dealings with things in the context of which the latter are constituted as moments of a nexus (of meaning). If "world" or the "situation" (following Heidegger) is a product of active world-disclosure, then this is precisely the kind of performance of an action that is disrupted when a situation becomes problematic. See Martin Heidegger, "The Worldliness of the World," ch. 3 of part 1, division 1 of *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), §§ 14–24).

8. See John Dewey, *Individualism, Old and New* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1999) [*The Later Works 1925–1953,* vol. 5, 1929–30*,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 41–124]. See also the discussion in Martin Hartmann, *Die Kreativität der Gewohnheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 262–64.

9. Dewey, *Individualism, Old and New,* 47 [66].

10. "Its hitherto trusted methods of enquiry [that is, those of the tradition] have become sterile. Conflicts over rival answers to key questions can no longer be settled rationally. Moreover, it may indeed happen that the use of the methods of enquiry and of the forms of argument, by means of which rational progress has been achieved so far, begins to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognized incoherences, and new problems for the solution of which there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 361–62.

11. MacIntyre, 361.

12. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *Monist* 60, no. 4 (1977): 453–71. Such crises are epistemological because they concern the basis of validity and the self-understanding of the corresponding (social or scientific) formation. On the theory of paradigm shifts, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

13. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 333.

14. MacIntyre.

15. This can be seen, in turn, as an attempt to develop a third way between realism and constructivism; however, here, too, MacIntyre's position is open to the criticism of fatal indecisiveness. In this sense, John Haldane develops several strategies regarding MacIntyre's "refutation" of relativism. However, their relation to each other, he argues, is not always clear. See Haldane, "MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?" in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre,* ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 91–107.

16. See also along these lines John Milbank's criticism of MacIntyre: "MacIntyre claims that his outlook is at once historicist and dialectical, yet denies that this is Hegelian. However, all that he seems to mean by this denial is that the historical process will not issue in a self-perspicuous moment of total illumination. Otherwise, the attempt to comprehend decisive narrative shifts in dialectical terms sounds thoroughly Hegelian. As a 'realist,' however, MacIntyre is not open to the Hegelian insight that the object of knowledge itself undergoes modification in the course of being known." Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 346.

17. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 263–409.

18. See the account of Socrates in Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* 288–90. (Note that Sibree translates *Prinzip der Innerlichkeit* as "principle of subjectivity."—*Trans.*)

19. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 12, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 354.

20. Rüdiger Bubner's interpretation of the phenomenon of the "devitalization" of institutions (in Hegel) can be understood in relation to the definition of "unconnectedness" that is so important for MacIntyre and Dewey when Bubner interprets the distinction between "life and death" in the context of moral forms of life as follows: "Dead is what no longer has a place in the present network of customs. Then that must be called alive which makes sense as a network." Bubner, *Geschichtsprozesse und Handlungsnormen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 197; see also 195.

21. Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* 92.

22. In the case of the "*corruption* of the Greek world," the form of life of the Greeks, having failed to resolve the contradiction posed with it, continued to exist in one form or another—in Sparta in a different form from in Athens—in a lifeless way before then being destroyed from the outside by the rise of the Roman Empire (Hegel, 286).

23. Although one cannot infer directly from the sterility or devitalization of forms of life, traditions, and institutions to their instability, Hegel evidently saw a certain connection between the two when he wrote the following in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit:* "The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 6–7.

24. "Since the community only gets an existence through its interference with the happiness of the Family, and by dissolving [individual] self-consciousness into the universal, it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it an internal enemy—womankind in general." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 288.

25. Hegel, 287.

26. Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* 92.

27. Hegel, 284 (translation amended).

28. Hegel, 287 (translation amended).

29. Hegel, 287. Hegel's merely sketchy presentation of this immanent dynamic runs along the following line of argument. If Greek substantial ethical life in its "concrete vitality" is at first oblivious to any contradiction between law and living reality, then the seed of an opposition is sown with the establishment of principles and the universal points of view that arise with them: "But when thought recognizes its affirmative character, as in Greece, it establishes principles; and these stand in an essential relation to the real world. . . . But as soon as thought arises, it investigates the various political constitutions: as a result of its investigation it forms for itself an idea of an improved state of society, and demands that this ideal should take the place of things as they are." Hegel, 286–87 (translation amended). But it is not only the establishment of principles that is already laid out in Greek ethical life. Rather, the exercise of democratic participation requires education, and thus thinking that establishes the principles; in other words, what is involved is not just an immanent but also a constitutive feature of this form of life.

30. In this sense, the fact that the problem in question develops in a "dialectical" way means little more than that it involves the unfolding of such contradictions understood as immanent contradictions. Siep formulates this point in a pertinent way: "'Dialectic' in Hegel always means the development and sublation of a contradiction. Yet 'sublation' always carries the sense of 'conservation' in addition to that of 'annulment.' The resulting concept or proposition is supposed to contain both sides of the dissolved, sublated contradiction." Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* 66.

31. Charles Taylor illustrates this figure in terms of different historical constellations, each of which involves the destruction of the purpose posited with a formation of ethical life itself: "Certain historical forms of life are shown to be prey to inner contradiction because they are defeating the purpose for which they exist. The master-slave relation frustrates the purpose of recognition for which it was entered into. The city state fails as a realization of the universal, because its parochial nature contradicts true universality. The revolutionary state destroys freedom because it tries to realize it in absolute form, by dissolving all the articulations of society, without which freedom cannot exist." Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 216–17.

32. Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* 283 (emphasis added; translation amended).

33. Hegel offers a beautifully clear formulation of the idea that contradictions are the moving principle of reality in his *Aesthetics:* "Yet whoever claims that nothing exists which carries in itself a contradiction in the form of an identity of opposites is at the same time requiring that nothing living shall exist." G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 120.

34. However, as we shall see, this "objective" side has in turn a "subjective" side.

35. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 281. Hegel also emphasizes in his interpretation that it is not Antigone herself who is trapped in a tragic collision "between duty and duty" (279) or has fallen into a contradiction with herself that would be undecidable for her: "The ethical consciousness . . . knows what it has to do, and has already decided" (280). The contradiction, the collision, is located on the side of relations of ethical life.

36. Here we find the paradigmatic description of something from which Marx took his orientation in approaches of what might be called "historical-materialist" historiography and that Jürgen Habermas, among others, calls "systems problems"; see Habermas, "Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus" in *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), 144–99. See also the abridged English translation: "Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism," trans. Robert Strauss, in *Theory and Society* 2, no. 3 (1975): 287–300.

37. On "real contradictions," see the brief account in Holm Tetens, *Philosophisches Argumentieren* (Munich: Beck, 2004), 243–49. On "contradiction" in logic and social reality, see Anthony Giddens, "Contradiction, Power, Historical Materialism," in *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 132: "It is often said that Hegel borrowed the idea of contradiction from logic, and applied it ontologically. But this is really a misconception, for Hegel wanted to show

that logic and the real cannot be partitioned off from one another. . . . He did not just insert contradiction into the real, he sought to demonstrate how contradiction is at the root of logic and reality alike."

38. On these problems in relation to Hegel, see Michael Wolff, *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs* (Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurt University Press, 2010).

39. I assume that the talk of practical contradictions can only be rendered plausible within such a complex ensemble of practices, or that sufficiently meaningful examples of "social contradictions" can be found only with reference to such ensembles. Should contradictory imperatives occur together in the practice of hide-and-seek—"Hide! But remain visible to all!"—that require the players to hide as visibly as possible, the game of hide-and-seek would quickly become pointless. In what sense this does not apply to more complex structures of practice, so that the latter can continue to exist even though they contain contradictory practices, is part of the problem in need of explanation.

40. Here I am not trying to show this through an explicit interpretation of Hegel but in a "freestanding" way, in order to be able to render the Hegelian motif plausible—or at any rate, to make it more transparent in its consequences—in terms of such a typology.

41. Here there is a parallel to the cases discussed in connection with the immanent criticism (see chs. 5 and 6). In the one case, the diagnosis of the contradiction only refers to lip service, as in the case of the misogynist CEO. In the other case, it refers to conditions such as the "free labor market," which is structured by the norm of equality while at the same time contradicting it.

42. Holm Tetens's example of Kierkegaard's criticism of the aesthetic way of life is instructive here. If pleasure is unthinkable without overcoming displeasure, then, on the one hand, the process initiated by the striving for pleasure leads systematically to the unintended result of displeasure; on the other hand, this does not make the striving for pleasure per se wrong, but only its pursuit (one-sided and misinterpreted) in the mode of the "aesthetic." See Tetens, *Philosophisches Argumentieren,* 246f.

43. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 288 (emphasis added).

44. Neither Jürgen Habermas's nor Charles Taylor's description of legitimation and motivation crises in late capitalist societies is conceivable without such a normative definition. See Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); and Taylor, "Legitimation Crisis?" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences,* vol. 2 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 248–88.

45. Ludwig Siep describes the "path of phenomenology" in this sense as a sequence of paradigm shifts: "Our view of reality is altered. . . . To put the point in contemporary terms: the *Phenomenology* thematizes paradigm shifts, or the consequences of foundational crises in science, morality, etc. Yet such shifts are here understood not as random, but rather as necessary consequences. The new conception of the object is supposed to contain the (unique) solution to the old paradigm's unbridgeable distinction within knowledge between the knowledge itself and its presupposed standard, reality proper." Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* 66. However, as Siep already points out, Hegel interprets the sequence of paradigms, contrary to the position advocated by Thomas Kuhn, as following a necessary course

exhibiting an immanent dialectical logic. As we shall see, MacIntyre's position moves between these two poles.

46. So it is not a question of the causal source of disturbances, but rather of the stance or positioning that the form of life adopts toward them. From this it follows, conversely, that forms of life can in principle adopt a correct position toward any external disturbance. Even if, in the most dramatic case, they still collapse, they do not collapse *as forms of life*.

47. Thus, for example, the mechanization and rationalization of production, as a precondition for an intensified division of labor, already plays an essential role in Hegel's depiction of the (contradictory) dynamics of bourgeois civil society; however, these are not immanent moments in the same sense in which the principle of individuality can claim to be immanent for the Greeks. Even if the conditions for the developments described reside in turn in the constitution of bourgeois civil society itself, contingent material circumstances nevertheless play a role here. The contradiction between forces and relations of production can be reconstructed in accordance with a similar pattern.

48. If, for example, the patriarchal family that is inimical to autonomy succumbs to a crisis as a result of the confrontation with emancipatory elements of a different form of life, this can be understood as the external activation of an internally generated contradiction—and thus neither as a hostile takeover nor as something that could have occurred spontaneously, on its own, in the same way. On the other hand, such a constellation would not be in crisis if this possibility were not implicit in it.

49. If in many cases the contradiction has to be identified and elaborated as a contradiction in the first place, this is the task of the critic. Criticism would thus be an activity situated between crisis and conflict; it is sometimes (certainly not always) the precondition for turning a crisis into a conflict in the first place.

50. Giddens, "Contradiction, Power, Historical Materialism," 141.

51. This pattern is also exhibited by the above-mentioned "contradiction between forces and relations of production." Here, too, mutually contradictory principles apply in different segments of a nexus of social practices. According to this pattern of interpretation, feudal rule and the corresponding organization of work as unfree labor contradict the requirements and possibilities of the societal organization of this social division of labor inherent in the development of the productive forces of industrial production based on a division of labor that goes hand in hand with modern machinery. Here two opposing principles are confronted in a historical transitional period. The point of the contradiction thus described is not that the one social group wants (civil) equality or freedom while the other group insists on traditional (feudal) inequality; that would be a case of political conflict between two opposed positions. The point is rather that (according to this thesis) the development of productive forces enables, presupposes, requires, and in part already practices certain forms of law and cooperation, while on the other hand the opposed principle is maintained. The contradiction arises where the two principles obstruct each other, for example, where political restrictions on freedom of movement prevent the development of a free labor market. The situation becomes conflictual as soon as social actors appear who act out this structural-systemic contradiction, because they find their interests reflected by one of the two sides (by one or the other set of practices and norms).

52. See Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*.

10. The Dynamics of Learning Processes

1. The 1938 *Logic,* to which I will mainly refer here, contains what is probably Dewey's most carefully worked out presentation of the process of inquiry. Earlier versions can be found in the 1903 book *Studies in Logical Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press [John Dewey, *The Middle Works, 1899–1924,* vol. 2, 1902–1903, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976)], 293–378), but also in the compact presentation of the "general features of reflective experience" developed by Dewey in *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1944), 145–47 [Dewey, *The Middle Works, 1899–1924,* vol. 9, 1916, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 152–54] and in *How We Think* (in Dewey, *The Middle Works, 1899–1924,* vol. 6, 1910–1911, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 177–356). A condensed account of the Deweyan process of inquiry can be found in Dirk Jörke, *Demokratie als Erfahrung* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003), 80–82, and in Larry Hickman, ed., *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). For a more detailed conception based on Dewey's theory of inquiry, see Hans-Peter Krüger, "Prozesse der öffentlichen Untersuchung: Zum Potential einer zweiten Modernisierung in John Deweys 'Logic. The Theory of Inquiry,'" in *Philosophie der Demokratie: Beiträge zum Werk von John Dewey,* ed. Hans Joas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 194–234. On the steps in the process of inquiry, see especially Krüger, 212–28.

2. A remark on my presentation is in order here. Dewey himself speaks of a "five-step model" of inquiry. According to this enumeration, however, the first step is somewhat confusingly the initial situation, which he explicitly distinguishes from the problem-solving process proper. Moreover, on closer inspection, the further steps he describes include some elements that should be kept separate for the sake of a more precise understanding. Therefore, in my reconstruction of the process of inquiry, I have decided to deviate from his (and the elsewhere customary) enumeration of the individual steps. I also try to follow through or develop the example of the theater fire, which Dewey only deals with cursorily.

3. Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 107 [Dewey, *The Later Works 1925–1953,* vol. 12, 1938, *Logic: The Theory of Enquiry,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 111].

4. How important this phase of the process of inquiry is for Dewey can be seen, among other things, in the passages in the *Logic* where he deals with the methodological orientation of the social research of his time. There Dewey finds fault with the prevalence of a (one could say "social-technocratic") procedure which assumes "that the work of analytic discrimination, which is necessary to convert a problematic situation into a set of conditions forming a definite problem, is largely foregone" (Dewey, *Logic,* 493 [487].)

5. Dewey, 108 [112].

6. Dewey, 108 [112].

7. To this corresponds the mundane learning and teaching experience that as long as you really believe that you have understood nothing at all, you cannot

formulate a problem that could inaugurate a learning process. Therefore, the first step toward understanding is the recourse to what one still understands; what one does not understand can then be contrasted with this.

8. This is an example invented by the author based loosely on Dewey.

9. Dewey, *Logic*, 108–9 [112]. It is only at this point that Dewey's own account of the fire example begins.

10. Dewey, 108–9 [112].

11. Jörke, *Demokratie als Erfahrung,* 81.

12. Dewey, *Logic,* 110 [113–14].

13. Dewey, 110 [113–14].

14. Dewey, 110 [114].

15. Dewey, 110 [113–14].

16. Dewey expresses this clearly in *Democracy and Education,* 150 [157–58]: "It is the extent and accuracy of steps three and four which mark off a distinctive reflective experience from one on the trial and error plane. . . . Nevertheless, we never get wholly beyond the trial and error situation."

17. Dewey, 145 [151–52].

18. Dewey, 140 [147].

19. The concept of learning assumes the existence of both things, the new and what can be called the resistance of the material, the recalcitrance of the situation. Today the possibility of the new is more often emphasized than the element of resistance in the world, but both seem to me to be important.

20. For a classical account in sociology, see Robert K. Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action," in *American Sociological Review* 1, no. 6 (1936): 894–904, and Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action,* trans. Jeremy Gaines and Paul Keast (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). However, the proponents of the "concept of labor" in the Marxist tradition have also dealt with this problem within a completely different theoretical framework. See, for example, Peter Ruben and Camilla Warnke, "Telosrealisation oder Selbsterzeugung der menschlichen Gattung? Bemerkungen zu G. Lukacs' Konzept der 'Ontotogie des gesellschaftlichen Seins,'" in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 27 (1979): 20–30.

21. Dewey, *Logic,* 111 [115].

22. Charles S. Peirce coined the notion of fallibilism in his *Principles of Philosophy* and made it into one of the main constituents of pragmatism. See the compilation of five characteristics of pragmatism in Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995). In Nicholas Rescher's uncompromising definition, "Fallibilism is the view that we have no assurance that our scientific theories and systems are definitely true; they are simply the best we can do here and now." Rescher, "Fallibilism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* vol. 3, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 545.

23. Dewey, *Logic,* 110 [113–14].

24. Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory,* 3 [299–300].

25. Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 84 [82] (emphasis added).

26. Dewey, 84 [82–83].

27. If Dewey's *Logic* (especially assuming we take our orientation from the theater fire example, as I have done) sometimes gives the impression that processes of inquiry are always only a matter of the choice of the right means for predetermined

ends, then this is incorrect. Dewey's position is expressly that processes of inquiry can extend to the purposes themselves, so that in the course of an inquiry it can transpire that the purposes being pursued must themselves be subjected to a critical examination. It is precisely in this context that the continuity between how a problem is posed and how it is solved becomes important once again: it can transpire within the context of the continuous readjustment of the definition of the problem in the course of solving it that, where the process of inquiry initially appears to be simply a matter of the correct choice of means, what is actually at stake is the setting of the purpose itself. At any rate, this is not the kind of instrumentalism with which a whole series of critics of pragmatism—beginning with Max Horkheimer—reproach Dewey. See Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum, 1974), 40–62 and 102ff.

28. Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 56 [55] (emphasis added).

29. Dewey, 83 [82] (emphasis added).

30. Dewey, 83 [82]. Axel Honneth interprets the orientation to "growth" and "maturing" as "elements of a naturalistic teleology" that is in tension with the procedural orientation also to be found in Dewey. See Honneth, "Between Proceduralism and Teleology: An Unresolved Conflict in Dewey's Moral Theory," in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 34 (Summer 1998): 689–711.

31. The motif of fragmentation and of the traceability of certain social pathologies, such as alienation and reification, back to processes of fragmentation can be found in Georg Lukács and, in certain respects, in Habermas's thesis of the fragmentation of everyday consciousness. Frederic Jameson also proposes a reconstruction of such motifs in terms of the fragmentation of consciousness. Dewey's perspective on fragmentation as a blockage to learning, however, raises an important point compared to such diagnoses. Instead of being aimed at the disintegration of an original unity (a motif that regularly faces the question concerning the shape and extent of the supposedly nonfragmented whole), Dewey's perspective aims at the inability to *generate* connections through learning. Thinking this motif further, one could deduce the question of how far these connections must extend from what is required to cope adequately with a situation and to understand it in its entirety.

32. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954), 142 [Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey,* vol. 2, 1925–1953, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 323].

33. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia,* trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 86.

34. "Psychiatrists have discovered that one of the commonest causes of mental disturbance is an underlying fear of which the subject is not aware, but which leads to withdrawal from reality and to unwillingness to think things through. There is a social pathology which works powerfully against effective inquiry into social institutions and conditions. It manifests itself in a thousand ways; in querulousness, in impotent drifting, in uneasy snatching at distractions, in idealization of the long established, in a facile optimism assumed as a cloak, in riotous glorification of things 'as they are,' in intimidation of all dissenters—ways which depress and dissipate thought all the more effectually because they operate with subtle and unconscious persuasiveness." Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems,* 170–71 [341–42].

35. Richard Rorty's interpretation of Dewey is diametrically opposed to this. He argues that Dewey was not interested in the idea of progress for the better, but conceived of change (like Rorty himself) as merely a matter of replacing one vocabulary with another (noncomparable) vocabulary. See, among other places, Rorty, "Rationality and Cultural Difference," in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers,* vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167–87.

36. See the remarks on the prevention of social learning in Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems,* 141 [323]: "Mental and ethical beliefs and ideals change more slowly than outward conditions."

37. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 361.

38. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 361.

39. In the contemporary discussion, the most prominent example of a position that assumes such discontinuous jumps is certainly Richard Rorty's neopragmatist conception. However, the emergence of "new vocabularies" that, as more imaginative and inclusive new descriptions of a situation, lead to something like "moral progress" does not designate specifically progress in learning in the sense of a development that can somehow be described as continuous. See, among other places, Rorty, *Truth and Progress.*

40. "An epistemological crisis may only be recognized for what it was in retrospect." MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 363.

41. Already in "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," which was still very much influenced by the debates in the philosophy of science over Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts, MacIntyre describes the progress of theoretical development as follows: "I have suggested that epistemological progress consists in the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives and forms of narrative and that epistemological crises are occasions for such reconstruction." MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *Monist* 60, no. 4 (1977): 456.

42. MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 460.

43. Bernard Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Philosophy* 75, no. 4 (2000): 477–96, works out the characteristic features of such a "vindicatory history," only ultimately to question its assumptions. Williams is pessimistic about the possibility of such "vindicatory explanations," since they presuppose a common basis of a kind that is precisely not given in cases of conflict and in radical transformation processes. However, the position I advocate here identifies such a basis precisely in the fact of crisis. See Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

44. See Robert Stern, "MacIntyre and Historicism," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre,* ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 154.

45. In basing my argument here on some "typical" cases and examples, I can only offer a rough sketch (as above in the treatment of crises) intended to work out in an ideal-typical manner the specifics of a transition pattern inspired by Hegel that is important for my discussion. On the other hand, a more detailed examination of the different phenomena of destruction and transition would yield interesting

differences not only regarding the differences between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of History,* but also the different kinds of transformations. A closer look at the historical material shows that not all of these transformations are built on the same model.

46. Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 94.

47. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51.

48. Walter Jaeschke, *Hegel-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2003), 185.

49. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 56.

50. Hegel, 56 (emphasis added).

51. In a lecture delivered at the Freie Universität Berlin in 1990, Michael Theunissen pointed out that this moment of Hegel's philosophy corresponds to the mythical logic which states that "a wound can be healed only by the spear which caused it"; accordingly, Theunissen criticized the assumption that such a connection exists. Think of the case of Telephos, who is wounded by Achilles and can only be healed through renewed contact with Achilles' spear. Taking up this image (and defending this logic), we can now say that the spear can cause the wound in the first place only *because* it is also able to heal it—and this in turn is because in a certain sense it accentuates the conflict that already characterizes the constellation it destroys. However, in the case of Greek ethical life, the "healing" does not lead back to the old but to a new formation of ethical life—which would therefore specifically not be a mythical cycle.

52. In other words, the old is reduced to a moment when it is replaced by the new. It loses its absolute validity. Thus, the learning process described is a process of integration and internal differentiation.

53. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11–12.

54. Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer takes a similar view: "The necessities with which we 'explain' the development of human forms of practice do not reside in eternal laws that can be recognized by historical research. They are reasons in the context of averting difficulties and problems. Cultural processes can be explained by the fact that we describe the problem situations and recognized solutions against the background of the criteria, evaluations and orientations of the given ethical life of an era (which are, of course, themselves in need of reconstruction)." Stekeler-Weithofer, "Vorsehung und Entwicklung in Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie," in *Die Weltgeschichte—das Weltgericht? Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 1999,* ed. Rüdiger Bubner and Walter Mesch (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 166.

55. Stephen Houlgate also argues for this position in Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History,* 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); see especially pp. 4–24.

56. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History,* vol. 1, *Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lecture of 1822–3,* ed. and trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 118 (emphasis added).

57. Hegel, *Philosophy of World History,* 110.

58. Stekeler-Weithofer completely rejects the eschatological-teleological interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history: "Hegel's philosophy of history is a criti-

cism of every metaphysical eschatology, including every prognosis of progress that seeks to be more than just a moment of action-guiding orientation." Stekeler-Weithofer, "Vorsehung und Entwicklung in Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie," 144.

59. See Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

60. Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel,* 12.

61. In a remark explicitly directed against Hegel, MacIntyre writes, "No one at any stage can ever rule out the future possibility of their present beliefs and judgments being shown to be inadequate in a variety of ways." MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 360–61.

62. Hegel, *Philosophy of World History,* 108 (emphasis added).

63. Therefore, Hegel also emphasizes that it is only in human history, and not in nature, that there is a "progress towards better, more perfect." Only in history, therefore, is the idea of progress at stake at all. It goes without saying that the idea that nature itself could also represent such a history (and even a history of overcoming problems) did not take root before Darwin, although a variety of tentative attempts had been made to discuss the idea. See Joseph McCarney, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 131.

64. Hegel, *Philosophy of World History,* 109.

65. Hegel, 109.

66. Hegel, 109.

67. But, and this would tend to support Hegel's critics, has this conflict not already been decided? Emil Angehrn, for example, in his extremely instructive inventory of Hegel's philosophy of history, asks, "Won't the emergence of the new, the occurrence of the unexpected, the contingency of the event . . . here again be reduced and captured in a developmental process in which, notwithstanding Hegel's assertions, nothing 'essential' happens? Isn't it ultimately a matter of the simple unfolding of something pregiven in itself?" Emil Angehrn, "Vernunft in der Geschichte? Zum Problem der Hegelschen Geschichtsphilosophie," in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 35 (1981): 353. In what follows, I will try to develop an alternative account that dispels this suspicion.

68. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* vol. 1, *Greek Philosophy to Plato,* trans. E. S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 21–22 (translation amended).

69. Of course, it is conceivable that a people could know that it is free and nevertheless submit to the authorities in the manner referred to. But even that would be a different relationship from one of plain ignorance. Among other things, in such a situation something like ideologies would have to be deployed on a larger scale to maintain belief in the naturalness of rule. For this very reason, traditional justifications of domination often involve a moment of *mauvaise foi,* that is, of disingenuousness in the Sartrean sense.

70. However, the coming to awareness and the transformation of the institutions should be conceived as a process. Thus, the fact that the peoples who were already free in themselves also recognize this should not be conceived as an analogous procedure to the sudden dispelling of an illusion in the fairy tale of the emperor's new clothes. (The emperor was naked the whole time, but only when a child announced it in public did everyone acknowledge his nakedness.) It is the interaction between

the gradual insight and the concomitant transformation of the practices that leads to the further insight and to the new institutions.

71. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology,* 12.

72. Pinkard, 12 (emphasis added).

73. This constitutes the difference between causal and rational determination.

74. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 218; see also ch. 8, "The *Phenomenology* as Interpretive Dialectic."

75. For a detailed account of the world-historical individual, see McCarney, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, 107–19.

76. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. John Sibree (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2001), 44–45 (some emphasis added; translation amended).

77. Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* 45.

78. This tension reappears later in historical materialism, where it can be understood as a tension between the system and actor perspectives. On this, see Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (London: Hinemann, 1981). See also the discussion in Marco Iorio, *Karl Marx—Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Politik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). An interesting reconstruction of historical materialism in terms of a theory of practice can be found in Jorge Larrain, *A Reconstruction of Historical Materialism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1986).

79. Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* 46 (translation amended).

80. There is some evidence to support the view that social change is not only an erratic process but one marked by continuities and discontinuities. That structural shifts at least prepare or accompany eventlike changes is not only a plausible hypothesis in social theory. Every theory of radical social change would do well to recall the insight into the interrelationship between the continuous structural and the eventlike contingent dimensions of radical social change, which was prepared by Hegel and was enshrined in the Marxist theory of revolution (notwithstanding the disparities among different versions). Another argument against mere voluntarism is that in the social domain experimental setups cannot be created out of nothing if "experiments" are not to degenerate into terror or social technology. This is not a "conservative" or conserving concept. Rather, as Marxist theory shows, it can very well assume revolutionary forms and is compatible with radical transformation.

81. Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* 421.

82. Such an understanding of transformation coheres well with my understanding of forms of life as ensembles of practices: as ensembles, they are, as described above, intentional in a restricted sense. Forms of life take shape through the same double movement that in history is as much something that occurs "through the individuals" as it is a history of acting individuals. But it follows that the learning processes of forms of life do not have to be conceived as something that springs from a planning-experimenting group of researchers. Rather, they should be conceived as emerging and, if necessary, imposing themselves in problem constellations within the performance of practices—not solely as a result of individual and collective actions and attitudes, but not without them either.

83. See Terry Pinkard, "Contingency and Necessity in History: Rethinking Hegel," in Bubner and Mesch, *Die Weltgeschichte—das Weltgericht?,* 117.

84. See Pinkard, "Contingency and Necessity," 116.

85. Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays,* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 2002), 233 (translation amended).

Conclusion

1. Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 194.

2. Ruth Anna Putnam and Hilary Putnam, "Dewey's *Logic:* Epistemology as Hypothesis," in Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life,* 214–15.

3. Ruth and Hilary Putnam outline Dewey's position as follows: "Dewey's view is that we don't know what our interests and needs are or what we are capable of until we actually engage in politics. A corollary of this view is that there can be no final answer to the question 'How should we live?' and that we should, therefore, always leave it open to further discussion and experimentation" (Putnam and Putnam, "Dewey's *Logic,*" 217).

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